

2015 IAN/ICEC Conservation and Environmental Education Excellence Award Winners

Bohumil Shimek Environmental Educator Award *For Outstanding Efforts by an Environmental Educator*

The Bohumil Shimek Environmental Educator Award for 2015 goes to Julie Schnedler with Mediapolis Community School.

Julie Schnedler is a 6th grade science teacher at Mediapolis Middle School. She has made outdoor education a central part of her curriculum. In 2009, Julie made headlines by restoring bobwhite quail populations on a county wildlife preserve. "Operation: Save the Quail" won the Disney Planet Challenge competition's grand prize and earned her entire 6th grade class of 60+ students an all-expense-paid trip to Disneyland. This year, her class returned to the site of "Operation: Save the Quail" only this time to save the pollinators. Students spent many hours researching the decline of pollinators. In the field, they learned more from ISU researchers, saw pollinators up-close, planted seeds and learned how pollinator and quail habitat overlap. The project gained national attention from Pheasants Forever.

Julie has gone out of her way to secure STEM grants allowing her to offer electricity and wind energy units in her classroom. She dedicates most of her summers to learning more or teaching environmental education outside the school. Julie also spearheaded an effort to create an outdoor classroom. She created a task force of teachers, students and parents. Students in drafting classes, industrial arts and environmental science were all involved. Local landscaping and masonry companies donated time and materials. Today, the outdoor classroom is not just a teacher resource, it's a community attraction.

The Shimek Award seeks to recognize educators "for innovative EE programs beyond job expectations" and Julie Schnedler most certainly goes above and beyond. She annually incorporates hands-on, experiential field projects into her curriculum. She has helped make environmental education accessible to others by leading the effort to build an outdoor classroom and she stays current in the field by dedicating her summers to extended learning. Congratulations to Julie Schnedler for being the 2015 Bohumil Shimek Environmental Educator Award Recipient.

Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award *For Lifetime Achievement in EE Excellence and Leadership*

The 2015 Aldo Leopold Environmental Education Award for Lifetime Achievement in EE Excellence and Leadership goes to Larry Reis with Winneshiek County Conservation Board.

Larry Reis has served as a naturalist and natural resource manager for more than 30 years with Winneshiek County. Larry holds a bachelor's degree from Luther College and a master's degree from the University of Northern Iowa. Over the course of his career, it is estimated that Larry has given 7,500+ programs reaching over 200,000 people. He has done all this while also maintaining various roles as WCCB's natural resource manager, interim director, and maintenance technician. Larry started and

developed WCCB's education program, oversaw the building of the Lake Meyer Nature Center as well as its exhibits, and established many hiking trails.

Larry epitomizes the role of naturalist in the classic sense: there is hardly a question related to the natural history or resources in Iowa that he cannot answer in detail. Larry has also embraced technology and finds a way to incorporate it into programs without losing the hands-on and experiential aspects that make his programs so memorable, engaging, and fun.

As natural resource manager, Larry has single-handedly restored the 160-acre Lake Meyer Park from an overgrazed honeysuckle/buckthorn patch to a shining example of a diverse ecosystem. He is dedicated to controlling invasive plants, re-establishing native species, and improving timber on all WCCB lands.

He is also the author of *Noting Nature*, a phenological record and memoir based on journal entries and observations from his many years of experience in the outdoors, and *Once a Trapper*, a biography of his father focused on his outdoor pursuits.

Larry has been an avid outdoorsman his entire life, building skills in hunting, fishing, birding, rock-hounding, and gathering wild edibles. He has been a Hunter Education instructor for 30 years. He also compiles lists of Christmas Bird Counts for the Decorah and the Yellow River Forest areas. In addition, Larry has an extensive Flickr account with more than 8,750 photos documenting wildlife, seasonal changes, and natural resources. They are available for public download at no charge because "the photos are there to help teach others about nature." Congratulations to Larry Reis for earning the 2015 Aldo Leopold EE Award for Lifetime Achievement in EE excellence and leadership!

Outstanding Environmental Education Program (2 or less naturalists)

Marshall County Conservation's Education Program is the poster child for doing a lot with a little. While the first inclination is to look at total numbers, a closer look shows an innovative and creative program based on the hard work of one 3/4 time naturalist and an impressive number of partnerships and volunteers.

9,400 people were at 184 events in the last fiscal year. 140 volunteers were coordinated by the naturalist. Grimes Farm & Conservation Center, MCCB's interpretive facility, provides visitors with connections to the seasons, wildlife, and land through habitat dioramas, interactive exhibits, and over 200 taxidermy mounts. During 2014-2015, there were 3,434 visitors from 33 states and eight countries.

The Marshall County Conservation Board EE program strives for quality and creativity to meet its goals. Strong community connections in the county toward EE is a great asset to the effectiveness of the program. Diane Hall brings 29 years of experience with Marshall CCB and only through that long-term, stable and consistent work could a CCB Education Program be able to accomplish so much with so little staff. The Awards Committee felt like Diane's can-do attitude deserved recognition. It can only be imagined the heights the program could achieve if Diane were full-time and had an additional naturalist!

Outstanding Environmental Education Program (3 or more naturalists)

Polk County Conservation is this year's award recipient for Outstanding EE Program with three or more naturalists. Naturalists have given 1,504 programs to 31,661 participants! However, they have spent 38,685 contact hours with participants. While school programs make up the majority of their programs, they also offer youth, family, and senior programming. Naturalists offer unique programs that include hosting weekly music events, an environmental book club, eco-bus tours, blogs and an 'Ask the

Naturalist' news column. They also have a huge social media presence with over 2,300 Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest followers. Naturalists partner with numerous other agencies to increase their outreach potential. They recently received a REAP/CEP grant for \$18,387 to offer pollinator programming. Congratulations to Polk County Conservation's EE program and their naturalists.

Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award

The Chris Holt Youth Environmental Education Award goes to eXtreme Adventures and eXtreme Kids, Louisa County Conservation. eXtreme Adventures is for 6th-8th graders and eXtreme Kids is for kids in 3rd-5th grades. Both aim to get kids into the outdoors with "extreme" recreation opportunities.

Programs feature exciting adventures that offer new opportunities to try various outdoor recreation activities as well as provide fun and engaging activities. Extreme is simply a mindset that goes back to the excitement factor. The focus is hinged on how they can use adventures to make the participants more capable, confident, and well-rounded for their future while instilling a deep respect for their natural environment. Extreme is a way to create excitement within an age group that is hard to reach due to busy schedules and lack of enthusiasm for typical programming. Extreme is not about putting the participants in an unsafe situation but rather about creating an environment of eagerness and exhilaration. Extreme is simply a mindset that targets the excitement factor. The program allowed the participants to challenge themselves while instilling a sense of self-confidence.

The exposure to a new and challenging activity got participants excited when they were able to accomplish the task. This resulted in their self-confidence going through the roof. Each adventure the students are a part of, remains with them as an exciting memory. What better way to encourage our youth to protect our environment than by giving them a reason to protect it.

"Ding" Darling Environmental Education Award

For Outstanding EE Program or Event which Informs and Educates the General Public

Wapsie Valley Archery Coaches: Angie Auel

The NASP motto is "Changing lives one arrow at a time" and Iowa coaches are doing just that! Under the direction of Angie Auel, the Wapsie Valley Archery team has had a lot of success with a first place and two third place state trophies over the past three years. Seven individuals also placed in the top ten at state. Wapsie Valley Archery has taken 98 archers to nationals in the past three years. To do this, Angie Auel and the team have raised over \$35,000! Pretty impressive numbers for a small team from Iowa! The coaches have made a huge impact on Iowa kids and with the guidance of Angie Auel, the group will aim straight and true for years to come.

Outstanding Volunteer

Mike Meetz

It is apparent that Mike Meetz cares about our landscape. Mike owns 40 acres of farm land in Story County that he has worked hard to restore to native prairie and wetlands. Over the past 16 years, Mike has used his own pull-behind combine to donate several hundred pounds of seed to Story County's Integrated Roadside Vegetation Management (IRVM) program to restore prairie in the county road ditches and wildlife areas.

Not only does he understand the importance of creating habitat, but he knows the value of environmental education. Meetz's prairie has been the site of several youth hunts for waterfowl and

pheasants. Every summer he allows SCC to bring van loads of summer campers to his farm to wade in his wetland, scoop with nets, and learn about wetland ecology.

Mike is a very active Story County Conservation volunteer. When SCC had an idea for an adult conservation training program in 1996, Mike joined the committee and helped create the Master Conservationist Program. He was instrumental in teaching the early years of the programs. The success of the program encouraged ISU Extension to take it statewide. He has helped SCC in many other capacities as well. Mike served as a guide at Halloween Hikes, led bird watching hikes for 3rd grade field trips, helped with trail improvement workdays, and assisted the IRVM program with several prescribed burns. Thank you Mike to your service to our land and our County Conservation Board system!

Outstanding Interpretive Print Media Award

Johnson County Conservation Board

This fall, Johnson County Conservation staff worked to overhaul their Conservation Connections newsletter, which had not been revised since its original printing in 2001. They had three main goals in their redesign: reach new readers, promote their work while inspiring positivity in the reader and boost event attendance. These goals were achieved. The newsletter is read by 2,597 subscribers. Congratulation to Johnson County for updating this vital resource.