A Naturalist For All Seasons –
Barbara Tagami, Dickinson County Conservation Board

Spring, summer, fall or winter, Naturalist Barbara Tagami is on the run, teaching students, residents and visitors to Dickinson County all about the wonders of nature. She is an inspiration to hundreds of those who participate in her programs, and her dedication and hard work shows through to her many accomplishments.

Barbara begins each spring with a fresh outlook, just as is her approach to teaching. It is the beginning of the circle of life, and her programs reflect that. She builds from "Incredible Edibles" to take in all aspects of our surroundings. From "The Sounds of Nature" for preschoolers to "Plants and Seeds" for elementary students, other lessons about the air and water, the season warms to the Earth Day Environmental Fair. This interactive learning fair demonstrates recycling, land stewardship, ecology and other important environmental principles in an outdoor setting.

Summer activities include the Monarch Larvae Monitoring Project, Life on the Farm, Project A WARE (a watershed awareness river expedition), the Kayak Treasure Hunt and Clean up, Monarch Tag and Release Event, Monday Morning Outings, IOWATER (watershed monitoring), Young Nature Explorers, and Kayaking a Wetland, just to highlight the major activities Barbara has on her itinerary.

While all these activities are ongoing, Barbara always has time to talk to anyone who wants to bend her ear about any topic they are interested in, whether it's water quality, environmental issues, sustainable energy, animal rights, or something else.

As the school year begins in the fall, Barbara's energy level seems to soar, along with her second favorite season. The air is crisp, and so are her ideas for teaching students in the four school districts within Dickinson County. Walk into any school with her, and you will feel her incredible ability to empower children with a sense of wonder and a thirst for knowledge. They identify with her, embrace her, tug at her, and tell her things about their day, and comment on the things they have learned from her. Programs range from the vertebrates to the solar system, Native American cultures to global ecology. She and her intern offer nearly 60 different programs, which they can teach, or have kits that the teachers can use. Field trips and recycling programs round out their school year.

There is no such thing as the dead of winter when it comes to Barbara and her programs. She is active in teaching about snowshoeing, ice fishing, winter habitats, and life under the ice to round out her scholastic schedule. New ideas and new implementations are always a part of her rapport with the students and teachers, which helps keep things fresh and exciting. Guest speakers, learning tools, hands-on learning, innovative educational props and a level of excitement and love of what she is doing allow Barbara to provide some of the best educational sessions possible.

Aside from educating her varied students, Barbara is involved in developing a new nature center for the county. This $4.5 million project is in its infancy, and Barbara is always working towards its growth. She reports monthly to both the Dickinson County Conservation Board and the Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County as to her programs, activities, accomplishments, and her thoughts on developing this new nature center, which will serve the residents of Dickinson County and the thousands of visitors that come to this county every year.

When you look at all that comprises the job description of a naturalist, and then include all this area has to offer, you have to wonder how this county got so lucky as to get someone as knowledgeable, patient, kind-hearted, varied, multi-task oriented, determined and yet seemingly so at ease with all that is going on as Barbara is. She has a way of answering questions as not to make anyone feel inadequate, yet leaves them feeling a bit more informed and even glad they took the time to ask the question in the first place.

Some of her activities this past year include:

- Presenting with the aid of her Naturalist Intern over 370 presentations to-schools and the public.
- Co-presenter for the Midwest Environmental Education Conference- "Activities Connecting Sensory Awareness in Young Children to Nature"
- Presenter at the IAN summer workshop- "Create Habitats and Dioramas"
- Initiated and collaborated with the Farm Bureau, ISU Extension, 4H, Soil and Dickinson County Water Conservation District to create the Annual "Life on the Farm" Event.
- Initiated and developed with volunteer help the annual "Monarch Butterfly Larva Monitoring" program at the nature center.
- Developed with the help of volunteers the "Annual Monarch Butterfly Tag and Release Festival."
- Created with the help of volunteers the annual "Kayak Treasure Hunt and Clean up" event.
- Created and organized with the Dickinson County SWCD the "3rd Annual Earth Day Environmental Learning Fair" and Earth Day Celebration.
- Produce a TV show called "LAKES ALIVE" to educated public about ecology of lakes, invasive exotics, Low Impact Development, rain gardens, and more.

I want to thank you in advance for considering Barbara Tagami for the Bohumil Shimek Environmental Educator Award for outstanding efforts by an environmental educator. She is well respected and loved in this county especially by the young people.

Sincerely,
Sue Laue, resident of Dickinson County