

2023 Conservation Educator Award Recipients



Karla Smith is a true champion for Suffolk's waterways and history. As an educator with Chesapeake Public Schools from 1971 to 2009, she blended history, geography and environmental science to engage her students in experiential outdoor learning. Her passion for educating the next generation led her to co-found the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance (NRPA) in 2010, headquartered in Suffolk. Smith's dedication to environmental education has left an indelible mark on her community.

One of Smith's significant contributions is the Oyster Restoration Program, which she initiated in her elementary school classroom and later expanded under NRPA. This program not only aligns with Virginia's curriculum standards but also nurtures a deep understanding of wetlands, water quality, and environmental stewardship among students. Through summer training workshops and outdoor field studies, Smith ensures that young minds are equipped with vital scientific skills while fostering a genuine appreciation for the intricate relationships in our environment. What started as a small classroom project blossomed into the Nansemond Watershed Initiative (NWI), engaging thousands of 7th-grade students to learn about the interconnectedness of plants, animals, and waterways.

Smith's innovative spirit also shines through her creation of The Watershed Explorers (WE) program in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This program, tailored for 3rd grade students, combines education and fun through interactive learning kits, marine life stickers, and engaging videos. By adapting to changing circumstances, Smith continues to inspire and educate young minds about the importance of preserving local waterways.

Her impact doesn't stop in the classroom. Smith played a pivotal role in the inclusion of the Nansemond River in the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Her efforts led to the installation of kiosks and maps highlighting the river's history, ecology, wildlife, and river access points.

Smith's dedication and unwavering commitment to environmental education led to her recognition as the First Citizen of Suffolk in 2018, a well-deserved accolade for her contributions as an educator, historian, author, and community leader.



Dr. Woodward Bousquet, fondly known as Woody, has dedicated his career to shaping the next generation of environmental leaders. With a Ph.D. in Science Education from Ohio State University, Dr. Bousquet taught at the university level for 37 years, including 26 years at Shenandoah University, from which he retired in August 2019 as Professor of Environmental Studies and Biology.

Bousquet's teaching philosophy centers on a hands-on approach, where research plays a pivotal role in preparing students to tackle complex environmental issues. Field trips and service-learning projects have been hallmarks of his teaching style. Beginning in 1993, Bousquet led his undergraduate students at Shenandoah University in wetland studies, water quality investigations, ecological inventories of natural areas, and environmental education projects ... all

in the Shenandoah Valley region. His approach has resulted in initiatives that extend beyond the classroom and directly impact the community. His students have presented research at prestigious conferences, shaping conservation efforts, and even influencing the master plan of a National Park.

A significant achievement of Bousquet's career is his involvement in the Abrams Creek Wetlands Preserve (ACWP). Recognizing the importance of these wetlands, he collaborated with students and community organizations to protect and educate the public about the preserve's ecological significance. Through research, presentations, and partnerships, Bousquet ensured the preservation of this vital habitat, earning accolades and awards for his efforts. The Preserve's establishment in 2003 marked a significant milestone for Winchester's environmental conservation efforts. In 2012, Bousquet and his Shenandoah University undergraduates were recognized by the Mason-Dixon Outdoor Writers Association for their "grassroots conservation" work. They were instrumental in studying, protecting, and educating the public about the Abrams Creek Wetlands in Winchester and Frederick County, Virginia.

Bousquet's influence is not confined to academia. His partnership with the Winchester-Clarke Garden Club and the City of Winchester led to the Preserve's recognition and ongoing management. The collaborative efforts were acknowledged with the Garden Club of Virginia's Bessie Bocock Carter Conservation Award and the Garden Club of America Founder's Fund Award.

Bousquet has received Shenandoah University's Exemplary Teaching Award, and he received the same award from Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NC. He was a Fulbright Exchange Scholar in Canada in 2000. He has served the Virginia Academy of Science in a number of capacities, including as the Academy's President in 2018-2019. His commitment to community involvement, conservation, and education aligns seamlessly with the values upheld by the Garden Club of Virginia.