

Statewide Environmental Education Center Announces Board of Directors

Slippery Rock, PA – June 11, 2009 – The Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education today announced its inaugural Board of Directors since the passage of Act 71 in July of 2008. Among other actions, Act 71 establishes PCEE in statute and provides for a Board of Directors. Four members represent Pennsylvania State Commissions and Departments; the other five have been appointed by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and represent a diverse cross-section of the environmental and educational communities.

Standing appointments for the four Pennsylvania State Departments are:

Jack Farster has been the Director of Environmental Education within the PA Dept. of Environmental Protection since 2002. In 2000, he was hired by DEP to assist with the EE Grants program, endangered species and biodiversity education and coordination of joint EE efforts with other state agencies and conservation organizations. Prior to DEP, Mr. Farster was an Environmental Educator with PA DCNR's State Parks, coordinating the environmental and historical education efforts at Oil Creek and Clear Creek State Parks. He also spent eight years as a District Wildlife Conservation Officer with the PA Game Commission, where he coordinated all law enforcement, information and education activities in the Western Erie County District.

Sarah Hopkins is the Division Chief of Outdoor Programming Services within the Bureau of State Parks, Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources. She directs the educational, interpretive and recreational program in Pennsylvania's 117 state parks, as well as the bureau's informational and promotional efforts, encompassing everything from printed publications to the bureau's website. Under her leadership, the program has expanded from five parks with full-time programming to a total of 23 full-time and 34 seasonal parks, currently reaching 350,000 people each year. Ms. Hopkins also belongs to the National Association for Interpretation and is a Certified Interpretive Planner.

Ronald Rohall, representing the PA Association of Conservation Districts, was appointed to the Westmoreland Conservation District Board of Directors in 1993 and elected Vice-Chairman in 1999. He served as President of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts from 2001 to 2003 where he was actively involved in the enactment of the Water Resources Planning Act. Under Mr. Rohall's leadership PACD secured a grant to develop a PACD Strategic Plan for Conservation Education in Pennsylvania. Mr. Rohall is also a consulting forester with 30 years experience.

Dr. Patricia Vathis is the Environment and Ecology Education Advisor within the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Services in the Dept. of Education. She is responsible for the development of the state mandated K -12 grade standards in environment and ecology and their implementation into the school districts. Dr. Vathis has written numerous publications and is the Pennsylvania director for several national environmental education curriculum programs. In addition to serving on a multitude of boards and councils, she is also the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Advisory Council on Environmental Education.

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education's appointments include:

Richard Butler has personally experienced the difficulties of bringing environmental education to inner city residents, having grown up in the community of Homewood in Pittsburgh. As the

Inclusion Manager for USRowing, Mr. Butler is dedicated to making outdoor activities such as rowing affordable, accessible and more diverse, and is focused on getting youth from traditionally underserved communities involved. Familiar with a number of environmental non-profit organizations, Mr. Butler also serves on the boards of Bike Pittsburgh PA, the Frick Environmental Charter School and PAEE (advisory), and partners with RiverQuest, the Student Conservation Association, Friends of the Riverfront and Venture Outdoors.

Leanne Krueger-Braneky, Executive Director of Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia, heads up a Philadelphia-based network that “helps local, independent businesses thrive while they build an economy that values people, the planet and prosperity for all.” Before joining the Sustainable Business Network in 2004, she spent a year in South Africa directing service-learning programs for the South Africa Community Fund, an organization that supports local social transformation organizations and conducts training in peace building. A fellow of the Environmental Leadership Program, she is committed to social responsibility and environmental sustainability.

Ruth Roperti, President of the PA Association for Environmental Educators, is a retired school teacher with 37 years of classroom experience. Ms. Roperti has served PAEE since 2003 as a Director, annual Conference Chair and President. She also serves as the Pennsylvania Affiliate Representative to the North American Association of Environmental Educators (NAAEE). For the past eight years, Ms. Roperti has been training teachers in the Environment & Ecology standards through graduate classes offered by Intermediate Units in western Pennsylvania.

Dr. Bruce Smith, Professor of Education at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, spent ten years with the National Park Service before entering the teaching field. He is currently responsible for the Environmental Education certification (K-12) of students and the environmental education component of all certification areas at Clarion University. Dr. Smith has been involved with Science Education and Environmental Education throughout his professional career.

Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director of Lower Merion Conservancy, has been involved with environmental education in Pennsylvania for over 20 years. He served on the Board of Directors for the PA Alliance for Environmental Education for four years and was President in 1995. For 10 years, he wrote “Earthbeat,” a regular column on EE issues and practices for *The PAEE Journal*. He has also hosted an adult environmental news radio show on WHY 91FM in Philadelphia and writes regular columns for the local newspaper. Mr. Weilbacher has received numerous awards, including PA’s Outstanding Conservation Educator from the PA Wildlife Association and the Environmental Educator of the Year award from PAEE.

“I am extremely excited to have the opportunity to work with this group of talented and committed environmentalists” said PCEE Director Kathleen Paul. “With this Board providing direction and support, PCEE is sure to become even more valuable and useful to the people of Pennsylvania.”

The PCEE Board and staff will be holding their first meeting in Harrisburg on June 15. Among other items on the agenda, they will review and approve bylaws for the Board and a 2010 budget and work plan to guide the Center in the coming fiscal year.

About PCEE: The Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education (PCEE) was created by Executive Order of the Governor in 1997 to “provide an avenue for increased participation by

educators, local officials, citizen and non-profit groups, business and industry as partners in the implementation of quality environmental education on a state-wide basis.” Administered by the PA State System of Higher Education, PCEE is housed at Slippery Rock University.

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