

# **Governor Markell joins DNREC Secretary David Small to honor Delaware's 2014 Young Environmentalists in State Fair ceremony**

**Harrington, DE** – Today at the Delaware State Fair, Governor Jack Markell and DNREC Secretary David Small honored four Delaware students recognized as DNREC's 2014 Young Environmentalists of the Year.

"These four exceptional young Delawareans are well on their way to becoming the conservationists, naturalists and environmental stewards who will help preserve our natural resources for generations to come," Governor Markell said. "We appreciate their interest, their talent and the promise they bring for Delaware's future."

"Through these awards, we have had the opportunity for more than 20 years to recognize and meet tomorrow's environmental leaders who are already making a difference at an early age," said Secretary Small. "We congratulate them for their work today and look forward to their future contributions as responsible citizens leading and serving our communities, state and nation."

Established in 1993 in honor of former DNREC Secretary Dr. Edwin H. "Toby" Clark II, the Young Environmentalist of the Year Awards are presented annually to Delaware students who have worked to protect, restore or enhance our state's natural resources through environmental stewardship, innovative projects and promoting public awareness.

Judges for the program's 21st year were Michelle Jacobs,

educator and DNREC Small Business Ombudsman; and Environmental Scientist Jennifer Luoma, DNREC Division of Watershed Stewardship.

DNREC's 2014 Young Environmentalists of the Year are:

- High School – Kathryn “Katie” Chambers of Hockessin
- Middle School – Natalie Runyon of Smyrna
- Special recognition – Cole and Samantha Palmer of Greenwood

Here's more information about the honorees.

High school winner **Katie Chambers**, 18, of Hockessin, graduated from A.I. DuPont High School in May. She first attended educational programs with the Delaware Nature Society in 2001. Four years ago, she joined the organization's summer camp program as a volunteer counselor, and has since then given more than 790 volunteer hours. Between July 1, 2013 and June 30 of this year alone, she gave more than 220 hours.

DNS Volunteer Coordinator Hannah Starke nominated Katie for High School Young Environmentalist of the Year, noting her maturity, leadership, reliability, patience, sense of humor, ability to connect with children, and her “innate ability to share her passion for the environment with people of all ages.”

“Katie has been one of our most dedicated and long-term counselors,” Starke wrote. “Our hope is that the children we educate today will move forward with a new passion for the natural world. Katie is a shining example of what our programs are accomplishing ... Without dedicated volunteers like Katie, our summer camps would cease to exist. She has helped Delaware Nature Society save about \$9,500 in labor costs, and her wonderful personality and her excitement for environmental education make her truly invaluable.”

DNS camp counselors work full-time, eight hours a day and five

days a week, assisting adult instructors, ensuring the safety of the children, teaching programs, maintaining a high level of enthusiasm among campers, dealing with unpredictable weather, cleaning up and preparing for the next day's programs, she added.

"I feel fortunate that I can help children begin to develop a connection with nature, like I did when I was their age," Katie said. "I am thrilled, also, to have the opportunity to give to my campers what I was given over my years at Ashland Nature Center. The memories of camp, the campers, and my fellow counselors are priceless, and I wouldn't trade them for anything in the world."

"Katie's passion for the environment is evident by the many, many hours she has volunteered as a Delaware Nature Society camp counselor to help educate younger children about the importance of taking care of the environment," said awards judge Michelle Jacobs. "By sharing her love for the environment with the hundreds of children she has come in contact with, Katie has surely sparked the same passion in future young environmentalists, and Delaware will be better for it."

Middle school winner **Natalie Runyon**, 14, of Smyrna, will be a freshman at St. Georges Technical High School in the fall. Within a couple of weeks of entering Smyrna Middle School as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader in 2012, Natalie approached science teacher Brian Hurd about starting and leading a Go Green Club at her new school.

With support from Hurd, other teachers and the school principal, Natalie started a paper recycling program, decorating recycling boxes for each classroom, training students to collect the paper, and soon moving from once-weekly to twice-weekly paper pickups. "Once Natalie had the schedule down and students trained in how to collect the paper from each classroom, the recycling program at Smyrna Middle

School was a huge success," Hurd wrote in nominating her for Middle School Young Environmentalist of the Year.

As an eighth grader the following year, Natalie continued her leadership of the Go Green Club and the paper recycling program, holding weekly meetings with members to discuss and share ways to help the environment. To ensure that the Go Green Club would continue next year, after she moved on to high school, Natalie organized elections for a new club president for the 2014-2015 school year.

"Natalie was instrumental in leading club members and our entire student body in their understanding of how humans impact the environment and how we can minimize that impact through her creation and leadership of our Go Green Club for the past two years," Hurd said.

Natalie recalls that while she was practicing cross country, she began to envision improvements to her school and its campus. "I decided to help make a difference in my community by starting this club," Natalie said. "This club changed my personality as a person because I believe that we can do anything to save the planet when we keep that goal in sight. I realized I met that goal when I saw the difference in my school and in my classmates."

"Kudos to Natalie for springing into action, inspiring others, and starting the "Go Green Club" at Smyrna Middle School!" Jacobs said. "She is obviously very passionate about the club considering she made sure that new officers for the following school year were elected before she moved on to high school. It's great to see leadership attributes in young students such as Natalie."

"Natalie took the initiative to start an environmental club, and then made sure the club succeeded in making Smyrna Middle School more 'green.' When she thought they could do more, she found ways for them to do more and encouraged students to

pursue activities and events at home or outside of school,” said awards judge Jennifer Luoma. “To me, by motivating her peers to live their lives in more of an environmentally-friendly manner and to help the environment, Natalie has the makings of being a great environmentalist.”

Special recognition honorees **Cole and Samantha Palmer**, 12 and 10, of Greenwood, have led a renewed effort to keep clean and monitor the health of the Tantrough Branch portion of the Mispillion Watershed. After their initial training with the Delaware Nature Society’s Technical Stream Monitoring program in August 2013, the siblings have enlisted the help of fellow Scouts and friends to contribute more than 190 hours of volunteer service to ensure that the stream and its banks are free of trash and to perform water quality testing.

“In Delaware, too much of our water is polluted and not fit to drink. Figuring our body is 75 percent water, if our water gets polluted, then we get polluted and we will all get very sick and unhappy,” said Samantha. “The most important part is that if the streams get healthier, we will get better and everyone’s happier, plus we’ll be able to eat fish and go swimming,” added Cole.

Cole and Samantha test the Tantrough Branch monthly for dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrates, phosphates, alkalinity and conductivity. Their data is used to characterize conditions and trends, detect potential water quality problems and assess program goals. The information is passed through DNS to DNREC and ultimately to the EPA to be posted in the National Watershed Assessment database.

“Cole and Samantha are dedicated volunteers who have not missed a sampling since beginning their monitoring,” said Kristen Travers, DNS Watershed Stewardship Team Leader, noting that the siblings are the youngest volunteers in the monitoring program. “Not only have they taken the initiative to monitor the health of the water, but also to keep the

stream clean by organizing two cleanups with local Boy and Girl Scout troops. These efforts are keeping trash out of our waters while educating their fellow scouts and the community about the importance of clean water and steps that anyone can take to make a difference for clean water.”

“These two young people volunteer to help the environment and lead their peers to care for it through example,” Luoma said.

“It’s great to hear about young children taking an active interest in protecting our environment,” Jacobs added. “I see future environmental scientists in both Cole and Samantha!”

For more information on the Young Environmentalist of the Year Awards, please contact Joanna Wilson, DNREC Public Affairs, 302-739-9902, or [joanna.wilson@delaware.gov](mailto:joanna.wilson@delaware.gov).