

Governor Markell joins DNREC Secretary David Small in honoring Delaware's 2016 Young Environmentalists in State Fair ceremony

HARRINGTON – Today at the Delaware State Fair, Governor Jack Markell and DNREC Secretary David Small honored four Delaware students recognized as DNREC's 2016 Young Environmentalists of the Year, along with an environmentalist group of third graders from Hartly Elementary School who received special recognition from the program.

“These impressive young people have demonstrated that every Delawarean can have an impact in protecting our natural resources and raising awareness about the value of environmental stewardship,” Governor Markell said. “I’m inspired by their commitment to use their time and talents to promote cleaner healthier communities and I’m proud to recognize them for their efforts to contribute to our state’s bright future.”

“Through the Young Environmentalist 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.

DNREC's 2016 Young Environmentalists of the Year are:

- High School – Hunter Seaman of Milford
- Middle School – Adrianna Snyder and Hannah Steenkamer, both of Newark (NOTE: The judges determined a tie for the middle school award.)
- Elementary School – Sonja Rose Bucic of Wilmington
- Special recognition – Senators in Action, Hartly Elementary School, third grade: Tania Braxton, Amelia Delaraga, Delayne Elsberry, Ezra Johnson, Olivia Maranad, Michael Megill, Evan Nagyiski, Aleck Robinson, Dominic Scaffidi, Lauren Szelstei, Lindsay Waters and Larry Whitesell.

Judges for the program's 23rd year were Education Coordinator Maggie Pletta and Administrative Assistant Colleen Holstein, both with the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve; Michelle Jacobs, educator and DNREC Small Business Ombudsman; and Environmental Scientist Jennifer Luoma, DNREC Division of Watershed Stewardship.

Here's more information about the honorees.

High school winner **Hunter Seaman**, 18, of Milford, graduated from the electrical trades program at Sussex Technical High School in May and plans to join the workforce this fall in the electrical or heavy equipment field. For the past two years, Hunter served as committee chair for the school's Ducks Unlimited Varsity Chapter, having recruited and trained more than 20 student committee members, all focused on the conservation and preservation of wetlands and waterfowl. This past school year, Hunter led the committee's two major fundraising events: its annual fall dinner at the Dagsboro Fire Hall and a fundraiser in conjunction with the annual

Delaware Ducks Unlimited Greenwing Youth Conservation Festival.

“Proceeds from these two events totaled more than \$14,000, all of which goes to directly to Ducks Unlimited for wetlands preservation and habitat conservation projects,” wrote his nominator, Anthony Carmen, DU club advisor at Sussex Tech. “Hunter’s efforts have directly led to increasing public awareness as well as demonstrating the highest qualities of environmental stewardship.”

“On behalf of Delaware Ducks Unlimited, congratulations to Hunter on all of his accomplishments,” said State Chair Matt Biggs, Delaware Ducks Unlimited. “Hunter is very deserving of such recognition. Under his leadership, the DU Varsity Chapter at Sussex Technical High School continued to grow in both fundraising and membership. We are excited to know that Hunter along with other youth conservationists will be future leaders and volunteers for Ducks Unlimited.”

“Congratulations to Hunter for taking on a leadership role in an organization that shares his passion,” wrote contest judge Michelle Jacobs. “It’s one thing to ‘talk the talk,’ but more impressive when you ‘walk the walk.’ Hunter’s efforts to lead two major fundraisers – ultimately raising \$14,000 – are to be commended!”

“Hunter displays a great commitment to the conservation and preservation of our wetlands. He is a true steward to the environment,” noted judge Colleen Holstein. “His work will have a direct impact on spreading the conservation values of Ducks Unlimited,” added judge Maggie Pletta.

The middle school Young Environmentalist contest was a tie between two Newark residents, **Adrianna Snyder** and **Hannah Steenkamer**.

Adrianna Snyder, 11, will be a 6th grader at Shue-Medil Middle School in the fall. Last spring, following surgery, Adrianna

was working with a physical therapist to complete her recovery. When she returned to school, Adrianna decided to add her own exercise to her regimen: picking up trash on the grounds of Brader Elementary.

“Adrianna was bound and determined – she put on gloves, brought a trash bag out and tirelessly performed stand-and-squat transitions over and over again to pick up the trash,” wrote her nominator and physical therapist, Shelly Menzer, noting Adrianna’s environmental efforts helped her strength, balance and ability to walk outside.

“Adrianna truly cares about keeping our Earth clean so that she, her family and her peers can enjoy a cleaner Earth. Her determination has inspired the staff and students at Brader Elementary School, showing others how important it is to take pride in the Earth and keep it a pleasant place,” Menzer added.

Judges also found Adrianna’s determination and accomplishments inspiring. “Adrianna seems to be one very motivated young lady. She is certainly a role model for her peers,” Jacobs said. “Adrianna is a truly positive peer presence any school would be fortunate to have,” Holstein added.

Hannah Steenkamer, 13, will be a 7th grader at H.B. DuPont Middle School in the fall. A dedicated volunteer since first grade, Hannah has never shied away from hot, cold or dirty jobs involving trash and recycling, including “harvesting” recyclables from trash barrels in Iron Hill Park. This past school year, Hannah was active in her school’s Recycle Club, assigned to collect, empty and return recycle bins to each teacher’s classroom after verifying materials in the bins are recyclable.

This summer, Hannah is serving as a junior counselor on the volunteer staff of the Iron Hill Museum & Science Center, working with campers age 7-11 in the center’s junior

naturalist program.

“This is a position of responsibility – normally age 14 and older – on which the center’s small staff and director rely greatly, since supporting volunteers are hard to find for extended periods,” wrote Hannah’s nominator, her grandfather Whit Knopf, who assisted her in planting a 6-foot pin oak at the Iron Hill Museum for Arbor Day. “Hannah has been a steady and energetic environmental volunteer literally half her life. She never courts the limelight – but she gets a lot done,” Knopf added.

The judges were impressed with Hannah’s maturity and dedication. “Hannah is a very determined individual who has found a way to make a difference,” judge Jennifer Luoma said. “Super awesome!” Pletta exclaimed. “Clearly Hannah is committed to educating others about recycling and nature around them. At such a young age, Hannah’s willingness to educate others is especially admirable, and our environment will be better off as a result,” Jacobs said.

Elementary school winner **Sonja Rose Bucic**, 8, will be a 3rd grader at Mount Pleasant Elementary School in the fall. As a second grader, Sonja coordinated an effort to collect single-use plastic grocery bags in a Guinness Book of World Records attempt to create the world’s largest plastic bag ball for Earth Day, April 23, 2016 at Justison Landing Park on the Wilmington Riverfront.

To promote the effort, Sonja distributed more than 750 copies of a flyer approved by the Brandywine School District, read a script on the school intercom during morning announcements and, to collect the bags, made bins replete with educational information about plastic bags, including recycling rates and environmental impact. Mount Pleasant Elementary contributed 8,350 bags – the highest number collected by participating schools and groups. The resulting bag ball, made of more than 52,000 bags that took all that day to tie and roll, easily set

the world record. The giant bag ball, weighing 340 pounds, was displayed at the Delaware Solid Waste Authority's Environmental Education building in New Castle before being sent for recycling to eco-friendly decking manufacturer Trex.

"Sonja worked to keep thousands of plastic bags out of the waste stream, educated hundreds of other students at her school about bag reduction, recycling and reuse, and contributed to a Guinness Book of World Records recognition for Delaware," wrote Sonja's nominator, Dr. Amy Roe, lauding "her tireless dedication" and "extraordinary effort" in raising awareness about the problems of plastic bag pollution and the importance of reduction, reuse and recycling through a multi-media public education campaign at her school, engaging other children at in a tangible activity to address the problem.

"Sonja's efforts in her own school will have a lasting impact. It's great to see such a young student want to get involved in her school – and in her community," said judge Michelle Jacobs. "Sonja will always be a part of Guinness World Records history, an exemplary feat for a second grader," judge Colleen Holstein added.



Governor Markell, Secretary Small and Div. of Fish and Wildlife Director David Saveikis with teacher Mary Eanes and students from Hartly Elementary School.

Also recognized were the **Senators in Action**, a third-grade environmental stewardship group formed two years ago by teacher Mary Eanes of Kent County's Hartly Elementary School. This year, the group focused on conservation. Their accomplishments for the 2015/2016 school year included: researching energy savings tips and auditing the school's energy use to create a go-green energy plan for the school; two tree plantings in local parks and rec centers;

participating in a letter-writing campaign to the White House to encourage use of turtle excluder devices in trawl nets to save sea turtles; staging a "For the Love of Art" auction to raise funds for One More Generation to support the organization's efforts in animal and environmental education; and holding a donation drive for the First State Animal Shelter and SPCA.

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.

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