

From Middle School Math to Higher Education Educator of The Year

Former Eastern Kentucky University professor recognized for contributions to environmental education

[Berea, KY, 10/23/2019] Dr. Melinda Wilder was recognized by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) as the 2019 Higher Education Educator of the Year for her life-long service to the field.

In 1983, Wilder began her career as a middle school mathematics and science teacher. In that role, she developed her school's outdoor classroom to teach a variety of subjects in natural settings. That experience and her passion for teaching about the environment led her to obtain a Ph.D. in science education.

Wilder began teaching in the College of Education at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) in 1994 and became the Director of the Division of Natural Areas at EKU in 2005. The following year, Melinda led the development of an environmental education endorsement program at EKU that was accredited by NAAEE and later by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

Over the last decade, Wilder has sat on the board of the Kentucky Association for Environmental Education, partnered with Ecology Project International and improved Yellowstone National Park's teacher fellowship program.

"By working with preservice and inservice teachers through undergraduate and graduate classes at the University, I hopefully initiated a ripple effect—wherein they too help their students connect with the natural world," said Wilder.

The Higher Education Educator of the Year award honors individuals for their efforts in promoting environmental education and using the environment as a context for learning in their teaching.

"Dr. Wilder has been a superstar in environmental education, always looking for ways to integrate environmental education into her teaching and helping students gain the knowledge, skills and know-how to be a positive force for sustainability in their communities," said Judy Braus, Executive Director of NAAEE. "Her career exemplifies leadership, volunteer spirit and innovation and we are thrilled to recognize her outstanding accomplishments in the field."

This award was presented at NAAEE's 48th Annual Conference in Lexington, KY with 10 other awards that recognize exemplary individuals and organizations in the field of environmental education.

About NAAEE

For nearly five decades, the [North American Association for Environmental Education](#) has led efforts to use the power of education to advance environmental literacy and civic engagement and create a more equitable and sustainable future. NAAEE supports a network of more than 20,000 educators and 56 state, regional and provincial affiliate organizations working in environmental education in more than 30 countries.

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