



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

2022

Arizona Association for Environmental Education eeExcellence Award Winners

Recognizing those who are or have:

- dedicated current and long-term service in the field of EE (programs, curriculum, research, publications, legislation, etc.)
- created a work environment that incorporates EE (volunteerism by employees, using recycled & environmentally-friendly products, collaboration with and/or funding of EE initiatives)
- demonstrated outstanding action, contribution, and leadership supporting EE
- demonstrated outstanding service and volunteerism
- show innovative and enthusiastic implementation of EE programs
- shared ideas, best practices, and techniques with others
- employed community engagement models and collaborates with the greater EE community
- demonstrated outstanding work on programs including practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion

05 November 2022

2022 Award Winners

Outstanding Junior/Young Professional in Environmental Ed

- Gabriella “Gaby” Parra, University of Arizona

Outstanding Environmental Educator in Informal or Non-formal Settings

- Rebecca Perez, Ironwood Tree Experience

Outstanding Environmental Educator in P-12 Settings

- Alisha Porosky, Lake Havasu City Schools

Outstanding Environmental Educator in Higher Education

- Jay Kurtz, Prescott College

Outstanding Environmental Ed Program

- Camp Cooper at the University of Arizona

Outstanding Nonprofit Organization Committed to Environmental Ed

- Highlands Center for Natural History - Sarah Vincent

Outstanding Governmental Agency Committed to Environmental Ed

- Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation, Environmental Education Program

Outstanding School or College Committed to Environmental Ed

- Emerson Elementary School

Outstanding Business Committed to Environmental Ed

- Footprint Foundation

Outstanding Inclusive Environmental Ed Program

- Bisbee Science Lab - Amie Esteves

Lifetime Achievement in Environmental Ed

- Dr. Molina Walters, ASU Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and
- Catherine Culver, Casteel High School



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Gaby Parra

Outstanding Young Professional in Environmental Education

Gabriella "Gaby" Parra, now a senior at the University of Arizona, has been making meaningful contributions in environmental education since her high school years, with no sign of stopping. During high school Gaby worked at Las Milpitas Community Farm in Tucson, where she supported neighborhood residents and refugees in growing natural and culturally appropriate foods. After graduation, Gaby took classes at Pima Community College, and started working at PCC's Immigrant and Refugee Student Resource Center, where she discovered her skill for working with diverse groups of people and her passion for working for equity, human rights, and justice. Maintaining her passion for the natural world, however, she also volunteered over 200 hours at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, where she worked hands on with many native creatures including hawks, owls, snakes, squirrels, lizards, turtles, and stingrays, and helped visitors get to know these amazing animals. After transferring to University of Arizona, Gaby joined the Bio/Diversity Project where she developed and facilitated environmental education lessons at Valencia Middle School, a predominantly Hispanic/Latinx school on Tucson's south side. This year, through the Earth Grant program for emerging environmental leaders, Gaby is working closely with Dr. Ramirez-Andreotta in the Environmental Science department to effectively communicate and advocate for Arizona environmental justice communities. As part of her work, Gaby is working directly with community members in Miami, AZ, an active copper mining community, to measure contaminant levels in soil, facilitate community meetings and educational trainings related to understanding environmental and health risks, and spread public awareness of evidence-based strategies for health and safety, such as planting native plants and trees around residences, and reducing dust inside the home. In Gaby's own words, "Being Chicana myself and growing up in the Mexican-American community, I grew up witnessing the environmental inequalities that Black and Brown communities face. Having the privilege to attend higher education is something I pride myself in, and I'd like to dedicate that to addressing issues that people like my family, friends, and community go through. Addressing environmental racism is not just important for society, but important for improving the personal lives of everyone around me." Gaby further describes herself as a "very social and communicative person," a natural "public engager and educator," and someone who is "comfortable in working with black and brown communities with understanding, sensitivity, and professionalism." After her graduation this spring with a BS in Natural Resources and Mexican American Studies, I can only imagine Gaby making great strides in the intersection of environmental education and community engagement and advocacy. I really look forward to watching this young leader and educator grow.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Rebecca Perez



Outstanding Environmental Educator in Informal or Non-formal Settings

Rebecca's career in Environmental Education began long before she started at the University of Arizona, where she received a Bachelor of Science degree in Literacy Learning and Leadership with a minor in Environmental Education. It began in the desert surrounding her childhood home on the southwest side of the Tucson Mountains, where as a young kid, she fostered her love and connection to the Sonoran Desert that she calls home. This is a story she shares frequently at Ironwood Tree Experience (ITE) where Rebecca currently serves as a Program Coordinator. In her position, she seeks to provide experiences where a similar love and connection to the natural world can be cultivated by Tucson's youth of today.

Rebecca was hired on to Ironwood Tree Experience (ITE) in August 2021 as a Field Instructor. She was the right person to inspire, teach, and mentor youth and support them in caring for the environment. For the first nine months on the job, she spent countless days in the field facilitating environmental education programs for Southern Arizona teens and young people. With commitment and responsiveness, she accepted the challenge and promotion to Program Coordinator in just under one year from hire!

Rebecca was promoted in such a short time for many reasons. She demonstrates a deep commitment to providing well-rounded, dynamic and quality programs for the young people we serve. She always brings a lens of accessibility and advocacy to everything she does, ensuring no one is left out when considering the "how" of ITE's programs. She models excellence in all of her work, from the small details to the big picture. She believes deeply in the power of collaboration to build functional and trusting teams that she role models and practices with the field team she works with.

In Spring of 2021, in partnership with the Pima County Department of Environmental Quality (PDEQ), Rebecca worked to co-design and implement a brand new internship program at ITE - Youth for Blue Skies. The focus of this internship is to provide learning and exposure for young people to real life examples of climate change and environmental justice impacts and issues, as well as solutions, within their own community. As part of the internship, youth were guided through a grant application process where they submitted proposals for youth-led climate action mini-grants that will support their own ideas and solutions to local environmental issues. Six of the nine students were awarded.

Rebecca continues to serve as Program Coordinator at Ironwood Tree Experience where she brings her lens of justice to the field of Environmental Education, pushing for a more equitable and accessible field for all, especially those from marginalized groups and communities. As stated in ITE's mission, Rebecca continues to bring her joy and passion to her job, working hard "to create healthy and resilient communities."



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Camp Cooper

Outstanding Environmental Education Program

Camp Cooper (coopercenter.arizona.edu) is a phenomenal program all around - their format and activities are both educational and engaging. Their staff are all exceptionally passionate and knowledgeable and should each be nominated for their own award for outstanding environmental educator. My son participated in the program last year with his 4th grade class at Satori School and he left the program saying, "Why can't we have school like this every day?" Not only that, but he was inspired to carry the things he learned at camp into his life every day, which is the ultimate goal of any environmental program. As a graduate of Prescott College who studied Environmental Ed, I was exceedingly impressed with nearly every aspect of Camp Cooper's program and staff. They deserve all the awards!



COOPER CENTER
for
**ENVIRONMENTAL
LEARNING**



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Highlands Center for Natural
History - Sarah Vincent



Outstanding Nonprofit Organization Committed to Environmental Education

The Highlands Center for Natural History (highlandscenter.org), a 501C3 nonprofit, is celebrating 25 years of excellence in engaging the public from children through senior citizens with the wonder of nature and encouraging them, by example, to be wise caretakers of the land. Preschoolers and parents are engaged in Knee High Naturalist programs while school-aged children participate in field trips, on-site visits by staff, docents and naturalists or are engaged in the Schoolyard Habitats STEM activities in every school in the Prescott USD and Humboldt USD. Programs for the County Attorney's Court Diversion program are offered as well as programs for the County Attorney's staff, assisting them through nature, to destress.

The new Arizona Naturalist Program teaches adult learners' skills and environmental knowledge required to become naturalists and lead others to engage with nature. Each graduate is required to provide a set number of volunteer hours annually which includes a natural history related project for the betterment of the community. This organization exists through the generosity of its supporters and because of fundraising events such as Shakespeare in the Pines, Wander the Wild, and the Plein Air events. Run by a dedicated staff and devoted volunteers, Highlands Center stays true to its mission and exemplifies its Mission in everything it does.

Through a partnership with Prescott Natural Forest, Highlands Center for Natural History leases land for its building, the gardens and trails. This unique public/private partnership allows the visitors to be immersed in the premier Natural Forest of the Central Highlands of Arizona.

Sarah Vincent is the Education Director at the Highlands Center for Natural History and has worked in outdoor and environmental learning for as long as I have known her. Both in her own organization and across Prescott, Sarah is a strong advocate for improving accessibility and inclusivity in environmental education programming. Sarah is always willing to speak the truth, have serious and hard conversations, and to stand her ground when it comes to the importance of ensuring historically excluded members of our community are centered and heard in this work. Sarah also has taken her educational leadership to the next level, and two years ago joined our public school board. I am certain that my environmental education work in this community would not have had the success it has had without Sarah's outstanding efforts to educate others on the critical role environmental education plays in building a better world for our children, our region, and our future. I especially admire the way Sarah brings patience and kindness to partnerships that have had a difficult past, finding ways for organizations at odds to reconnect and regrow the environmental education community and network our town deserves. Sarah is my local environmental education hero and I hope she can be AAEE's too.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

**Pima County Natural Resources,
Parks and Recreation, EE Program**

Outstanding Governmental Agency Committed to Environmental Education

The Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation's Environmental Education Program provides meaningful experiences to promote Sonoran Desert conservation, elevates environmental and cultural resource literacy, and encourages the use of the County's Natural Resource Parks system. A skilled team of educators and dedicated volunteers provide a wide range of educational and interpretive opportunities to reach the broadest possible audience. The programming elements are divided into areas of interest such as: Park Interpretive Programs, School Programs, Youth and Family Programs, Adult and Volunteer Programs, and Community Outreach.

Led by Julie Strom and her predecessor, Wendy Burroughs, the EE team has consistently provided access to programs for a wide variety of people of all ages and backgrounds in our community. The program runs free and reduced programs for school groups at all of its facilities, provides online education opportunities increasing accessibility to content, and bridges arts and environmental education through the Living River of Words program. The eeTeam was also instrumental in helping to launch the Arizona Master Naturalist Program by initially sponsoring the flagship chapter of the program in Pima County.

Pima County NRPR Environmental Educators are a diverse and dynamic group of leaders who work with volunteers and community members of all ages to ensure access to our natural world is not only for a few. I'm excited to recommend the Program for the AAE Outstanding Governmental Agency Committee to EE for 2022.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!



FOOTPRINT
FOUNDATION

Footprint Foundation

Outstanding Business Committed to Environmental Education

The Footprint Foundation is the non-profit branch of Footprint©, a sustainable technology firm that is focused on reducing or eliminating plastics in our everyday life through the development and manufacturing of revolutionary technologies.

Their mission is to eliminate plastic pollution from the environment and educate people on the serious impact that plastic has on our planet and bodies. They seek to inspire long-lasting change, together with businesses and individuals, through education and targeted actions.

Christine Figgner, the Director of Science and Education works with key partners, including non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and sustainable brands to spread awareness about the power of consumer choice at events and conferences. She is also bringing this awareness inside classrooms to instill the knowledge of personal choice on the next generation of consumers, scientists and changemakers.

The Footprint Foundation was brought to our attention in 2021 when they entered into a partnership with the WNBA Phoenix Mercury and NBA Phoenix Suns to create the Footprint Center in Phoenix, an arena committed to eliminating single-use plastic to create a healthier planet and a first-class sports and entertainment venue for sustainable innovation.

The Foundation also has a wide variety of education resources on their website, including podcasts, webinars, videos, books, and teacher resources dedicated to providing information about the importance of reducing single-use plastics and waste for a sustainable future.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!



Laboratorio
de Ciencias
de Bisbee

Bisbee
Science
Lab

Bisbee Science Lab- Amie Esteves

Outstanding Inclusive Environmental Education Program

Amie Esteves, the Program Director of the Bisbee Science Lab, operated by the Bisbee Science Exploration and Research Center (BSERC). BSERC was founded in 2018 as an effort to provide experiential science learning activities for children and adults in Cochise County, facilitate the professional development of teachers, and support ongoing STEAM research. In 2020, the Bisbee Science Lab (BSL) moved to 519 W Melody Lane in San Jose Bisbee, where it currently operates a makerspace/tinkerspace, virtual reality lounge, Science Friday programming and outdoor learning center in a county building. www.bisbeesciencelab.org In March 2021, BSERC launched the Sky Island STEAM Express, its mobile science lab project. Sky Island STEAM Express has visited 13 communities within the county with a bi-annual rotation of locally sourced science exhibits on different topics. Since its launch it has visited over 5000 students across the county, bringing interactive science exhibits to underserved communities in southeastern Arizona.

Amie Esteves began as a volunteer for the BSL in 2019, she was hired as the first paid employee in 2020 as program director of the Bisbee Science Lab and the lead designer and operator of the mobile STEAM Express. It is for this work that I have nominated her. Amie has taken the environmental issues identified by the communities we serve and designed the hands-on mobile lab exhibits, and Science Friday programming; in addition, she serves as the mentor to the 5 Bisbee High School interns who work at the Lab. In addition, she has brought the Master Naturalist program to our region, with 16 participants in this rural area. She developed partnerships with local environmental organizations to bring speakers and field trips in the region. In these leadership and development roles, Amie designs our programming to the highest standards, all aimed to address the environmental issues that the region faces. Her knowledge of permaculture, and commitments to ecological thinking has informed all the work of the BSL. As a mentor to the interns, Amie has served as a role model, not only as a woman interested in science, but as an environmentalist driven to act with the earth in mind.

This fall, Amie traveled to Pittsburg with the lead intern at the BSL to present the Sky Island STEAM Express at the Association of Science and Technology Centers. For the intern, this was her first time on a plane! Amie presented on how to bridge environmental education gaps in rural communities, focusing on local environmental challenges. The goal of Amie's work is to provide actionable learning and build resilient communities to address local environmental issues.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Alisha Porosky

Outstanding Environmental Educator in P-12 Settings

Ali Porosky has been a champion for environmental education, sustainability, and conservation for the past 10 years at Lake Havasu High School. She has brought the AP Environmental Science course to LHHS for the first time, supplementing her already successful ecology class. Ms. Porosky is also the founding advisor of the Students of Sustainability (SOS) club to our students, which focuses on raising awareness for wildlife conservation, reforestation, and local issues such as recycling and responsible use of resources.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Jay Kurtz



Outstanding Environmental Educator in Higher Education

Jay Kurtz is an Adjunct Professor at Prescott College in Prescott, AZ. He works hard to teach his graduate students. In the course Philosophies and Trends of Environmental Education he focuses on the NAAEE Guidelines for the Professional Development of Environmental Educators. In doing so he fosters engaging lectures and discussion forums on various topics like environmental literacy, professional responsibilities of the environmental educator, and more. He continually fosters learning and promotes inclusivity in his online classroom space.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!



Emerson Elementary School

Outstanding School or College Committed to EE

Emerson School is a learning community dedicated to the promise in every child. We work collaboratively to nurture thoughtful leaders, and life-long learners; through standards based instruction that is engaging, meaningful, interactive, and student-centered. They continually assess all of their student's rigorous work assignments, and communicate specific feedback to facilitate the highest level of achievement for each child.

Emerson Elementary School is a K-8 community school in the Phoenix Elementary School District. Emerson is located in the Coronado Historic Neighborhood in Downtown Phoenix. Emerson is truly committed to being a cornerstone of the community. With a wide variety of community collaborators, including Arizona State University, the Coronado Neighborhood Association, the Arizona Sustainability Alliance, and a variety of other local nonprofits and businesses in the Valley, Emerson leverages community partnerships to provide meaningful, hands-on environmental educational learning opportunities to its students. Most recently, Emerson galvanized it's variety of partners to plant over 100 trees and plants on its campus and school garden to celebrate its 100 year anniversary while incorporating shade to mitigate heat on campus to provide more outdoor learning opportunities. With 125 volunteers from the community in attendance, it was an exciting celebration and showcased the schools commitment to sustainability and environmental education.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!

Dr. Molina Walters



Lifetime Achievement in Environmental Education

Dr. Molina ("Mo") Walters has consistently promoted Environment Education, often giving up weekends and breaks to host assorted professional development classes toward getting a certificate in Environmental Studies. She has hosted multiple environmentally focused study abroad opportunities as well. Her unbridled enthusiasm and passion for our desert and planet is evident in every class she teaches, and in her continued outreach to former students, now teachers, to further their understanding of our environment and take that understanding into their classrooms.

She is nothing short of incredible as she continually overcomes joint pain and physical issues to bring her students into more comprehensive content knowledge.



ARIZONA
ASSOCIATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION

eeExcellence!
Catherine Culver



Lifetime Achievement in Environmental Education

Ms. Catherine Culver is one of the finest educators I have ever worked alongside. I am sure you receive many letters of recommendation that start similarly. The only thing about Cathy that you will find in common with those teachers is the first line of this recommendation. I had the pleasure of observing Ms. Culver as her Career Ladder Specialist when she was a teacher at Chandler High School. I have also had the pleasure of serving as her principal at Casteel High School for the past five years.

While at Chandler High, she developed Advance Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and on-level Environmental Science. Ms. Culver utilized her skills as an AVID teacher to help students realize their potential and challenge students who would have traditionally fallen through the cracks to take the most challenging classes. While at Chandler High, She worked alongside ASU to provide her students in AP and Environmental Science to earn credit through ASU's Sustainability Program.

Ms. Culver has brought her partnership with ASU to Casteel. She continues to lead and develop environmental science curriculum that allows students to see science in action. Her room is filled with student-created biocolumns. The students in Ms. Culver's classes understand that she cares deeply about them and their learning. Ms. Culver believes in hands-on and minds-on education. She has served on the following committees AVID, ED-Tech, Data Wise, and Formative Assessment. Ms. Culver has run the Environmental club, Adventure Club, and Student Council. She participated and presented in ASU's GK12-CHEM/Phys program. Cathy has received grants from Lowes, SRP, ASU Sustainability, and Chandler Education Foundation. She is dual credit certified through Chandler Gilbert Community College. In 2021 Ms. Culver was awarded for her work with ASU and the National Science Foundation in the creation of Advancing informal STEM learning (AISL) for FEWS for Change: A Resource Conservation Role-Playing Game for Youth.

Ms. Culver puts students first in her classroom. She is always looking for ways to improve her practice. I had the pleasure of observing her teach a lesson where she used her work with SAIL (Formative Assessment) and had AP students develop their own learning goals for an upcoming unit. Students used these personal learning goals to build student agency and track their understanding while they progressed through the material. It takes an exceptional teacher who can create a class where student agency drives the learning in an AP class. You cannot find a better teacher who embodies the qualities of what a science teacher should be. She is kind, understands her content, and exceeds every expectation possible. I give Ms. Culver my highest recommendation. She will make you and your organization proud, just like she has made Chandler Unified Proud.