



The Conservation Educator Award

The Garden Club of Virginia's Conservation Educator Award recognizes an individual or an organization whose work in an educational environment empowers the GCV's mission—to celebrate the beauty of the land, to conserve the gifts of nature and to challenge future generations to build on this heritage. The recipient may be an educator, scout leader, 4-H leader, Master Gardener or an environmental organization. Established in 2016, the award is a "recognition award," which promotes the ideals of conservation through education; the recipients are honored for successfully creating a learning "situation" which benefits the community. Evaluating determinants of the Conservation Educator Award include the nominee's educational initiatives and their impact on the community, the involvement of the community, speakers/volunteers and hands-on opportunities. The 2021 recipients of this important, mission-centric GCV award are Allegheny Mountain Institute and Norfolk Botanical Garden's Jennifer Erving.



Above: (from left to right) Barbara Brothers (AMI), Virginia Gillock (Augusta Garden Club), Bree Hersch (AMI), Kim Davidson (AMI), Julia Loman (AMI), Marie Thomas (Augusta Garden Club), and Laurie Berman (AMI)

ALLEGHENY MOUNTAIN INSTITUTE | HIGHTOWN

Nominated by The Augusta Garden Club, Staunton

Allegheny Mountain Institute began in 2011 as the Allegheny Mountain School with a mission to cultivate healthy communities through food and education. Its founder, Laurie Berman, recognized the need to reinvigorate Appalachian communities to return to their agrarian roots—learning to grow their own food again and taking charge of their personal health and that of their communities. In 2014, AMS officially renamed itself Allegheny Mountain Institute. The organization's vision remains the same as it was a decade ago: to train the trainer. In other words, to teach others to experience the joys and health benefits of growing one's own food and teach others to do the same.

Allegheny Mountain Institute hosts classes and workshops in the communities of Highland County, Rockbridge County, Augusta County, Staunton and

Waynesboro. Approximately 24,000 pounds of vegetables support community health through a variety of initiatives, such as Crop to Community and Blue Ridge Area Food Bank. AMI's Executive Director, Kim Davidson, works with the board, volunteers and the Fellowship Program to teach others to experience the joys and health benefits of growing one's own food. The Fellowship Program is central to AMI's success. Eight to nine fellows are recruited for an 18-month immersive, educational experience. During the first six months, they receive hands-on, farm-based training using bio-intensive, organic and regenerative practices. In the next year, the training is put into action by helping grow the local food system, supporting sustainable farming, increasing access to nutritional food and promoting health through educational programming. These initiatives have led to AMI's success in bringing together diverse individuals in the community and promoting equity in its programs.

JENNIFER ERVING, YOUTH EDUCATION SPECIALIST, NORFOLK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Nominated by The Garden Club of Norfolk

Jennifer Erving has worked at the Norfolk Botanical Garden for over 15 years as an in-the-field educator at the NBG's WOW garden—the World of Wonders Children's Garden. She has designed discovery stations, scavenger hunts, walking tours and a "dirt factory" play area—all with the goal of encouraging children to enjoy the outdoors, learn the benefits of a connection to nature, and introduce them to the magic of gardening.

With the limitations imposed by the pandemic, Erving developed Nature Quest, an interactive app which provides immersive garden experiences. Launched in July, Nature Quest includes photo scavenger hunts, games and educational activities. "Victory Gardens on Discovery Peak" was her first NBG Nature Quest, and it invites teams or individuals to engage with edible plants in the WOW garden.

Erving has served as an inspiration to children—and their parents—and she has reason to be optimistic about the future. "I've seen a monumental shift in how children respond to environmental education over the past decade," she says. "More and more are becoming advocates for global sustainability and fighting climate change."

By developing creative and innovative programming and garden design, Erving has encouraged children to be curious about the environment, learn about other species that share our planet, where food comes from and the rewards of being outside. From the beginning of her professional

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career with the YMCA to her innovative programs at Norfolk Botanical Garden, she has shared her passions with thousands of children and families. "As an educator," she says, "I remain committed to helping children find those moments in the garden that will further foster their growing commitment to preserving the natural world."

In addition to the GCV's 2021 Conservation Educator Award, Erving was also honored by The Garden Club of America. She is a 2021 recipient of their Elizabeth Abernathy Hull Award, which recognizes individuals around the country who work with youth under the age of 16 to inspire their "appreciation of the beauty and fragility of our planet."

—Jane Edwards, GCV Conservation Awards Chairman, The Garden Club of Norfolk



TOP: Norfolk Botanical Garden's WOW Garden.

ABOVE Jen Erving, GCV's 2021 Conservation Educator Award recipient.

Photos courtesy of Norfolk Botanical Garden

