

Deborah Rigsbee Miller

Past-President, Environmental Educators of NC

EENC has grown tremendously in professional credibility and organizational resiliency thanks to the hard work and passionate dedication of its many past Presidents, Board of Directors, and members from across the state. One dynamo that provides all of us a model to emulate is the late Deborah Miller, our 7th EENC President in 1999.

Those of us who were fortunate to know her loved Deborah's tremendous energy and gung-ho zeal for all things EE. See what you can learn from this extraordinary woman that lived life fully and generously.

One of the first EENC Board positions Deborah Miller held was "**Central Section Coordinator.**" Deborah organized educational tours and interesting seminars that no one had thought to do before such as special behind-the-scenes tours of the Carnivore Preservation Trust, the NCSU Solar House, Niche Gardens, and many more interesting sites. Deborah understood that people wanted to network and see exciting EE places and faces.

Deborah then served as **EENC President-Elect**, where she organized the first GRAND-SCALE Annual Conference for EENC. Up until 1998, the annual conferences were small and cozy with an overall attendance of 65 people, but at Deborah's conference the attendance was over 150! Deborah broke out of the thinking-small-box by brokering a new partnership with the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University. The theme was "Environmental Education: A Higher School of Thought". Deborah secured a Duke alumnus from Disney World Conservation Station to speak, marking EENC's first national keynote!

This put EENC on the map as a serious, viable and credible source for professional development in EE! Again, EENC Conferences that followed used the blueprint-for-success-in-large-partnerships that Deborah had forged and started to move the conferences across the state's 3 regions: Bald Head Island on the coast, Castle McCulloch in the Triad, Camp Kanuga in Hendersonville in the mountains, Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, etc. Deborah's conference was the first to "educate" the caterer on vegetarian entrees (and it was a pork BBQ caterer at that!), and the first to have vermicomposting available for food wastes! And it was the first to show a "Conference Preview" for the next year's professional development and networking conference.

Deborah served as **EENC's 7th President** in 1999. She created a new Diversity Scholarship Program in response to comments that EENC was not a diverse group (which was true as the majority of members were Caucasian females.) Partnering with Environmental Media, Deborah awarded scholarships to minority and financial-need members (and potential members) from all over the state to help in building diversity for the organization as well as the field of EE. She also made a special effort to recruit diverse Board members (ethnic, gender and age) and "installed" them by having them sign a public commitment and be ceremoniously pinned with a new EENC cloisonné pin. This brought a new formality to the proceedings and emphasized the important role of EENC's Board of Directors.

During Deborah's tenure, EENC was awarded the prestigious "**State Affiliate of the Year**" by the North American Association for Environmental Education! Deborah also gave EENC a higher profile at NAAEE annual conferences by organizing the "Networking Cakes Event" at the Affiliates Opening Ceremony. This involved coordinating and ordering specially decorated theme cakes for each state/province, which they used to attract people to their table for state/province program idea sharing and networking--all numerous logistics that she coordinated for many years.

As EENC was a program co-sponsor, Deborah made it a priority to advocate for and promote the new **NC EE Certification Program** and then went on the road to make numerous presentations to other states and regional Affiliates who were interested in this new NC ground-breaking program. She personally donated very generous and exciting "1-week Beach Getaways" for both EENC and NAAEE Conferences to help both organizations in raising funds and scholarships.

Throughout the years, Deborah was the "**Star Recruiter**" for encouraging new members to join EENC. Her passion and enthusiasm won over many new educators to join the state's professional organization and state affiliate to NAAEE.

Deborah's tireless work on behalf of EENC did not go unnoticed. She was honored with almost every **EENC Award** an individual can receive as she journeyed from member to Board member to Life member.

1995 Deborah Miller joins EENC.

Deborah is awarded EENC's...

- ❖ 1996 Outstanding Newcomer Award
- ❖ 1998 Environmental Educator of the Year
1998 (Deborah is instrumental in Duke University Nicholas School of the Environment receiving EENC's Outstanding Environmental Organization Award.)
- ❖ 1999 Outstanding Service Award
2000 (Deborah is instrumental in the U.S. EPA Office of Environmental Education receiving EENC's Outstanding Partnership Award.)
- ❖ 2003 Melva Fager Okun Lifetime Achievement Award

Please note that Deborah accomplished all of this while raising two children, taking care of her elderly mother, creating and leading a nonprofit for children called "Science Stars", and working a full-time job with the U.S. EPA in RTP.

Upon her retirement from the U.S. EPA in September 2009, Deborah applied her vast EE experience to her new career as a Green Realtor. For her clients, Deborah made sure EE literally hit home!

The greatest honor we can give to Deborah's memory is to embrace her passion and follow her lead in promoting excellence and diversity to strengthen the professional field of environmental education, and to share her sense of wonder and excitement for the environment with our children and grandchildren.

###