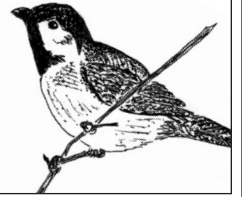


# Fiddleheads and Feathers



The Newsletter of the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation, Ltd.

Fall 2007

## Greetings and Happy Holidays!

The Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation is now over a decade old! We celebrated our 10th anniversary last year in style at the Clarence Nature Center. The celebration was well-attended by friends, family and past recipients of MGAEF aid. For me, the best part was meeting students we sent to the Adirondacks and DEC camps. We work hard to make these opportunities available and it was great to put faces to the names. Thanks to all of you that have donated over the years to make this good work possible.

The MGAEF continues with our core programs: (1) environmental curricula grants, (2) support for students to study ecology and environmental science and (3) a scholarship for a worthy SUNY-ESF student. In addition, we will be providing support to the Newark Middle School to send students on a field trip to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge.

We realize that you get many worthy requests for donations, but please consider us when you make your charitable donations this year. Our funds directly benefit many projects both close to home in Clarence, Newark and Onondaga County, as well as worldwide.

*Daniel Ardia, President*

## Environmental Awareness in Bangladesh by Mariah Mandelman

*Mariah Mandelman developed and implemented an environmental curriculum using native primates as a tool to teach environmental awareness in Bangladesh. She was a 2007 recipient of a curriculum development grant.*

I had previously spent 7 months as a US Peace Corps volunteer working in Rangpur, Bangladesh, as an English teacher in a secondary girls school. When my term was ended suddenly and the program was evacuated due to security concerns, I was devastated to leave my town and my students and friends. Having been hoping for a way to return, I designed this project with Bangladesh in mind.

Bangladesh is severely threatened by environmental change. The Bangladeshi education system largely involves the use of rote memorization and lecture, thus not providing students opportunities to develop necessary life skills such as critical thinking, communication, and reasoning skills. I felt this program could promote these skills through interactive activities as well as provide students with knowledge and understanding of environmental issues facing Bangladesh.

The program was conducted at the primary site for girls in classes 6, 7, and 8, for a total of 207 students. These classes were carried out by a co-teacher in the native language, Bangla, to insure



'Web of Life' activity with Class 8A students



Class 7A student discussing the role of birds in the forest and inter-relationships with other forest organisms



Class 8A students listen as one group presents their position as to why they deserve the land in 'Who deserves the land?' activity

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## A Look at Board Member Alice Gray



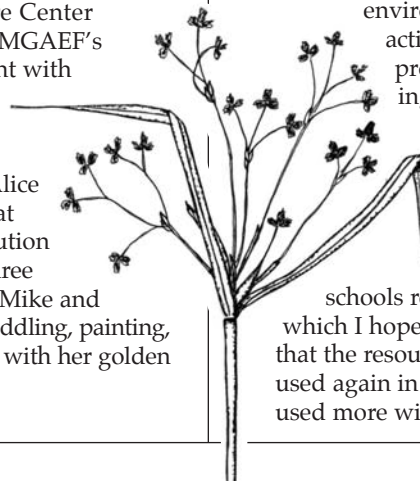
This year our featured Board Member is Melinda's mother, Alice Gray, who has served on the Board since its inception in 1996. A Buffalo native, Alice received her BS in Nursing from the University of Buffalo and worked at Roswell Park and at St. Francis Hospital. She returned to SUNY Buffalo to receive her MS in Speech Pathology. She worked at The Language Development Program in Tonawanda, where she was a Speech Pathologist, working with children with disabilities. Currently retired, she is very active in community organizations, including the Clarence United Methodist Church, Breast Cancer Network of WNY (President), Clarence Contemporary Club, Hope Chest Dragon Boat Team, Clarence Women's Club, Cancer Wellness Center, and the National Breast Cancer Coalition.



Alice is an avid reader and is very involved with environmental issues, especially as they impact health and wellness, with their potential relationships to cancer. She served on the Department of Defense Peer Review Panel in Washington, DC. This organization is made up of scientists and breast cancer survivors who review cancer research grant applications for possible funding.

Alice has been married to her college sweetheart, Don, for 47 years. They have a daughter, fellow Board Member Suzanne, who lives in Clarence with her husband Joe and their three children. Their son, Eric, who recently returned to WNY, works as a lawyer for Moog Inc. Alice and Don have been dedicated to the development of the Clarence Nature Center and are committed to MGAEF's continuing involvement with the Clarence and Newark School systems.

In her free time, Alice enjoys spending time at the Chautauqua Institution with her family and three grandchildren, Isabel, Mike and Jack. She also enjoys paddling, painting, traveling, and walking with her golden retriever, Daisy.



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understanding amongst the students. The program was also conducted at a secondary site, where students undergo instruction in English. Here the program involved only six students due to small class sizes, but a large number of teachers also took part, which will hopefully encourage the use of teaching methods and materials for future use.

Overall, the program went exceptionally well, and I was very pleased with the students' enthusiasm for the material and willingness to participate, even in activities that were entirely new and challenging for them.

I think this program worked well as a pilot study to demonstrate support for the use of environmental education programs in developing countries. While promoting interest and concern regarding environmental issues, it also

actively engaged students and promoted life skills and learning in ways the traditional educational approaches in-country do not.

Furthermore, I received tremendous support and enthusiasm from teachers, parents, and heads of

schools regarding this program, which I hope illustrates the possibility that the resources I compiled will be used again in the future, and could be used more widely.

## Making Aunt Melinda Smile



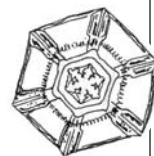
Isabel Melinda Murphy has many things in common with her Aunt Melinda... she loves animals, she loves to draw, she is concerned about the environment, and she loves to learn. Although she never had the chance to meet Aunt Melinda, Isabel loves to hear stories about her, and she especially loves to imagine Melinda's adventures in Africa as a teacher with the Peace Corps.

In October, for her 8th birthday party, Isabel wanted to do something different. She decided to ask her friends to bring school supplies instead of birthday gifts, and the girls packaged them into school supply kits for students in Africa. In the kits, the girls sent notes, complete with hearts and smiley faces. The box was decorated with artwork, labeled "To Africa With Love", and mailed on behalf of the MGAEF.



Isabel was able to collect and send 30 complete kits of school supplies that will put a smile on the faces of 30 students. And we believe Aunt Melinda will smile too!

For more information about WorldVision's "School Tools" program, see [http://www.worldvision.org/worldvision/wvusufso.nsf/stable/st\\_int\\_about](http://www.worldvision.org/worldvision/wvusufso.nsf/stable/st_int_about).



# Lessons Learned at Cranberry Lake Biological Center

Excerpts from Kate McDonnell, Alicia Weatherbee and Cornelia Willis



This summer, we participated in a summer biology camp run by Environmental and Forest Biology department at Syracuse University. It was a summer we will all remember.

The Adirondack Field Studies Program was an incredible experience. While we were there we experienced everything from getting to meet new people in a more intimate setting, to learning how to collect data in less than ideal situations.

Every day, we separated into 2 groups and we went to class for about four hours. It was a different class each day. The classes we took were herpetology, mammals, aquatic life/insects, medicinal and edible plants, and orienteering. In addition to those classes, we hiked around the camp or canoed. Each class helped us figure out what we wanted to do for our final project.

By Thursday, we had to separate into groups of 2-3 people and pick our topic of research. As part of our week, we had to develop an experiment and

take it through the various steps of the scientific method.

For our final project we decided to compare the native fish population in Cranberry Lake to non-native fish populations, to prove how invasive species cause a decline in the natural born fish populations. We eventually determined there are a larger amount of non-native species compared to native species, as we expected. We found the largest numbers in Yellow Perch, which sometimes ranged in over 100 fish. We focused more on Pumpkinseed Fish as our main native fish of study and found that there were shockingly small numbers of this once abundant fish. We determined that outsiders should not stock lakes just to fish for what they want. By stocking

lakes we are destroying natural habitats and causing the death of once abundant fish in these areas.

Overall, we appreciate this experience that was given to us. We will never forget it. Through this camp, we have made lifetime friends and learned valuable lessons. To us, it was like a mini-version of college. We believe you should continue to support this program for future students because it really is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



Kate McDonnell



Alicia Weatherbee



Cornelia Willis

## MGAEF Goes Urban!!

For 2007, we awarded our first curriculum development grant that directly deals with the urban environment. Urban environmental concerns are a critical, but often overlooked, issue. One chronic area of environmental toxicity is lead paint, which is found at high levels in the older homes found in urban areas. The MGAEF is excited to partner with the Secondary School of Law, a public magnet high school in Brooklyn, NY, to examine the problem of lead poisoning in their community from a variety of disciplines.

Students will combine environmental sampling with socio-economic analyses. The students plan to collect samples of water, paint and soil to test for lead. This will create a background map of lead exposure. These data will be compared with socio-economic information to assess the parts of the community at greatest risk. In addition, the students will create informational brochures about the dangers and sources of lead and how to minimize exposure.

The project will clearly benefit the community by increasing public awareness and minimizing lead exposure in young children. In addition, the students will become informed and concerned citizens as they grow to learn that:

- they can have positive effects on problems found in everyday life,
- current issues have historic relevance, and
- important problems must be studied from multiple viewpoints.

Addressing controversial issues and empowering students by gathering evidence and assessing competing claims was the topic of Melinda's Master's Thesis. She would be proud of this project and of us for helping support it.

## Outreach in Puerto Rico

Our third curriculum development grant in 2007 was to the Global Environmental Teachings Program, a program sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The program links groups of educators through travel courses and computer linkages to share environmental information and teaching approaches. Participants enhance their global knowledge while learning a different perspective on environmental issues. Our funds go to support their outreach in Puerto Rico.

The island of Puerto Rico has a wide diversity of habitats and a large number of species found only in Puerto Rico. One common link between teachers in Wisconsin and Puerto Rico has been an interest in teaching using birds. The goal is to use this common interest and the linked environment phenomenon of migration to enhance their students' interest in the environment. Our funds will go to purchase a "bird trunk", a mobile research equipment store. The trunks contain binoculars, a spotting scope, and field

guides. This trunk will be used by multiple teachers in Puerto Rico, as they gather environmental data and teaching approaches to share.



## Evolution of the MGAEF Curriculum Grant Program *by Dan Ardia*

This is the 10th year of our Environmental Curriculum Grant program and the program has come a long way! Over the last 10 years, we have given 19 grants to teachers working from upstate NY to overseas, including Bangladesh, Kenya and Chile. In each of these locations teachers and students have felt the touch of Melinda and her Foundation through our support of creative projects designed by innovative and inspiring teachers. We are expanding the program both in number awarded and in size (now \$1,500, from \$1,000).

Our first grant was given in 1997 to two teachers from Brockport, NY who sought funds to design and implement a wonderful project combining biology and art (two of Melinda's passions). For the next four years, we funded projects exclusively in NY, covering a range of age groups

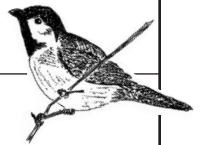
and studies. These include marine biology (Scarsdale), nature trail (Mahopac), urban habitat studies (Niskayuna), fisheries science (Cuba), stream ecology (Poland), and endangered species restoration (Albany). In addition, we directly supported the development of a curriculum to help support the Clarence Nature Center.

In 2002, we funded our first project outside NY by supporting a watershed level education project in Telluride, CO. This was followed in 2003 by a grant to a wetland restoration curriculum in Warrenton, VA. Excitedly, in 2004, we made our first international grant by providing support for an environmental education project in the Juan Fernandez Islands off the coast of Chile. The international nature of our grant was important for three reasons: (1) funds tend to have greater impact overseas, (2) Melinda's strong belief in interna-

tional service as demonstrated by her time with US Peace Corps, and (3) the validation of the MGAEF as an international foundation, both in impact and perspective.

In 2005, we provided support to Kenya, where Melinda served in Peace Corps, for an educational tree planting project, as well as a wetland restoration curriculum in Avon, MA. In 2006 we funded a stream monitoring program in Guatemala (in a location Melinda and Dan visited on their honeymoon!), plus another aquatic-focused curriculum in West Virginia.

In 2007, we funded three projects (a first); these projects are described here in this newsletter. We are excited by the diversity of the projects we support. Thank you for making this all possible – your donations truly make a difference around the globe.



### Giving Back to Nature

Last year, for their birthday celebrations, junior environmentalists Ben Montesanti (age 9) and Anna Montesanti (age 8) collected donations to the MGAEF in lieu of birthday gifts. "We love nature, and want to protect the environment," said Ben. "And we want to help the animals keep their habitats, and teach people to stop polluting our world," added his sister Anna. In total, the Montesanti siblings gave over \$500 to the Foundation. This is a gift that will keep giving back to the environment. Their dad, David Montesanti, grew up with Melinda. Kudos to David and his wife Jackie for educating their kids on the importance of protecting and preserving the Earth, our home.

### Send a Meaningful Gift This Season

MGAEF Wildlife Notecards – A perfect holiday gift, each 12 notecard set features 6 different color photos of African animals taken by Melinda while in Kenya with the Peace Corps. These beautiful cards can be used for any occasion. Cost is \$10.00 per set, plus \$1.00 shipping.



Gift "In Honor or Memory Of" – A meaningful way to honor or remember a special person! Make a contribution in their name to MGAEF, where your gift will advance environmental education, and we will send an acknowledgment letter to the honoree or family. Perfect for holidays, birthdays, and remembrance. Please indicate honoree or family name and address so we can send them an acknowledgment letter.



## Please Help Us Reach and Teach!

Through your donations, we are able to reach out and teach environmental education locally, as well as in remote corners of the globe. We depend on your support to provide these programs in the future, and we greatly appreciate any amount you can share. All contributions are tax deductible.

If you are able, please help us reach more students locally and around the world by sending your check to "MGAEF" in the enclosed gift envelope. We are ever grateful for your support.

