



The following information was provided to the Jan Hollmann Environmental Award Committee as part of the nomination packets for Ben and Hilary Thompson:

Ben Thompson

"Since 2004 I have taught seventh grade science in Pasadena, Maryland. The summer prior to starting at George Fox Middle School, my wife and I enrolled in the Chesapeake Connections teacher training program sponsored by Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center. Inspired by Arlington Echo staff and guests, including Steve Barry, Melanie Parker, Sheen Roos, and Larry Zoller, I worked to integrate the philosophy of Arlington Echo into my classroom – getting students outdoors and exploring nature in the context of the curriculum.

My science students began making visits to the greenhouses at the Center for Applied Technology - North to learn about Maryland Native Plants they would later plant in a large, school yard restoration project. The students continue annual boat trips with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to learn about living and nonliving factors affecting the health of the Chesapeake Bay. They raise Diamondback Terrapins as part of a popular 'Head Start' program that partners school groups with scientists investigating the species at Poplar Island.

I love music and have taken to playing Hawaiian instrumental music during science laboratory activities. After meeting with Annapolis resident, Dave Means, a retired acoustical engineer and custom ukulele builder, I decided to offer a ukulele building and playing club after school. The following summer, I sought out 'Bard of the Chesapeake Bay' Tom Wisner who visited with my ukulele students and encouraged them to play his tunes about caring for the Chesapeake Bay. Later, I worked with Jeff Holland and Janie Meneely to help students write their own songs about the Chesapeake Bay. The group began performing their music throughout the region. Over the last decade, some performance highlights have included Rachel Carson's 100th birthday celebration at the National Wildlife Visitors Center, annual performances at the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Eagle Festival, Earth Day concerts at the Maryland Zoo and U.S. Botanic Gardens, a U.S. Department of Education performance dedicated to Tom Wisner, and recently an Earth Day Sing-Along for dozens of Anne Arundel County seniors at Woods Presbyterian Church.

The seventh grade science curriculum has offered many opportunities to strengthen students' connection to the Chesapeake Bay. In recent laboratories they have studied oyster anatomy and role oysters play in the ecosystem, created model 'floating islands,' planted with native aquatic plant species and studied the interactions of plants, snails, and fish in several classroom tanks. I am constantly seeking out new opportunities to engage my students with flora and fauna that make our Chesapeake Bay ecosystem unique."

Hilary Thompson

"My journey as an environmental educator began in 2004 when my husband Ben encouraged me to take a one week summer course at Arlington Echo. I wasn't sure what to expect, and being five months pregnant was immediately dubbed "the meatball" during our canoe outings. Through Chesapeake Connections I found the means of connecting my students to nature and to bring my social studies lessons to the great outdoors. Having spent much of my youth exploring the woods and waterways around my grandparents' house in Baltimore County, I have felt connected to the natural world from a young age. To encourage children to understand and care for the environment was a natural fit for me. Many of the students I have worked with over the years had never spent time in nature and it has been a particular joy to bring outdoor experiences to these children.

Over the years my students have planted and cared for a large rain garden in our school yard. They have studied the woods in our schoolyard, observing habitat and keeping it free of trash. My students have built and monitored bluebird boxes, which have now been home to several generations of birds, blue and otherwise. They have raised and released American Eels, learning how to care for living creatures and becoming knowledgeable about the creek in our schoolyard, which would become the eels' home.

In 2012, I helped launch our school's Green Club. This student group carries out independent inquiry and projects, enjoys field trips on the Skipjack Stanley Norman and to Clagett Farm, participates in school and community events. The Green Club has brought awareness of many small and large environmental issues to the student body and searches for ways to improve our school facility and practices, such as the school wide recycling program they helped create."