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Delaware Nature Society Honors Eight at Annual Meeting

The Delaware Nature Society held its 46th Annual Meeting on April 13 at Ashland Nature Center in Hockessin. The keynote speaker was Hal White, author of *Natural History of Delmarva Dragonflies and Damselflies – Essays of a Lifelong Observer*.

Eight individuals and the town of Townsend were honored at the meeting for contributions to the community in various capacities. The award-winners are: Amy O’Neill, recipient of the Outstanding Environmental Educator Award; Abi Vanderlek, winner of the Outstanding Youth Award; the Isaacs-Greene family, Matt Chesser and the town of Middletown, recipients of Conservation Awards; and Darwin Palmer for the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Amy O’Neill is a technology teacher at William C. Lewis Dual Language Elementary School in the Red Clay School District. O’Neill’s students maintain a certified wildlife habitat garden that doubles as an outdoor classroom for studying monarch butterflies. O’Neill also established a school “green team” to coordinate a recycling program that has collected enough paper to preserve more than 200 17-foot trees and plastic to save 13,000 gallons of oil.

Abi Vanderlek installed a new floor in the Ashland Butterfly House to provide improved access to visitors in wheelchairs, as well as those with baby strollers. She conducted this volunteer project as the final phase of her Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest achievement in Girl Scouting. Vanderlek also made other improvements to the Butterfly House and created educational materials about butterflies. She received donated materials from local businesses.

The Conservation Award recognizes those who help protect natural resources and biodiversity. Over the past year, the Delaware Nature Society worked with the Isaacs-Greene family to complete the donation of their property. The Isaacs sisters, Kay, Sue, and Beth, along with Kay’s husband, Jim Greene, donated 60 acres of marsh, swamp forest, and upland woods along the Johnson’s Branch, a tributary to Abbott’s Pond in Milford. The marsh and swamp habitat are unique among the sites in the Milford Millponds Nature Preserve and offers new opportunities for education programs and research projects.

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Delaware Nature Society Honors Eight at Annual Meeting, p. 2

Matt Chesser is the environmental program administrator for the planning, preservation and development section of Delaware State Parks. During Chesser's tenure as section administrator, State Parks completed important projects at Blue Ball properties, Indian River Marina and Fox Point and constructed nature centers at Killens Pond and Trap Pond.

Chesser also is a key member of a multi-organization team that is working to preserve 260 acres at the NVF property in Yorklyn. Critical natural areas including Delaware's Red Clay Creek Natural Area and Kennett Township's State Line Woods have been preserved for future generations as a result of this collaboration. When this project is complete, it will include new flood retention areas in the form of created wetlands, highlight historic structures, address lingering contamination on-site and create a public recreation destination.

The town of Townsend received a Conservation Award for becoming the first community in Delaware to be certified as a community wildlife habitat and the 40th in the United States. During the three-year certification process, Delaware Nature Society staff helped to educate residents about sustainable gardening practices. Twenty-four residential backyard habitats were created and certified, as well as the municipal park and Town Hall, the Early Childhood Center and Townsend Elementary School. In addition, a stream clean-up and two gardening workshops were held to educate residents on environmentally friendly outdoor practices.

Darwin Palmer was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for his lifelong dedication to educating children and adults about the wonders of the natural world. Palmer has been a strong supporter of Delaware Nature Society as a volunteer, member, donor and trip leader for nearly 30 years. He was instrumental in the cultivation of DNS's guide corps and teaching staff. His excellent teaching skills and extensive knowledge of natural history has been a perfect combination to train and mentor members of the teaching guide corps and staff.

For more information about the Delaware Nature Society go to [HYPERLINK "http://www.delawarenaturesociety.org"](http://www.delawarenaturesociety.org) www.delawarenaturesociety.org or call 302-239-2334.

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