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Smelter Opponents Win N.C. Coastal Federation Pelican Award

OCEAN – A grassroots organization that rose out of nowhere in 2011 to fight off a proposed smelting plant in Morehead City won a Pelican Award for its environmental advocacy from the N.C. Coastal Federation.

The Clean County Coalition was among the five recipients along the central coast to win 2012 Pelican Awards.

Sixteen individuals, groups and agencies across North Carolina won awards this year. The annual Pelican Awards recognize exemplary action to protect and preserve the coastal environment. The winners will receive the awards Saturday at a luncheon at the N.C. History Center in New Bern. The federation will use the occasion to also celebrate its 30th anniversary.

“These awards are our way of recognizing extraordinary commitment to protecting and preserving our coast,” said Todd Miller, the federation’s founder and executive director. “We should never underestimate the power that many people bring to the effort of assuring that our coast remains a healthy and vibrant place. We can’t thank them enough.”

This year, in honor of its 30th birthday, the federation is giving a special award to Fred and Alice Stanback of Salisbury. Donations from the Stanbacks and their family members have had a huge effect throughout state in protecting the environment and in building the capacity of dozens of conservation groups, including the federation, Miller noted.

“In fact, over the years they have become the single most influential force in building the capacity of citizens to watch out for environmental quality in North Carolina,” he said. “Their financial support exceeds any other form of environmental philanthropic giving.”

The plans for a sulfur smelter at the state port in Morehead City had been shrouded in secrecy when the first reports dribbled out in the spring of 2011. The project had received most of its needed state permits when Leigh Johnson, Renee Coles, John Nelson and Neil Littman called some people together at the old train depot in Morehead City. Seated around the table were people representing downtown businesses, the Realtors Association, the local tourism agency and environmental groups.

They formed the Clean County Coalition, which for the next two months rallied people against the smelter. Hundreds of people attended town board meetings. Thousands packed two public informational meetings that the coalition sponsored. Its members organized petition drives and public rallies and marched at the port gate.

It all came to a stunning conclusion when Gov. Beverly Perdue held a press conference in Morehead City to announce that the smelter plans were being scrapped. Though that issue faded, the coalition did not. It intends to remain involved in important local issues.

“Most of these types of fights don’t end in such a clear-cut victory,” Miller said. “That this one did is a testament to the coalition’s broad public support and its tireless dedication.”

Other Central Coast Pelican Award Winners

- **Development Award: East Carolina Community Development Inc., Beaufort.** The nonprofit group in Carteret County is dedicated to building quality affordable housing. It recently turned a green vision into a green reality with the development of Glenstal Apartments in Jacksonville. The 56-unit apartment complex is the first affordable-housing development in Eastern North Carolina that promotes energy efficiency and incorporates enhanced stormwater management. The complex uses beautifully landscaped swales and artificial wetlands to control runoff, the largest source of pollution on the coast. Cisterns also collect rainwater that residents use to water community gardens. All of the buildings are certified Energy Star construction.
- **Restoration Award: N.C. History Center at Tyron Palace, New Bern.** It is hard to believe that one of the greenest public buildings in North Carolina was once the site of a polluted shipyard that contained asbestos, PCBs and other toxic chemicals that were contaminating the Neuse River basin. The site of the 60,000 square-foot museum includes permeable surface parking areas, rain gardens and restored and artificial wetlands to filter stormwater. A 35,000-gallon cistern underneath the center’s courtyard catches runoff from the roof. The water is used to irrigate the grounds. The building itself was built with recycled materials.
- **Volunteer Award: the Roberson’s.** The Roberson family lives on the White Oak River, directly across from Jones Island, the federation’s main restoration and education site in the central region. They can see the island from their porch while having coffee and often kayak over just to check things out. Paula and Walt and their sons, Ryan and Marcus, have volunteered their time not only as island stewards, but have moved oyster shell bags, planted marsh grass and monitored plants and animals on the island. Paula and Ryan, specifically, have spent over 150 hours in the past three years working with central region staff on and off the island.
- **Business Award: Second Wind Eco Tours & Yoga Studio, Swansboro.** On the heels of a successful career in sales management, April Clark opened Second Wind in early 2010. As one might imagine, the name of the business reflects her dream of getting and giving a respite from one’s hectic daily lives. But April gives much more. Her sense of adventure and passion for the environment are evident in every aspect of her business from her website that encourages environmental concern to her personal commitment to volunteer. She serves as an engaged member of the federation’s Central Advisory Committee, represents the federation at festivals and workshops and rolls up her sleeves to bag oyster shells or do whatever tasks might be

needed. She began the popular kayak and yoga trips to Jones Island in the White Oak River, offering the chance for participants to experience and learn about the federation's education and restoration center, while adding funds and new members for the federation.