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Onslow Woman Wins Lifetime Achievement Award

An Onslow County woman who saved an island in Stump Sound and preserved a historic boat landing received A Lifetime Achievement Award from the N.C. Coastal Federation.

Lena Ritter of Tar Landing is one of four recipients of 2013 Pelican Awards along the central N.C. coast. The others are Dana Edgren, a teacher in Carteret County; J. Barber Enterprises, contractors in Swansboro and Raleigh; and Geodynamics, an engineering firm in Morehead City.

Thirteen people, groups and businesses 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 Duke Marine Lab near Beaufort.

“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.”

Ritter, a native of Onslow County and a third-generation fisher, in 1982 began organizing local fishers and families against a marina and condo project on 50-acre Permuda Island in Stump Sound because she feared the resulting stormwater would ruin clam and oyster beds. The fight took five years, but the island was preserved and is now part of the state’s coastal reserve system. Even more importantly, Ritter’s work led to the adoption of more effective coastal

management rules to prevent polluted runoff and inappropriately sited marinas in all 20 coastal counties. She also focused statewide and national media attention on the need to protect and restore our coastal resources to maintain traditional coastal communities.

For her efforts, Ritter in 1987 received the first Nancy Susan Reynolds Award for extraordinary leadership at the grassroots level from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation.

Ritter, a former federation board president, later worked to protect public access at Morris Landing, a boat landing that had been used by local people for generations. She worked with the state and the federation, which eventually bought and preserved the 52-acres that now provide a waterfront park for nearby Holly Ridge and a site to stock oyster shells and load barges for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' restoration programs.

Edgren, a third-grade teacher at White Oak Elementary School in Cape Carteret, knows that hands-on activities and partnerships benefit students of all ages. The federation has been working Edgren since 2007 to integrate school rain gardens into her teaching curriculum. Last year a working greenhouse was built on school property. Edgren worked to get solar panels for the greenhouse, rallied other teachers to install composters and rain barrels and engaged students in growing native plants in the greenhouse for the rain gardens. The students also led school-wide tours of the rain garden, created nametags for the plants and customized the greenhouse with flowers, work tables and signs.

Jason and Wayne Barber from J. Barber Enterprises have donated their time and resources to help the federation to complete various stormwater retrofit projects in Carteret and Onslow counties. This father and son team has built six rain gardens at Queens Creek and Swansboro Elementary Schools, Tiller School and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum; two bio-retention areas at the Croatan National Forest Recreation Area at Cedar Point and at Dudley's Marina; and a stormwater wetland at Western Park.

Chris and Sloan Freeman of Geodynamics designed the company's new offices in Morehead City with the environment as a priority. Elements included green building features like geothermal heating and cooling, extra insulation for energy efficiency, energy efficient light

fixtures, plumbing for rainwater toilet flushing, low-impact development of parking areas and low-VOC paint and flooring materials. With the opening of Geodynamics in 2012 they are providing a model for green practices and LID.