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Titan Opponent, Two Others Win Regional Pelican Awards

A longtime opponent of a proposed cement plant near Wilmington joins two other residents or groups along the southeast N.C. coast in winning 2013 Pelican Awards from the N.C. Coastal Federation.

Cliff Cash has been fighting the Titan America proposal since the day it was announced more than five years ago and he helped launch a grassroots organization, Stop Titan, to fight the plan.

Joining Cash as regional winners are Sandie Cecelski, a high-school teacher in New Hanover County, and the Winding River Property Owners Association.

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.”

Fighting a corporate giant is no laughing matter but sometimes a good laugh is just what you need. Cash is a stand-up comic by night, but by day he owns a recycling company called Green Coast Recycling. His small but efficient company keeps 100 tons of recyclable waste out of the New Hanover County landfill each year. Over the years, Cliff has used his local “green business” to support the fight against Titan. He has offered cost breaks on ads on his company’s recycling truck and hosted several fundraisers. Last year Cliff put together a scrap metal drive with all the money going to Stop Titan’s statewide essay contest.

When you walk into Cecelski’s classroom at E.H. Ashley High School, you are amazed by the aquariums full of creatures, field boots and gear, a clear sign that this isn’t your ordinary classroom. A teacher for 25 years, Cecelski stresses the importance of linking classroom learning with getting students out in the marshes, creeks and ocean where they can use their knowledge. She has worked with the federation to engage students in oyster and salt marsh habitat restoration and water-quality projects.

Working with other teachers and New Hanover County Schools, Cecelski developed and launched a stormwater education program that connects students to the health of their local waterways by engaging them in projects to reroute downspouts on houses to direct stormwater away from creeks. Cecelski is also working with the county to launch a new Marine Science Academy. Students will take college-level marine science coursework, hold internships, participate in a research cruise and complete a graduation project.

Cecelski describes her motivation best by saying, “My goal is to develop highly trained individuals to fill my mud waders.”

Many people retire to our coast to kick back, relax and enjoy the beautiful environment. Others retire here and work diligently to keep our coast healthy. That’s just what members of the Winding River Association in Brunswick County are doing. They recently adopted a set of landscaping guidelines that promote native plants, rain gardens and rain barrels within their community.

Winding River residents Rich Peruggi and Pam Duncan spearheaded the creation of the environmentally friendly guidelines. Duncan said she got the idea from working with the federation after volunteering to build a rain garden at the Government Center in Bolivia. She later was among the volunteers who worked with Peruggi, a federation board member, and federation staff to create two demonstration rain gardens within Winding River.

Duncan then joined the Architectural Review Board of Winding River and volunteered to help update their design guidelines. Pam notes how it was “timely to highlight the low-impact development (LID) ideas and actively engage our builders and homeowners in protecting our coastal environment.”

“The guidelines are great and we are using them as a model for other coastal developments,” says Lauren Kolodij, the federation’s deputy director who heads up the organization’s LID efforts.