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A Lifetime of Conservation

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Brother Don Geiger, S.M., received the 2011 Partner of the Year Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Greater Dayton Conservation Fund of the Dayton Foundation and the Greater Dayton partners for the Environment at a ceremony Nov. 9, at the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery in Dayton.

Geiger is the founder of the Marianist Environmental Education Center, a co-founder of the Rivers Institute and biology department professor emeritus.

The Partner of the Year Awards recognize people and organizations who demonstrate leadership and inspire the community through their work for the protection, preservation and restoration of the region's environmental and agricultural resources. Other 2011 winner include Dane Mutter for Lifetime Achievement, Aaron Rourke for Individual of the Year, and Hamilton Soil and Water Conservation District for Partner of the Year.

Geiger said he was "surprised, but pleased" to receive the award.

"I think these awards are good because there's a great need for people working in the environment, and the people who get these awards have been at it for some time," Geiger said. "We need to recognize that."

Geiger is known for his involvement in initiatives promoting the development of a shared community vision for conservation and education. He founded MEEC in 1996 at Mount St. John in Beavercreek, Ohio, where he spearheaded community efforts to plant a prairie on land excavated to build Interstate 675.

In October, in recognition of the 25th anniversary of Geiger's leadership in ecological restoration, the prairie was dedicated as the Brother Don Geiger Prairie at Mount St. John.

He has worked with the Beavercreek wetlands and numerous other community-minded pursuits, said Don Pair, geology professor and associate dean for integrated learning and curriculum.

"Bro. Don Geiger is the founder of ecology-minded organizations both in the community and on campus," Pair said. "He influences faculty, students and staff with his enthusiasm and incredible dedication to issues of our environment."

Rivers Institute coordinator Leslie King nominated Geiger. She said he has been involved with the Rivers Institute since its inception, helping to lead the initial kayak trips down the Great Miami River. He later served as a resource for students as they developed the concept and vision for the Rivers Institute as a collaborative conservation effort.

"That Marianist background provided him with so many skills and talents to work with a group to create that widely shared vision, which is necessary for these types of initiatives," she said. "You need the community involvement, whether its students, citizens, faculty or staff. You need those people to feel empowered and engaged, and he has that ability of bringing people in and engaging them."

Geiger retired from the biology department faculty in 2008, but he continues to engage students through leadership and conservation-based curriculum development with his role in the River Leadership Curriculum, King said. The curriculum was developed as a potential Common Academic Program course and funded through the McGregor Fund. This is the second year for the two-semester course.

"The idea is to work with students to develop a sense of the importance of the river and natural areas [in Dayton], and to enable these students to take up a leadership role in the community," Geiger said.
Geiger also has been teaching classes at the University's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute for 12 years.

In addition to the 2011 Partner of the Year Award, Geiger has been honored with the University's Outstanding Faculty and Distinguished Alumni Awards, the College of Arts and Sciences' Outstanding Scholarship Award and the Sigma Xi Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Greater Dayton Conservation Fund, established in 2007, is a permanent endowment supporting preservation of environmental assets in the Greater Dayton Region. The fund awards grants to organizations that "help protect the region's natural environment through education, acquisition, restoration and scientific research; encourage collaborations and regional land conservation; and leverage cooperation and support of various efforts of like-minded organizations," according to the Dayton Foundation website.

The Rivers Institute project was the first such program to be awarded a grant from the fund's steering committee.

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