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An Environmental Pioneer

05.06.2008 | Energy and Environment, Faculty, Science A University of Dayton biology professor who has been a pioneer in environmental preservation and especially dedicated to keeping the Miami Valley green will retire from teaching this month.

Brother Don Geiger, S.M., is a modest man whose career as an educator and preservationist spans 53 years. He will retire May 15 at the age of 75, but he will continue his efforts to preserve the environment of the Miami Valley.

"Without his efforts, our land management would not be where it is today," said Cris Barnett, chief naturalist for Greene County. "He has taken us leaps and bounds into the future to where we need to be."

Geiger founded the Marianist Environmental Education Center 16 years ago at Mount St. John in Beavercreek, Ohio, where he lives and will continue to serve. MEEC teaches students and visitors how to act in communion with the land and achieve sustainability through ecology-based simple living, social justice and spirituality.

He will continue to be active as a mentor for students and faculty in the UD Rivers Institute, a Fitz Center for Leadership in Community initiative. Geiger helped create the Institute, which partners with local community organizations and leaders to draw people to the Great Miami River and use it responsibly as an economic, recreational, communal and educational resource.

He is a member of the Beavercreek Wetlands Association since 1989 and served several terms as member of its advisory board. He will continue to supervise volunteers from the Wetlands Association on Saturday mornings, working to restore natural areas of Greene County Park's Creekside Reserve. He served on the advisory board of the Ohio Prairie Association and works for the Greene County Parks District writing management plans for 21 Park Reserves.

"Care for the environment is not his job, it's his life," Barnett said. "This is what he believes in and how he lives his life."

Park districts in three southwest Ohio counties use methods of land restoration Geiger developed. He pioneered control methods of invasive plants such as honeysuckle, and he has led thousands on nature experiences.

"From the beginning I have wanted my scientific research to make a difference and to have a practical application," Geiger said.

A Dayton native, Geiger began his career at UD in 1964 as a biology professor focused on crop protection, food production and plant physiology in agriculture.

His laboratory conducted leading edge research on the movement of water and organic nutrients in plants. In the early 1980s he began research that contributed to the improved effectiveness of the herbicide Roundup, which is used extensively controlling invasive plants in restoration of natural areas. The weed killer is sprayed on leaves and is carried throughout a plant's system to be effective.

In 1985 he shifted his focus beyond basic plant physiology research to include research related to environmental conservation, an issue he's encouraged to see receiving increased attention.

"I have almost no doubt that there are enough people beginning to understand the importance of this issue that we'll get things under control," he said. "The real challenge is to take the situation at hand, use the gifts you have and find the best way you can make a difference."

And although he helped create UD's Ph.D. program in biology, helped guide more than 30 students to graduate degrees and has had his work cited extensively by his peers, Geiger says the most fulfilling aspect of his career has been watching his students make discoveries of their own.

"My greatest legacy is knowing I've helped somebody find their way in something worthwhile for them," he said.

Geiger has been honored with UD's Outstanding Faculty and Distinguished Alumni Awards, the College of Arts and Sciences' Outstanding Scholarship Award and the Sigma Xi Lifetime Achievement Award.

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