



Loudoun County Public Schools Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 20, 2024

ASHBURN, Va. - Mark Pankau, a retired LCPS teacher, was named the 2024 Page Hutchinson Environmental Educator of the Year by the Virginia Association for Environmental Education (VAEE). The award, announced during the annual VAEE Conference in February, recognizes exceptional contributions made by an individual to their community in environmental education.

Pankau, who was a physical education teacher at Guilford Elementary School and who retired in 2019, first became involved as an environmental educator in 2007 when he offered an after-school environment club at Guilford. Pankau says his interest in the environment can be traced back to his grandparents, who were farmers and therefore very dependent on a healthy environment to support their work. "I like to say I have the farming gene," said Pankau.

Through the environment club, Pankau helped jumpstart Guilford's recycling efforts, encouraging all Guilford students to participate in recycling with classes receiving a recycling report card to grade their efforts. Pankau and the environmental club also cleaned up the school's courtyard, adding a pollinator garden and additional planting beds for each class. Pankau ran fundraisers and applied for grants to purchase plants and materials to transform the courtyard into an outdoor classroom.

This project led Pankau to learn about environmental initiatives at other LCPS schools. He started the Northwest Virginia Regional GREENetwork newsletter — or the Great Environmental Educators Network — to inform LCPS educators and other interested groups about environmental opportunities, webinars, grants and scholarships. Pankau says the newsletter, the distribution of which he recently scaled back from five times a week to three times a week, is nothing fancy, a collection of links to environmental education opportunities, news and graphics for additional inspiration.

Pankau also became involved with the Loudoun Environmental Education Alliance (LEEA) and, in 2022, became the LEEA Board Chair. LEEA and Pankau's Northwest Virginia Regional

GREENetwork co-host the Loudoun Student Environmental Action Showcase. Pankau connects with educators and encourages them and their students to participate in the showcase to receive recognition for their environmental education projects. The fifth annual [Loudoun Student Environmental Action Showcase](#) will be held on April 24 at the Academies of Loudoun.

Pankau sums up his efforts by saying it's all about networking. "It's finding out who's out there, learning about what they're doing and sharing what you're doing. When I sign off my emails, I write 'sowing seeds.' I feel a little bit like Johnny Appleseed, but instead of planting trees, I'm planting ideas."

Clark Seipt, who was hired as the new LCPS Director of Sustainability in December, notes, "This is a well-deserved honor. Mark has worked tirelessly to promote student learning and educator support for environmental education in Loudoun. As LCPS prioritizes an expanded emphasis on sustainability division-wide, effectively mobilizing K-12 environmental literacy will be key – so will a partnership with Mark, LEEA and many other community organizations."

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