

Mary Schon, Ph.D.

Bachelor of Arts in Biology, 1976, Mount Marty College, Yankton, SD

Master of Arts in Biology, 1981, University of South Dakota-Vermillion

Doctor of Philosophy in Agronomy/Plant Physiology, 1989, University of Missouri-Columbia

Plant Scientist, The Land at Epcot[®], 1989-1999
Manager of Science Communications at Epcot[®], 1999-2006
WALT DISNEY WORLD[®] Resort, Lake Buena Vista, Florida

Senior Scientist for New Initiatives, 2007-present
The Krell Institute, Inc., Ames, IA

While Mary Schon was pursuing her doctoral degree in agronomy/plant physiology at the University of Missouri-Columbia on a USDA National Needs Fellowship (1985-1989), she never dreamed that achieving that goal would land her a position at the vacation destination of the world. But she's glad it did! Mary spent 17 years bringing agricultural science to life at *Epcot*[®], *Walt Disney World*[®]. Her initial roles were Plant Nutritionist and then Plant Science Coordinator for *The Land* greenhouses, a well-known attraction that demonstrates global food production to the millions who visit each year. Mary conducted plant research and led the plant science team during this time. Schon then became passionate about science communication efforts at *Epcot*[®] through her involvement in programs such as *Gardening for Food around the World (GFFAW)*, sponsored by the World Bank. In 1999, Mary was named the first Manager of Science Communications at *Epcot*[®]. Her experience there taught her how little the American public understands about agriculture and the science behind it, but how eager many are to learn when it is made understandable and relevant to them.

Each year from 1996 to 2003, Schon recruited a team of nine agricultural scientists from Future Harvest (CGIAR) Centers around the globe to be part of the GFFAW. She then trained them to communicate effectively with the family audience at *Epcot*[®]. Mary prepared scientists to share stories of the challenges of global agriculture and to highlight the critical role that their research played in tackling these problems so that we can feed the world and sustain our environment. Guests of all ages were intrigued by the research occurring around the globe once they understood its importance and saw its relevance to their lives. *Gardening for Food around the World*, part of the *Epcot*[®] International Flower and Garden Festival, impacted hundreds of thousands of guests each spring during the six-week festival.

Mary also trained agriculture college interns and other *Epcot*[®] cast members to communicate science effectively to thousands of *Epcot*[®] guests each day. She used *Epcot*[®] venues such as *The Living with the Land* boat ride and walking tour through *The Land* greenhouses (1989-2006), American Society of Plant Physiologists' *Plants for the 21st Century* show (1998), Monsanto's *Look Closer* plant biotechnology exhibit (1999-2003), and American Farm Bureau Foundation's *Great American Farms* experience (2003-2006) to make guests more aware of the many ways agriculture impacts their daily lives. Schon partnered with Disney's creative and operational teams to develop and implement these and other experiences, and worked closely

with the *Epcot*® Business Development Team to attract corporate and organizational sponsors interested in developing science-related shows at *Epcot*®.

Mary joined the Krell Institute (www.krellinst.org) team in 2007 to broaden the scope of their business in the Midwest, especially in the areas of agriculture, energy, and the environment. Now back in her home state of Iowa, she hopes to continue to use her passions for agriculture and education and her communication and development skills to increase the public's awareness of the value of agriculture in their lives, to inspire youth to explore science careers, and to train science students and scientists to effectively communicate the value and excitement of the science they are involved in. Krell has over a decade of experience in the fields of workforce development, science communication, and science education, so Mary is well-positioned to use her skills and experience.

Earthpark, a proposed environmental learning center in Iowa, was Schon's first client at Krell Institute. As Senior Advisor for Science and Education, she was part of their development team from March through December, 2007. Schon organized and led a team of K-16 educators that established the goals for and initiated planning of the Earthpark education programs. This project is now on hold due to loss of federal funding. Mary is currently working on developing partnerships that will bring the benefits of a successful energy efficiency program to Iowa schools. She is also actively pursuing roles within the agriculture community, and is seeking organizations and/or corporations interested in conveying their science success stories to the public, policy makers, or other lay target audiences.

Schon grew up on a farm near Carroll, Iowa, the oldest daughter with nine siblings, and the first in her extended family to graduate from college. After earning her bachelors degree she taught high school biology, acted as governess for the Tom Brokaw family in NYC, and worked as a lab technician in the Iowa State University Agronomy Department before pursuing her masters. Mary was biology lab instructor and then served as registrar at Mount Marty College before completing her Ph.D. at the University of Missouri-Columbia (UMC) on a USDA National Needs Fellowship (NNF).

Schon credits the USDA for her career. The NNF allowed her to leave a low-paying non-science position to return to graduate school and start a science-based career that has provided her with amazing opportunities to learn and to impact others. She credits UMC with giving her the interdisciplinary training that allowed her to succeed in a very unique and rewarding position at *Epcot*®. Schon also values the balanced emphasis her Ph.D. Advisor, Dr. Dale Blevins, put on research, teaching, and communication. That has made it natural for her to transition from research into communication and outreach roles.

Mary has been an invited speaker for audiences including the National Science Board, NASA Education Team, American Farm Bureau Federation, and thousands of students. She has always been active as a volunteer in the community, and was the Communication Chairperson for the *Epcot*® VoluntEAR Action Team from 2003-2006 and the Team Leader from 2005-2006. Since returning to Iowa, she is Survivor Chairperson for the Carroll County American Cancer Society Relay for Life and is active on their planning team. She is an active member of St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Carroll.