



Project Learning Tree
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Press Release

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Five Educators Named Project Learning Tree® **2007 Outstanding Educators of the Year**

Washington, D.C. – Project Learning Tree® (PLT), the environmental education program of the American Forest Foundation, is proud to announce the 2007 National Outstanding Educators of the Year. Jim Chandler of Auburn, ME; Melanie Cornelius of Frisco, TX ; Michelle Hunter of Crawfordville, FL; Gail Lutowski of Guyton, GA; and Hazel Scharosch of Casper, WY, will be honored at PLT's 21st International Coordinators' Conference, May 7-11, in Wichita, KS.

PLT has been recognizing outstanding educators since 1994 for their commitment to environmental education, their exemplary use of PLT, and their exceptional teaching skills. They represent both formal and non-formal educators; they work in rural and urban communities; they teach all ages of learners.

Jim Chandler is Consulting Teacher in Science and Director of Auburn Land Lab at the Auburn School Department in Auburn, Maine. Chandler has been involved in environmental education for 30 years and a PLT facilitator since 1988. Over the years, he has been an innovator of a wide range of ongoing formal and non-formal educational programs that use PLT materials to increase students' understanding of the forest environment and resource conservation. In his current job with the Auburn School Department, he administers the K-8 science curriculum and arranges professional development for 11 schools. PLT is incorporated throughout the curriculum and most of the teachers have been trained in PLT. He is also Director of the Auburn Land Lab, an environmental center serving several schools in central Maine that uses the environment as a context for learning for more than 3,500 visiting K-12 students each year.

Melanie Cornelius is Elementary Science Instruction Specialist at Frisco Independent School District in Frisco, Texas, a booming suburb north of Dallas with more than 20 elementary schools and approximately 8,000 elementary-aged students speaking 35 different languages. Cornelius oversees her Texas school district's elementary science curriculum, teaching resources, and professional development. Cornelius was instrumental in making PLT activities a requirement for specific units in grades two, four, and five, and she holds PLT professional development workshops several times a year for those grade level teachers with science responsibilities. For the past three years, Melanie has acquired U.S. Department of Education grants to implement these trainings, including advanced training in differentiated instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs).

Michelle Hunter is a 4th grade teacher at Shadeville Elementary School in Crawfordville, Florida. The school has been certified as a Florida PLT School since 2000 and Hunter has been the school's PLT coordinator for the past three years. For the school to maintain its designation as a PLT School at least 80% of the faculty is required to attend a PLT workshop and of this 80%, at least 50% are required to participate in an annual PLT week. Hunter organizes this school-wide week-long environmental education unit that incorporates multiple grade-level appropriate PLT activities for each student, a science and literary fair, and community guest speaker presentations around a particular theme, for example "Friends of the Forest." Over 650 youth, 50 faculty members, and hundreds of parent volunteers participate. Hunter leads PLT professional development workshops to help her fellow colleagues incorporate the PLT curriculum methods and techniques into their own classrooms throughout the year.

Gail Lutowski is Education Program Specialist at the University of Georgia's Mary Kahrs Warnell Forest Education Center in Guyton, Georgia. Lutowski uses PLT activities and learning methods as a foundation for the many outdoor natural resource education programs she develops and she leads K-12 field trips around the Center's 3,300-acre working forest. Her programs have reached over 20,000 students and teachers since the Center opened in 2001. Lutowski was trained in PLT in 1997 and became a PLT facilitator in 2001. She conducts numerous PLT training workshops for local school teachers, preservice teachers, area foresters, and other natural resource professionals. As a Regional Coordinator for the Georgia PLT program, she serves as a team leader for all PLT facilitators in her 15-county district, sets workshop goals, and serves as a mentor for facilitators.

Hazel Scharosch is a K-6th grade teacher at Red Creek School, a one-room school house in Casper, Wyoming. She has been teaching in this rural ranching community school house for 17 years and has on average 9-12 students of all ages in any given year. Scharosch uses the PLT curriculum extensively in her teaching because it helps her accomplish educational goals across the domains. Scharosch was introduced to PLT 15 years ago at a 4-day environmental education workshop hosted in part by two of the original developers of the PLT curriculum. The workshop forever changed her methods of teaching and served to deepen her commitment to expanding environmental literacy for all. Ever since, she has conducted numerous PLT workshops for both classroom teachers and non-formal educators, including Girl Scout leaders, child care providers, and 4-H club members.

“These five educators are committed to improving students’ understanding of the environment, their place within it, and their responsibility for it,” said Kathy McGlaufflin, Director of Project Learning Tree and Senior Vice President of Education at the American Forest Foundation. “They truly deserve to be recognized for their contributions to Project Learning Tree and the field of environmental education in general.”

Project Learning Tree[®] (PLT) (www.plt.org) is the national environmental education program of the American Forest Foundation. Developed in 1976, PLT has an international network of more than 500,000 trained educators using seven curricula covering the total environment. The American Forest Foundation, a nonprofit organization, works for healthy forests, quality environmental education, and informed decision-making about our communities and our world.