

Tahoe USFS worker makes national impression



Joy Barney introduces Generation Green crew members to the importance of data collection in this continued restoration watershed assessment project. Photo/Provided

By John C. Heil III

Joy Barney has dedicated her life to connecting youth to the land. In the process she has touched many lives.

The Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's conservation education program specialist since 2007, Barney received regional and national recognition this fall with the Gifford Pinchot Pacific Southwest Region and the National Interpreter and Conservation Educator of the Year award. Named in honor of the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, the annual award is a national honor given to employees for achievement in environmental interpretation and conservation education.

“The reason this is such a big accomplishment for Joy, is that she doesn’t even have interpretive services in her job description – she is a conservation education specialist,” said Timothy Williams, regional coordinator for the Interpretive Services Program. “When she delivers with the conservation education program, she excels at telling the story and interpreting why it is so important to connect youth with nature.”

Barney, 52, always had a keen interest in wildlife or being in nature from camping trips in the summer growing up. The San Jose native said that was where she felt the most whole. After receiving a bachelor’s of science degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Biology from UC Davis in 1985, Barney started her career with the Forest Service shortly thereafter as a forestry technician in silviculture. Even though she wasn’t technically in a conservation education position, she started programs such as the Little Children’s Forest in Groveland and Earth Day events on the Stanislaus National Forest.

She picked up her love of interpretation on the Pinecrest Ranger District with wildflower walks, guided hikes and leading campfire programs.

“She is very deserving of this award and I am thrilled to get to work with her on a regular basis,” said Beth Quandt, science outreach coordinator for the Lake Tahoe Unified School District. “She has been instrumental in bringing so many wonderful programs to the students of the Lake Tahoe Unified School District.”

At the LTBMU, Barney created a partnership group called South Tahoe Environmental Education Coalition . Under her leadership, these groups work together to provide high-quality, standards-based education programs for 2,500 children annually. Other programs she manages include Ski with a Ranger, Winter Trek and Kokanee Salmon Education, serving more than 2,000 other forest visitors.

In addition, Barney started a successful high school program – Generation Green of Lake Tahoe, providing volunteer and employment opportunities for diverse youth in the Lake Tahoe area. Due to the success of these programs, she expanded to the Eldorado National Forest.

“Joy’s tireless energy, enthusiasm and creativity contribute greatly to the success of the conservation education program,” said LTBMU Forest Supervisor Jeff Marsolais. “She excels in creating partnerships that foster meaningful connections for students and has done a tremendous job developing engaging science programs that build opportunities for future employment.”

In the process of all her work on the LTBMU, Barney has inspired others to do similar work.

“Joy has led me to my current passion and pursuit of my profession in conservation education,” said Megan Dee, conservation education assistant for the LTBMU. “I would never have continued in the Forest Service without her extraordinary leadership and mentorship, which is also the case for many of the students she has worked with.

“She is an inspiration to all who work with her –partners, educators, students, parents, employees, and more. Joy and I both have consistently reminded successful Generation Green students that we aren’t losing the students, but the world is gaining them. This is based on our high school model Generation Green post graduation and post-youth summer internship. It is not just a summer job to the students; it can be life transformational, and it is Joy who leads them to learning how to achieve, thus creating future land stewards and advantageous citizens of society.”

One of Barney’s mentors – Jim Oftedal, the regional outreach and recruitment and workforce diversity program manager recalls Joy providing one of her students a

bicycle to get to and from work. "She took a big sister approach," said Oftedal, who helped Barney start Generation Green on the LTBMU. "That student she helped is now a permanent employee with the Forest Service.

"Joy is a giver. The Generation Green program is more than a typical 40-hour work week. She really is a special woman. I can't say enough about her. She is a very humble person. She has a wonderful smile and I am happy for her. She deserves this award."

"If I was independently wealthy, I would still do this job," said Barney.

John C. Heil III works for the U.S. Forest Service.