

# UWSP receives six million dollar grant for environmental education

By **Andrea Wetzel**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

After receiving the largest competitive federal grant in UWSP's 106-year history, the College of Natural Resources (CNR) will be home for the first ever National Environmental Education Training Program.

Former Senator Gaylord Nelson, who is the founding father of Earth Day, joined Chancellor Thomas George, CNR Dean Victor Phillips as well as UWSP faculty, students and members of the community at a press conference Wednesday at the Schmeeckle Reserve Visitor Center where details of the award were discussed.

The award consists of a \$5 million federal grant and \$1 million from partner institutions across the United States. UWSP was selected to serve as the national hub for the program because of the CNR's longstanding commitment to environmental education.

Another main reason that UWSP was selected is because it is home for the National Environmental Education Advancement Project (NEEAP.) Members of NEEAP have already created partnerships across the nation and helped over 20 states strengthen their environmental education programs.

Professor of Environmental Education Richard Wilke, who has been honored as a distinguished professor by the UW-System was the lead author of the 104 page program's proposal and will oversee its implementation.

At the press conference, he addressed the need for a better standard for environmental education nationwide, and how the program will take steps to meet this standard.

"A recent Roper's-Starch survey indicated that 96 percent of the parents in the United States

Project WILD and Project WET.

"We really assembled a super bowl caliber team if you look at the partners that we have, and UWSP is the quarterback," said Wilke.

According to Wilke, the program will prepare over 50,000 educators to teach about the envi-



Photo by John Krejci

*The largest grant in UWSP history was presented by Gaylord Nelson, pictured here, at the Visitor Center in Schmeeckle Reserve.*

want environmental education taught to their children," said Wilke. "However, the nation's children are not getting the environmental education wanted by their parents."

To implement the National Environmental Education Training program, UWSP is joining with partners such as the North American Association for Environmental Education, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Northern Illinois and Ohio State Universities, the World Wildlife Fund and Project Learning Tree,

ronment in the next three years. He also highlighted some of the initiatives that the National Environmental Education Training Program will undertake.

The program will provide teacher education programs at colleges and universities across the country in traditional means as well as through Internet courses.

Abby Ruskey, co-director of NEEAP, will lead efforts to provide leadership training at the local, state and national levels to help environmental educators

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build stronger programs and services.

The National Environmental Education Training Program will provide a system that will enable experts to travel the nation.

To ensure that environmental education is quality, the program will provide guidelines for developing and choosing environmental education materials.

Wilke noted the important role that Congressman Dave Obey and his staff played in securing the funding for the federal grant and for promoting environmental education overall.

"Through the influence that Congressman Obey had in the national level, we are obtaining more money than we would have otherwise through this grant," said Wilke

This year the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was subject to budget cuts. Although they proposed cutting the budget for their Office of Environmental Education by 40 percent, Obey convinced the EPA to fully fund the Environmental Education Act of 1990 according to Wilke

Obey is the ranking minority member of the Appropriations Committee of the US House of Representatives. He was unable to attend the press conference because he is in Washington working on the federal budget.

"The overall goal of environmental education is to create a culture in which everybody involved is guided by an ethic of when we intrude on the environment we ask: What is the conse-

quence?" said Nelson.

Nelson spoke about the experiences he had when talking to children and how they reflected the evolution of environmental ethics. He spoke of one young girl who made her mother drive back to the grocery store to replace a can of tuna with a can that was labeled as dolphin safe.

Nelson served one term as Wisconsin's governor then served as a US Senator from 1963 through 1980. Throughout his career, he fought for the environment, creating the Environmental Education Act in 1970 and writing legislation that preserved areas such as the Appalachian Trail and the Apostle Islands.

"The environmental cause has been hanging by a thread for several years and only saved by the veto end of the President," said Nelson. "I am afraid that if we get an anti-environmental congress as we've had and a president who has no interest and doesn't understand this issue, that it will be disastrous for the environmental cause for several years to come."

CNR Dean Victor Phillips and UWSP Chancellor Thomas George also spoke at the press conference.

According to Wilke there it is very possible that the National Environmental Education Training Program may be extended from three to five years.