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DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-0435

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Hunt Named Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Award Winner for Environmental Work

NASHVILLE - Christine Hunt, whose lifelong work and passion as a horticulturalist and leader of river cleanup have made an impact on Tennessee, has been named winner of the 2021 Robert Sparks Walker Lifetime Achievement Award.

The award is part of the annual Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards administered by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC). The announcement was made at the annual awards luncheon today.

"Christine Hunt has had a remarkable career in appreciation and protection of our environment," TDEC Commissioner David Salyers said. "Her work at the Tennessee Aquarium and her decades-long devotion to the Tennessee River Rescue have made her not only a champion for our environment, but an inspiration to many others who have worked under her leadership. We are proud to honor Christine with our lifetime achievement award."

Hunt is the former horticulturalist at the Tennessee State Aquarium in Chattanooga, where she worked for 30 years. She worked alongside hundreds of horticulture volunteers, instilling in them an appreciation for the plants in living forests. But her passion for nature and her leadership in conservation has extended beyond the Tennessee Aquarium.

In 1988, she and a small group of volunteers began a grassroots effort known as Tennessee River Rescue. The group cleaned up the waterways in and around Chattanooga. The first year they cleaned the banks of the Tennessee River in two zones. Thirty years later, more than 800 volunteers collected 4,000 bags of trash in 20 zones across three counties at the annual rescue event.

The Tennessee River Rescue has developed the skills and experience of volunteers to grow the cleanups to more zones and more people. Some zones even utilize experienced divers to collect submerged trash. Other zones require boats to reach and collect trash. One facet has been challenging volunteers to find the most interesting piece of trash, and previous items have included sofas, shopping carts and even false teeth.

After years of the Tennessee River Rescue, Hunt successfully proposed a “pollution tank” to the Aquarium exhibits committee to bring awareness about pollution in Tennessee’s waterways. The tank is now a fan favorite at the Aquarium. The Tennessee River Rescue has partnered and assisted river cleanups in other parts of Tennessee and Alabama. Hunt has also had a long involvement in the study and appreciation of butterflies and has led international trips where Aquarium members visit butterfly farms.

Prior to working at the Tennessee Aquarium, Hunt was a native plant specialist at Reflection Riding Arboretum and Nature Center in Chattanooga. She earned a master’s degree in Environmental Science at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where she founded an Earth Day celebration in 1990.



L to R: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Commissioner David Salyers; Christine Hunt; Tennessee Governor Bill Lee

More information about the awards program is available [online at this link](#).