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2000-2001 International Visionary Award Goes to UNH Marine Docents

By [Steve Adams](#)
UNH Sea Grant

January 31, 2001

DURHAM, N.H. -- The University of New Hampshire Marine Docents, a group of 130 volunteer teachers, has received the Gulf of Maine Council's 2000-2001 Organizational Visionary Award. The council, an international group, seeks to promote cooperation to maintain and enhance the Gulf of Maine's environmental quality.

Awards are given annually to outstanding individuals and groups working within the gulf's watershed. The award was presented Jan. 24 by N.H. Gov. Jeanne Shaheen.

Supported by both UNH Cooperative Extension and N.H. Sea Grant, the docents work with schools, 4-H clubs and other youth groups and civic organizations, bringing presentations about the marine and coastal environments into schools and communities. They also conduct tours of UNH's Shoals Marine Laboratory and Jackson Estuarine Laboratory, and act as field guides and instructors at the Seacoast Science Center in Rye and the Sandy Point Discovery Center in Stratham.

"This is a wonderful honor for an excellent volunteer effort," says John Pike, UNH Cooperative Extension dean. "The marine docents have increased public awareness of the marine environment for the past 20 years."

More than 400 docents have been trained over the history of the program. The docents currently reach between 15,000 and 20,000 people per year. Their mission is to provide a lens through which the marine and associated environments can be viewed, understood and enjoyed sustainably by people of all ages.

"I'm really pleased that the whole program is being recognized for its volunteer efforts to educate and motivate youth, teachers and the public about the importance of the marine environment," says Sharon Meeker, an extension educator who coordinates the group's activities. "I'm grateful to Cooperative Extension, Sea Grant and the University of New Hampshire as a whole for their continued support."

The council also honored Linda Kukis Scherf, a teacher at St. Mary's Academy in Dover, with an Individual Visionary Award. She and her students participate in the Great Bay Coast Watch, Cooperative Extension/Sea Grant's volunteer water quality monitoring program, which is affiliated with the marine docents.

Scherf and her class also participate in beach cleanups and other such activities. She is a member of the Gulf of Maine Institute Without Walls, a youth stewardship program, and chair of the Cocheco River Watershed Coalition.

The Gulf of Maine Council consists of the N.H. Coastal Program, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, the Massachusetts Coastal Program, the New Brunswick Department of Environment and Local Government, the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labor, and federal partners such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Environment Canada, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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