Making a Difference

*Promoting and Improving Natural Resource Education Through Excellence in K-12 Teaching Awards and College Student Scholarships*

Article by **LESLIE WITTENBURG** and **BRIAN ROBERT**

Photos courtesy **CONSERVATION LEGACY**, except where noted

*Texas wildlife has a bright future. Many of our state's universities are training exceptional people to help ensure the land, water and wildlife resources are managed in ways that will allow them to continue to be some of Texas' greatest assets. Since 2004, San Antonio Livestock Exposition, Inc. (S.A.L.E.) has partnered with the Texas Wildlife Association Foundation (TWAF) to help fulfill the mission to expand and deploy new conservation education programs across the state of Texas.*

Through this partnership, S.A.L.E. and Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) Conservation Legacy programs have educated over 2.7 million Texans about our state's diverse, abundant wildlife and natural resources, and the importance of healthy land stewardship. Conservation Legacy programs include a wide range of educational programs including public events such as the San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo, classroom presentations, hands-on field investigation days, land management field days and webinars.

S.A.L.E. has generously funded the Natural Resource – Excellence in Teaching Award for over a decade to teachers who demonstrate use of innovative techniques and curricula in their schools to promote and improve agriculture and natural resource literacy among their students. Teachers receiving the awards also articulate the importance of conservation to the future of Texas and Texans to equip future decision-makers with critical thinking skills. Four teachers were awarded $2,000 each, and five teachers were awarded $1,200 each for the 2016-2017 school year.

The recipients are:
- Jack Reed – Killeen High School
- Tiffany Deschler – Westbrook Intermediate School
- Michaela McCowan – Vanguard College Preparatory School
- James Bendele – Central Catholic High School
- CG Guerrero – Stephen F. Austin High School
- Amalia Patterson – Shady Grove Elementary
- Sue Moore – Silsbee High School
- Laura Kusak – Moulton Elementary
- Medina Willis – Lanier High School.

Students from Vanguard College Preparatory School use their new Texas Stream Team equipment to conduct monthly water quality samples on Lake Waco.
In addition, TWAF and S.A.L.E. are also working to ensure the educational success of college students by awarding annual scholarships to deserving applicants. Students may major in any field, but selection is based upon their focus on natural resource management and must exemplify the TWA mission of “Serving Texas wildlife and its habitat, while protecting property rights, hunting heritage and the conservation efforts of those who value and steward wildlife resources.”

This year’s recipients are:

- Stetson Dierlam – Texas A&M University
- William Fair – Texas Tech University
- Colton Leopold – Texas A&M University
- Samantha Merrifield – McLennan Community College
- Elizabeth Schneider – Texas A&M University-Galveston

Together, TWAF and S.A.L.E. are improving opportunities and facilitating the continued education of those entering college as they develop the knowledge and skills they need as the next generation of agriculture and natural resource conservation-minded decision makers.

Thank you S.A.L.E. for this meaningful partnership to facilitate and grow agriculture and natural resource literacy within schools across Texas. These combined elements and efforts are creating tangible relationships for students between land and water while recognizing K-12 teachers and their desire to implement science-based lessons and outdoor experiences that are aligned but go above and beyond the essential academic skills.