

IN THE INTEREST OF PRESERVATION

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The Innovations in Environmental Education (IIEE) program was started in 2007 as a program of the El Dorado Community Foundation with the goal of supporting the teaching of environmental science in El Dorado's public schools. Since it may not be intuitively clear why a retired physician who spent his last 24 working years in the Bronx, NY, has an interest in this area of activity I will explain.

I was born in San Francisco and while I lived on the West Coast I went backpacking every year. It started when my children were small—about two and four as I recall—and we put them in carrying bags on a mule that I led in. Although I have lived most of my life on one ocean or the other, I never miss the sea when I'm away from it but I pined for the mountains every summer that I was unable to get into them. Although I enjoyed my years in NYC, I knew that I would come back west when I retired. When looking for a retirement area I got on-line and searched every town between Interstate 80 and highway 88 at about 4,000 feet elevation and I settled on Camino.

One day in a Placerville coffee shop I saw a poster advertising a talk at the American River Conservancy in a subject of interest and while there I learned about ARC's environmental education programs in which I decided to volunteer. Working in those programs brought me under the spell of Kathryn Hayes and Judy Johnson. I eventually joined the board of ARC and became board liaison to the Environmental Education unit and my interest continued to grow and, I would like to think, so did my knowledge of the field.

As an old Sierra hand I supported the Conservancy's land acquisitions—in fact I was in awe of what it had accomplished—but my heart was mostly in the educational programs.

For most of my working life I took care of inner city poor and developed programs for their care. I did this as an academic working first at UCSF where I had gone to school, and later at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx and retired as Professor and Chairman Emeritus of the Department of Family and Social Medicine. While academic salaries were considerably lower than a physician might earn in private practice the retirement benefits were exceedingly generous; hence the income to support my interest in environmental education.

The goal of IIEE is to support teachers of environmental education in two ways. One was to make small grants available with a minimum of paperwork. A call from a teacher who was trying to put together an appropriate education program but, for example, couldn't find the money for busses or substitute teachers would get a small grant with the stipulation that they do at least some rudimentary evaluation of it's effectiveness and send me a report. The other goal was to stimulate teachers to develop curricula that presented an innovative idea for student learning.

I believe that for an idea to flourish a supportive community of people with similar interests need be developed; thus the publication of Quail Call, our newsletter put together by ARC's environmental educators. Our other plans for "community-building" will be unrolling, also with the involvement of ARC.

The major obstacle to some of my hopes and plans has become the difficulty teachers have in freeing themselves for the development of new educational programs and for attending meetings intended to create a group in which interested teachers could find support and ideas.

Funding decisions for this program are made by a committee of environmental educators who review proposals and consider the likelihood of success, the cost/benefit potential and the degree which the proposed program may be an innovative.