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CONTACT: [Sande Snead](#) for VEE
(804) 536-7009

VEE Marks 40th Anniversary by Recognizing Partners in Excellence

RICHMOND, Va. – A year of special activities celebrating the Virginia Environmental Endowment's (VEE's) 40th anniversary culminates at the Virginia Historical Society on Oct. 5 with the recognition of VEE's Partners in Excellence in the morning followed by a Banner Lecture at noon on the history and legacy of the Kepone disaster that led to VEE's creation. The [lecture](#) is open to the public, but tickets are required and can be purchased at the Historical Society the day of the event. Some lectures sell out.

Over its 40-year history, VEE has partnered with nearly 500 nonprofit organizations, universities, government agencies, schools and communities. Of those, 22 were selected as Partners in Excellence honorees and awarded \$1,000 in recognition of their contributions to Virginia's environment. In addition, VEE made a \$10,000 grant to a documentary being developed by a nonprofit film organization on the late U.S. District Court Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr. as a special recognition for his role in establishing the Endowment.

In February 1977, Merhige approved creation of VEE with \$8 million as part of a settlement against Allied Chemical for polluting the James River with the toxic insecticide Kepone. This was the first time a federal court converted a pollution fine into a creative way to help the environment. Merhige was VEE's "founding father" and appointed its first Board of Directors and all subsequent board members until his passing in 2005.

Hampton Roads honorees are:

Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Since opening its Richmond office in the early 1980s at the invitation of VEE, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation now has offices in Richmond and Hampton Roads, an oyster restoration center in Gloucester, a world-class, energy efficient center in Virginia Beach and six outdoor environmental education programs across the state. The Foundation serves as the premier voice of the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams. Recent VEE grants have supported the work of the Virginia No Child Left Inside Coalition and a circuit rider education professional to assist school science supervisors.

Elizabeth River Project received its first support from the Endowment, in this case, a start-up grant of \$1,375 in 1992. The Project is known for its success in developing a robust partnership among industries, local communities, and government, to improve the Elizabeth River – a body of water that was once identified as a candidate for downgrading its status due to toxic pollution. VEE has supported several projects including the Learning Barge and recently partnered with ERP's affiliate, the Living River Restoration Trust, to establish the first local land trust for the Elizabeth River watershed.

James River Association was founded in 1976 by a group of citizens concerned about the health and future of the river. At that time, the James River was one of the nation's most polluted rivers due to Kepone contamination, discharges of raw sewage, widespread industrial pollution and inadequate wastewater treatment. However, the river's condition has improved remarkably over the last 41 years in no small measure due to the James River Association. VEE has been a long-time funder with recent grants supporting its work to increase citizen engagement, pass precedential legislation, continue its organizational growth, and expand its State of the James review.

Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). Many of the 100-plus research grants VEE has supported over the past 40 years were given to the scientists and coastal experts at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. The Institute is internationally recognized for its work, which has helped to shape environmental policies here and beyond. VEE has supported VIMS research and analysis in a wide range of areas: Kepone, fisheries management, wetlands and coastal science, and more. Most recently, VEE provided VIMS with funding to examine the current state of Kepone contamination in the James River.

Virginia Coastal Policy Center (The College of William & Mary Law School) is a relatively new entity, which quickly has become a leader on coastal issues confronting the Commonwealth by providing science-based legal and policy analysis as well as advice to state and local decision-makers. The Center provides invaluable training opportunities for law students while helping to shape Virginia's coastal policy. Founded in part through a VEE grant, the Center's interdisciplinary approach draws on a wide range of expertise from within the College, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Virginia Sea Grant, and across the country.

Wetlands Watch. From its early beginnings as a watchdog on wetland losses in Hampton Roads to its current role as one of the state's leading climate adaptation and resiliency advocates, Wetlands Watch is representative of small nonprofit organizations whose reputation, expertise, and influence continues to grow in Virginia and beyond. Recent VEE grants have supported its on-the-ground climate change work and its efforts to advance landscape conservation practices to deal with storm water runoff pollution and a Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional training and credentialing program.

Other honorees being recognized across the Commonwealth are:

- Richmond: Chesapeake Bay Foundation, James River Association, Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Virginia Forever, The Nature Conservancy, Virginia's United Land Trusts, Virginia Junior Academy of Science and Virginia Conservation Network and Judge Merhige.
- Charlottesville: Southern Environmental Law Center, The Nature Conservancy and Institute of Environmental Negotiation at UVA.
- Valley: Valley Conservation Council (Staunton) and VMI Center for Leadership and Ethics (Lexington).
- Others: Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, Bay Journal Media; Chesapeake Conservancy (Annapolis, Md.); Friends of Rappahannock (Fredericksburg); Land Trust Alliance (Washington); and West Virginia Rivers Coalition (West Virginia).

For details on VEE's 40th anniversary and more on all honorees, go to vee.org. For information on

the Banner Lecture, go to <https://tinyurl.com/yd4r3qdp>.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2017, the Virginia Environmental Endowment is a nonprofit, grant-making foundation based in Richmond, Va., that is focused on improving the quality of the environment by using its capital, expertise and resources to encourage all sectors to work together to prevent pollution, conserve natural resources and promote environmental literacy.

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