



Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

Steve Beshear, Governor

Leonard K. Peters, Secretary

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Leslie Isaman
(502) 573-2883

Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission Bestows Highest Honor

2013 Biological Diversity Protection Award given to storied couple

Frankfort, Ky. (Dec. 12, 2013) – After a 27-year tenure teaching more than 75,000 students at the Pine Mountain Settlement School, Ben and Pat Begley were honored today with the 17th annual Biological Diversity Protection Award, presented during the year-end meeting of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission (KSNPC).

Don Dott, executive director of the KSNPC, said the annual award honors individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions to the discovery or protection of Kentucky's biological diversity. "This year's award signifies the importance of reaching out to children and teaching them how to become better environmental stewards," said Dott.

Pine Mountain Settlement School is located in the mountains of Appalachia in southeastern Kentucky in Harlan County. It was an early source of education for the mountain youth of the area, offering a hands-on approach to education that continues to be a model for today's schools. The environmental education program at Pine Mountain began in 1972, but had become dormant when the Begley's arrived in 1987. They revived it, improving existing classes, creating new ones and recruiting distant schools for multiday visits, resulting in more than 3,000 students attending classes annually.

Between them, the couple taught school classes seven months each year, led two annual spring wildflower weekends and one fall color weekend, and a four-day forest study workshop entitled, "In the Foot-steps of Lucy Braun." They also conducted the school's day camps for local children and a weeklong summer reading camp for third- and fourth-graders, keeping alive the lore and ecological information of Pine Mountain and the forests of southeastern Kentucky.

Today, the school's programs have evolved to meet the changing needs of the community and region. Programs currently include environmental education and basic educational support for students in local schools. The richness of Pine Mountain Settlement School's campus and its history is a source for multiple other enrichment programs for the local community and beyond. This notoriety is due in large part to the major contributions of Ben and Pat Begley.

For additional information on the KSNPC, call 502-573-2886 or visit the website at <http://naturepreserves.ky.gov> or Facebook at <http://facebook.com/ksnpc>.

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