

KU sustainability director enjoys helping people change their habits

By Kelli Tibbits

Jeff Severin enrolled at the University of Kansas with plans to pursue a medical career as a doctor of radiology.

But he says he changed his focus to environmental studies after about a year because he found he was much more interested in “how people connect with the earth than how the human bones connect in the body.”

Severin is director of the Center for Sustainability at the University of Kansas, where he became a student in 1997 after growing up in Robinson, a small town with a population of about 200 in northeast Kansas.

At KU, Severin met and fell in love with his wife, with whom he has a 10-year-old daughter. They were married in 2005 in the beautiful urban setting of the Marvin Grove area of the KU campus.

Meanwhile, Severin had graduated and begun working in KU’s recycling program. He was appointed in 2007 to his current job, where he works – in addition to recycling – with:

- The bicycle program.
- Campus forest activities.
- The energy conservation program.
- And ensuring KU makes the best possible use of the space it has available.

Part of Severin's job involves working to teach KU students to change their habits, which he said is not always easy.

He encourages them to get outdoors, connect with nature, be more aware of the beauty of the earth and become more involved in recycling and their community.

Severin said perhaps the thing he likes most about his job is that it enables him to work with a diverse group of great people who all want to improve the community and the environment.

He also likes that, with so many different things going on, each day at his job is different.

While there is not much about his position that he doesn't like, Severin did say the most challenging part is acquiring funding. As is the case with practically any community-based program, there is never enough funding to do everything you want, he said.

Severin’s activities outside his job include working with the City of Lawrence Trail Program and the KU Fights Hunger program, and serving on the board of the Kansas Association for

## Conservation and Environmental Education.

KACEE is one of the first and largest conservation and environmental education organizations in the nation. It focuses on providing environmental education to make Kansas a cleaner and healthier state.

KACEE teaches educators about land use and water quality, including how to clean up our waterways and our environment. These educators in turn pass this information on to their students, impacting thousands in schools across Kansas.

The program's goals include developing the environmental leaders of tomorrow and making it less difficult to change any bad habits adults might have in terms of caring for our environment.

Severin is in his eighth year of volunteering with KACEE, for which he is a past president and is now in charge of the Education Program Advisory Committee. That group develops KACEE's educational programs.

Severin said he has also volunteered many years with the City of Lawrence Trail Program committee, which oversees the building, maintenance and usage of trails throughout Lawrence. Severin loves to hike those trails with his family.

Severin said he's particularly passionate about the KU Fights Hunger program, which maintains a food pantry on the KU Campus to assist both KU students and others who are in need in the Lawrence community.

Severin has no plans to ever leave Lawrence. He enjoys working there to teach others about the importance of recycling and taking care of the environment.

He said his various activities don't leave him much time for hobbies but – as you might have guessed – in his spare time you might find him on the trails hiking, biking and enjoying the outdoors with his family.