

Strickler looks back on decades of connecting youngsters with nature

By Rebecca Lewis

John Strickler spends much of his time enjoying moments with his loved ones and catching up on his favorite reads. The tone in his voice as he talked about his family was one of joy.

“I have a son, a daughter, four granddaughters, and step-granddaughters, all of whom I love,” he said.

Although Strickler is retired from the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education, he is still actively involved with several boards, including The Nature Conservancy, an organization that owns the Tall Grass Prairie National Preserve.

“It’s a worldwide organization that I’m proud to be a part of,” he said.

Strickler is also an avid reader. His favorite read is Richard Louv's *The Last Child in the Woods*, a 2005 publication about the staggering divide between children and the outdoors.

*The Last Child in The Woods* relates to the same issues as KACEE, Strickler said.

“It cites the need for environment/conservation education that gets kids outdoors to understand nature and appreciate it,” Strickler enthusiastically explained. “It’s one of the things that KACEE has done, to provide conservation education materials for teachers and train teachers in use of the materials.”

According to its website, KACEE’s vision is “growing a healthy, vibrant, and resilient Kansas through the power of environmental education.”

The organization's mission is "accelerating environmental literacy and conservation in Kansas through non-biased, science-based environmental education."

Strickler, who has been involved with KACEE for 48 years, recalled that in his early years with the organization he worked to broaden its base membership.

What makes KACEE so unique is that most environmental education organizations are organizations of individuals, he said. KACEE, on the other hand, is an association of organizations.

Other duties in which Strickler partook during his time with KACEE included making plans for its annual meetings and coordinating efforts to promote environmental education.

KACEE is one of the most successful state environmental education associations, having provided environmental conservation education across the nation. This comes, in part, from what KACEE emphasizes in its workshops and training, which feature the concepts of problem solving, critical thinking, and non-biased education about the environment and the need for conservation.

"I would say that it seems that our educational system needs to put more effort in teaching young people about how to think critically about issues," Strickler said.

He said one reason he chose to be involved with KACEE was because of his realization that society needed a better understanding of why conservation and natural resource protection were needed.

While previously working in the field as a forester, Strickler put a lot of effort into environmental education. He believes that when he got involved with KACEE and its workshops, the organization changed his life for the better.

“I am a strong believer in the need for environmental conservation education,” Strickler said. “One of the greatest benefits of being involved in environmental conservation education is the well-educated and informative people that it allowed me to get to know and become friends with.”