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Rader Receives Lifetime Achievement Award for Environmental Education

Mike Rader recently received the John K. Strickler Award for 2018 from the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education.

That award is given out annually to someone who has “had a minimum of 10 years’ involvement in the field of environmental education, involvement with KACEE as well, and have made and continues to make significant contribution,” according to the KACEE website.

Rader had an opportunity at the ceremony to meet the award's namesake, Strickler, who was one of KACEE's founders as well as its first executive director.

Rader recalls feeling humble as he received the honor and heard Stricker talk about how proud he was of Rader and his commitment to the environment.

Rader began to grow an appreciation for wildlife and nature at a young age. His father was an avid hunter, so Rader grew up with a background of nature. He would also go on fishing trips with his father.

Rader’s appreciation for wildlife grew during visits to the home of his grandparents, who had an orchard in their back yard. He recalled feeling intrigued by the birds in the orchard.

Today, Rader is the wildlife education supervisor for the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism. He has been the supervisor there for 11 years. He previously was employed for 18 years at Wilson State Park in Russell County, where he was a conservation worker.

In his current position, Rader oversees five people from different nature conservations. Some of those include the Kansas Wetland Education Center, the Prairie Center, and the Outdoor

Wildlife Learning Sites (OWLS), with schools across the state. Rader also helps with wildlife surveys and other environmental efforts.

Rader's favorite part of his job is the flexibility.

"It's not just an office job," he said. "I have the flexibility to go out in the field and work."

Working with wildlife and nature is not only important to him, but also to his wife and daughters. Rader's wife has worked at the Wilson State Park and interacted with many people as part of her job. She shares information with the public about the park, including its fish.

Even though Rader doesn't supervise his daughter at her job at a nature center, he still can work with her on different projects.

"It's nice to see that it (his appreciation of nature) has carried on," Rader said of his daughter's working at a nature center.

Rader's other two daughters have also worked at nature conservations and continue to interact with nature or wildlife.

Rader said he finds wildlife to be relaxing, exhilarating, fun to see, and enjoyable to teach others about.

But most important, Rader's appreciation for wildlife has continued his entire life.

Even in his spare time, Rader enjoys going bird watching in different locations around the state. He also enjoys exploring to find native plants, reptiles, and amphibians in certain locations.

At the end of the day, Rader wants people to take home an understanding for wildlife education. With organizations like KACEE, Rader and others can help inform and educate the public about the environment.

“We want to teach people how to think, not what to think,” he said.