

## Steve Woolf: Creator of WILD Kansas

By Hallee Haar

Steve Woolf, a school superintendent and member of the Kansas Association for Conservation and Environmental Education, has dedicated his life to helping get young people in touch with the environment.

Woolf was introduced to KACEE by a high school classmate of his, who had an interest in getting people involved in environmental conservation. Woolf recalled that he knew after his first KACEE meeting that he would “never look back.” He felt inspired to get personally involved.

As superintendent of the Erie School District in southeast Kansas, Woolf wants what is best for all his students. Joining KACEE has helped enable him to help those students. Likewise, Woolf has helped KACEE through the creation of WILD, an environmental education resource program.

According to <http://www.kansasgreenschools.org/WILD>, the mission of WILD is “To make a positive difference in the lives of students and the land in which we live by developing leadership, personal growth, and connections to our environment.”

Similarly, the vision of WILD is that “Students whose lives are impacted by WILD will achieve academic growth, develop an adventurous spirit, participate in outdoor activities and foster leadership to build healthy local communities, a strong land ethic, and a sustainable world.”

Woolf specifically wants to make sure that it is financially possible for students to experience the environment. He does not want costs or materials to get in the way, so one part of WILD is making materials available.

He also wants to make sure that students of all ages have the chance to learn about the environment, believing that all kids should spend more time outside.

Working full-time as a superintendent while also being the creator of WILD keeps Woolf busy. It requires a tremendous amount of passion and work for Woolf to do both jobs at once. But for him, all the hard work has been worth it.

"I really believe that life is short, that you need to do what you're passionate about," Woolf said. "And that's what I did. That's my life."

Woolf added: "I need to make sure I make every day count. People that know me know that I make every day count."

This personal philosophy is what pushes Woolf. His job requires a significant amount of travel. In order to make the equipment affordable it has to be shared by various groups in WILD. Woolf is so dedicated to helping his program that he will drive equipment out of state himself.

Woolf wants to make sure that kids can explore any interest they have in nature, regardless of what the interest is. Whether that means gardening or camping.

WILD grew so fast that a conference was held the first year of its existence, Wolf recalled. This year, WILD will hold its third conference.

Only time will tell what the future holds for Woolf and WILD. No matter what, Woolf's passion for teaching children about the environment will continue.