



Celebrations for the Environmental Science Program's 50th Anniversary!

In the Conservators' Winter 2017 Newsletter, we announced that the Environmental Science Program is turning 50 this year. Now we'd like to add details about the Program's history, plans for the upcoming celebration, and also some of the effects that the Program has had on people who have passed through it since its founding.

The Environmental Science Program of Newton began as a Ford Foundation Project in 1967 headed by Dick Staley and Pete Richter, Newton High School science teachers, with support from Ernie Ruber, a biologist from Northeastern University. In the late 1960s, there was a growing awareness of "ecology" and the environment several years before related political activity around the country led to the first Earth Day in 1970.

The "Envi Sci" Program channeled some of that energy and excitement into an outdoor educational program that let students learn about science while they were enjoying the outdoors and making friends.

Testimonials

I've been fortunate to contact many people who were students or leaders over the 50 years that the Program has operated. Some of them have written about how it changed their lives.

Stuart Freudberg, a Student Coordinator in the 1970s told me:

"...I would say the program had a very profound impact on my life and my career — I developed a huge interest in environmental science and meteorology — and decided in 1970 to go to college in environmental engineering...

what I gained back 50 years ago has made a tremendous difference personally and professionally."



Mt. Washington Lakes of the Cloud Hut (early 1990s) — Garen Corbett with Leea Regan and others

From Ralph Keyes, who was in the Program in the 1970s:

"...ESP instilled in me a love for field science and outdoor life sports. All these years later I am a high school teacher and outing club advisor. [My organization] Teens To Trails supports and promotes high school outing clubs in Maine, and we are looking to share our success here in Maine with other states."

Pam Mahoney Peak, Student Director '93; Director '96 said:

"...I loved the Program, and being a leader in the Program even became the basis of my college essay/interview!"

Program Challenges

The Envi Sci Program had some ups and downs over the years, including some years when the enrollment was low and the finances were tight. In an article published in the Newton TAB in March of 1997, the then-staff advisor Leea Thomases said, "This is one of the best-kept secrets in Newton. Not a lot of people know about the program. We want people to be aware so the program doesn't die."

The article went on to describe the day trips and activities of the program, including studying wildlife in tide pools, canoeing on the Charles River, and climbing mountains, all activities that are still part of the Program.

Leea Thomases talked about something else that the Program still does today. "I took away a belief in myself that wasn't there before. I hope the program continues [to provide current] students with that self-confidence."

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Recent Years

Fast-forwarding to recent years, it is reassuring to read a parent's letter about her son's experience:

"[My son] has found it challenging to find summer programs in line with his interests, but Envi Sci's mix of science, outdoor experiences, and physical endeavors like hiking and canoeing has proved to be the perfect combination. Even more important than these elements, Envi Sci has offered opportunities [for him] to grow in more intangible ways — helping him to build confidence, social skills, and leadership abilities."

50th Anniversary Celebration Plans

This year, through the work of a volunteer committee that communicated with a list of alums, we have replaced our preliminary plans for "A Night at the Hut" with three other events in early August:

Friday, August 4th: A day hike at Mt. Monadnock for former students, leaders, and family members. We will provide transportation details to people who have RSVP'd. Yes for this hike.

Saturday, August 5th: The main event: a reunion party in the afternoon and evening at Margarita's Restaurant (227 Moody Street, Waltham, MA) with a buffet, slides, video, and stories. There will be a full-moon canoe trip on the Charles River, just outside of Margarita's, with a guide from Charles River Canoe and Kayak. (Please RSVP specifically if you plan to go on this canoe outing!).

Sunday August 6th: An informal brunch for attendees to meet and talk with other former leaders and students, hosted in a Newton home.

What You Can Do To Help Spread the Word

We have created an online registration page so people can sign up in advance: <http://bit.ly/2s8NK5X>

We are asking people to help us spread the word by contacting anyone in their networks whom they know from Envi Sci. We already have registrations from leaders and advisors from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s who are planning to come.

All three events are included in the price of the celebration weekend: \$67 — AND you get the 50th anniversary edition of the Envi Sci T-shirt. We ask you respond by mid-July so that we can arrange for the food and seating accordingly.

We have posted this information on the Envi Sci website: www.newtonenvisci.org/50years/index.html

We are encouraging people to go to the Envi Sci 50th Facebook page and post stories, videos, and photos: <http://bit.ly/2pMtEi1>



Mt. Monadnock summit, 2016

Sustaining The Program For The Future

Finally, this reunion is about connecting different people who have enjoyed the Envi Sci experience during the past 50 years. We hope that everyone recognizes the positive power of the Program and stays connected, to sustain it for another 50 years.

With that in mind, we hope that anyone who hears about the reunion, whether they attend it or not, will contribute whatever they can to the Environmental Science Program Anniversary Fund. You can do that by using the online registration/donation form, using the link on the Envi Sci website, www.newtonenvisci.org/50years/index.html or at: <https://epay.cityhallsystems.com/?key=newton.ma.us&type=ev>

If you or someone you know has been part of the Envi Sci Program, and would like to participate in the 50th anniversary events, please contact the Program's Executive Director, David Backer, at contact@newtonenvisci.org for more information. ■

✍ David Backer