Chesapeake Research Consortium Executive Director Receives 2024 Sellner Chesapeake Guardian Award

Honored for lead role in new, pivotal Chesapeake Bay report

Every other year, the Chesapeake Bay scientific community nominates someone who has made outstanding contributions toward Chesapeake Bay research and management. For the first time in its history, the Sellner Chesapeake Guardian Award ("Guardian Award") was bestowed upon two individuals.

Denice Heller Wardrop, Executive Director of the Chesapeake Research Consortium and Research Professor of Geography at Penn State University, and Kurt Stephenson, Professor at Virginia Tech, co-edited the pivotal Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR) report developed through the Chesapeake Bay Program's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC).

Dr. Raleigh Hood (center) presents the 2024 Sellner Guardian Award to Drs. Denice Wardrop and Kurt Stephenson, joined by the award's namesake, Dr. Kevin Sellner (left). Photo credit: Dave Jasinski, Green Fin Studio.

Over the course of four years, Wardop and Stephenson guided the report's development and key findings around why progress toward attaining Chesapeake Bay Program water quality has been slower than expected– and what lessons have been learned to accelerate future progress. A major objective of the CESR report was to highlight opportunities for increased effectiveness and since the report's May 2023 release, the two have given over 60 presentations to share the report's findings and implications.

As Gary Shenk, USGS hydrologist and STAC member notes, "Because of [Wardrop's] leadership and the efforts of the CESR team, the report and its outreach strategies have been highly impactful as the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership begins to consider its future beyond 2025."

There are 60 listed contributors to the report itself, and it summarizes the work of many more scientists and engineers. As Wardrop notes, "This award not only acknowledges the Herculean effort that STAC undertook in compiling the CESR report but also the incredible wealth of knowledge and experience that has accumulated over the 40 years of effort. We have learned

a tremendous amount as a community, and that learning provides key insights for the path ahead."

The Guardian Award was presented by the Chesapeake Community Modeling Program on June 10th, 2024 during the ninth biennial Chesapeake Community Research Symposium in Annapolis, Maryland. Approximately 200 people were in attendance for this award presentation– the sixth the group has provided.

The Guardian Award was first presented to Dr. Kevin Sellner at the 2014 Chesapeake Modeling Symposium for "Exceptional Service Dedicated to the Advancement of Community Modeling in the Chesapeake Bay Region" and subsequently named in his honor.

Over the years, the award has broadened to recognize individuals for their significant, selfless, and sustained contributions to the research, management, and policy maker communities in Chesapeake Bay watershed. Subsequent awards have been given to Gary Shenk, Carl Cerco, Marjorie Friedrichs, and Karl Blankenship–three of whom were in attendance at the Symposium. Visit the Chesapeake Community Research Symposium website to learn more about the event and the Guardian Award.

The Chesapeake Research Consortium (CRC), celebrating its 52nd year, is a non-profit [501(c)(3)] organization comprised of seven research and education institutions across the Chesapeake Bay watershed. CRC aspires to fully enable its member institutions and the broader scientific community in the region to contribute effectively toward better understanding and management of the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. Each of CRC's member institutions has a long history of research within the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed, using that science to inform management, and training the workforce for science-based management.

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