

## MAMEA's 2020 Informal Educator Award was presented to Karla Smith.



Karla is a retired elementary school teacher who helped form a grassroots environmental organization with 16 other citizens call the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance (NARPA). The mission is to raise public awareness and encourage environmental stewardship of Suffolk's waterways and wetlands by developing and implementing programs and initiating collaborative actions with individuals, businesses, civic organizations, and governmental agencies. Karla used her expertise as a retired classroom teacher to develop a wetland and waterway education curriculum for 7th grade science students. She worked alongside science supervisors and public school teachers to align this curriculum with state standards. She has been teaching in the classroom twice a year for the past 8 years bringing live animals, biofacts, and water samples for testing. She also organizes a hands-on field trip to a local waterway park for students to experience the wetlands. Karla has worked to expand this program to private schools, summer camps, and the Governor's School summer program.

Karla has recently received funding to create a wetland program for 3rd graders in Suffolk. Due to COVID-19, she has needed to use her creative and innovative talents to develop a wetlands box including inquiry activities, materials, videos, and a student journal. This tool can be used in the classroom or at home this year. Karla has been an invaluable education source for NARPA and does all of this work as a volunteer with a sincere interest in developing good environmental stewards for future generations.

Karla has been a member of MAMEA for four years. She has participated in the annual conference each year gleaning information and lesson activity ideas for use with the students in Suffolk. She networks with other MAMEA members to share her resources and ideas about NARPA programs including presenting a poster at past conferences.

Karla directly and indirectly impacts all the 7th grader science students in Suffolk public schools each year through classroom lessons and a Meaning Watershed Experience. She also assists high school students with watershed projects and provides programs for other Suffolk youth groups. You've done an amazing job serving your community. Congratulations Karla!