

Cindy Pinell, 2019 Informal Educator of the Year Mid-Atlantic Marine Education Association (MAMEA)

MAMEA's 2019 Informal Educator Award was presented to Cindy Pinell.



Cindy has been a driving force and mentor in environmental stewardship in Suffolk, VA for several years working with programs sponsored by Nansemond River Preservation Alliance and Suffolk River Heritage. Cindy began her involvement in oyster restoration and water quality monitoring in the Suffolk waterways as a volunteer with her daughter's Girl Scout troop. Her enthusiasm for this important mission led her to recruit friends and neighbors and mentor them in dockside oyster growing and water monitoring. She became a spearhead of the Suffolk citizen oyster growers and Girl Scout leader. She also recruited several elementary teachers and encouraged them to incorporate the oyster project in their science curriculum. To assist teachers in this, Cindy retrieved oysters from floats, delivered them to the classrooms, served as the visiting expert interacting with students in science activities that day, and then returned the oysters to the floats at the end of the school day. In addition, she helped develop and lead successful environmental experiences for locals at Bennetts Creek Park during the Clean the Bay Day and Suffolk Riverfest Events.

In fall 2012, the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance partnered with Suffolk City Schools to bring a comprehensive watershed curriculum to all 1100 seventh grade science students in the four Middle Schools. Cindy helped lead the charge, involving the students in local oyster restoration and water quality monitoring. The effort required additional citizen scientists and volunteers to work with classroom teachers patterned after Cindy's previous elementary school work. Cindy has worked tirelessly to bring success to this program. Cindy's efforts both directly and indirectly help students develop a sense of place and become responsible environmental stewards. Cindy does all of this with the only compensation for her time, efforts, and expenses being the enthusiasm of students and citizens for the local environment and its preservation.

Cindy has been a member of MAMEA for three years. She has participated in the annual conference each year gleaning information and lesson activity ideas for use with the students of Suffolk. Cindy has also networked with other MAMEA members to develop a cadre of resources for both herself and the teachers of the classes where she delivers lessons.

You can often find Cindy along the Suffolk waterways, undaunted, up to her armpits in marsh mud, with frozen fingertips, wind dancing through her hair, or rain dripping from her nose because environmental science doesn't always happen on the warm sunny days. As one member of the Nansemond River Preservation Alliance Education Committee said "You need only pick of the phone and say 'Can you help me?' and Cindy is there", whether it is to chase runaway oyster floats, plan an event, assist a new citizen oyster grower, or serve as a last minute substitution in a classroom. You've done an amazing job serving your community. Congratulations Cindy!