

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

**July 15, 2020**

**2020 Celebration of Children in Nature Award Winners**

*Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center Honors Champions of Children in Nature*

*Austin— July 15, 2020* — Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is hosting the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Celebration of Children in Nature Awards Presentation on the evening of Sunday, September 13, 2020. Westcave will honor three outstanding individuals and a cadre of public-school teachers that represent innovative and successful regional initiatives to get kids in Central Texas out into nature.

The pandemic has illustrated just how much we need nature – and how many of us lack access to greenspaces. A decade ago, Westcave convened partners in Central Texas who shared a passion for connecting children to the joy and wonder of the natural world. That "lunch bunch" eventually became the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin, or "CiNCA," a formal program of Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center with a mission of "fanning the flames of a Central Texas movement to reconnect kids to the wonder and joy of the natural world while raising a new generation of environmental stewards."

Through years of organizational meetings, grant writing, program delivery, and advocacy, CiNCA has been a connector, information hub, and catalyst that "changed the nature of nature" in Austin. As a result of those efforts, Austin has more parks and green spaces being developed that address a history of inequitable access to nature, the City of Austin passed a "Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights," and new government positions have been created dedicated to connecting children to nature.

The Celebration of Children in Nature recognizes partners and new friends in this work for the incredible difference they make, and honors their contribution and commitment to a brighter and more informed tomorrow for everyone.

### **2020 Award Recipients**

#### **John F. Ahrns Award for Environmental Education – Doug DuBois, Texas Youth Hunting Program**

Doug DuBois has served in leadership positions in the Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) and the Texas Youth Hunting Program (TYHP) for over 17 years as a Director and Chairman of the TYHP Advisory Committee and TYHP Area Coordinator of the most active Area in the Texas Youth Hunting Program. Doug is also a Texas Parks and Wildlife Volunteer Hunter Education Instructor who has personally certified 121 students in Hunter Education, focusing on safe, legal and ethical hunting practices. One of Doug's greatest contributions is his service as a TYHP Huntmaster. As a Senior Huntmaster Doug has trained hundreds of new volunteers in the program. Additionally, as a mentor, Doug assists new Huntmasters through their first hunt so they can then act autonomously to recruit, youth, volunteers and landowners for TYHP. It is because of Doug that TYHP has reached the pinnacle of youth hunting programs in the nation. More than any other TYHP volunteer, Doug has run the largest youth hunt, the Cave Creek Wildlife Management Association "Super Hunt". This season Doug surpassed his own record of 64 youth on one hunt by hosting 67 hunters on 16 ranches for the 2020 Super Hunt. Doug would be the first to tell you, teamwork accomplished the goal, but without Doug's leadership and meticulous planning this event would not happen. Doug is the consummate TYHP promoter. He is constantly bringing in new volunteers and new ranches. Doug has 12 ranches where he is listed as the Lead Huntmaster. Doug has been Lead Huntmaster on over 45 hunts.

hosting over 500 youth, each with an adult parent or guardian, with the hunts focused on safety and conservation education. Hunting has so many positive life lessons involved, which motivates Doug to continue to contribute to program growth. Leadership, passion and exacting standards are highlights of Doug's service; what an outstanding Environmental Educator!

**John Covert Watson Award for Vision – Earth Native Wilderness School, Dave Scott**

Earth Native Wilderness School, located in Bastrop, Texas, is an outdoor school for all ages, offering courses on an impressive range of topics that include wilderness survival, bushcraft skills, wildlife tracking, native plant identification, ceramics with natural clay and traditional bow and arrow making.

Currently serving over 2,000 children a year, Earth Native provides deep immersive hands on nature connection experiences with programs in Austin, Dripping Springs, and Bastrop. The approach to Environmental Education is balanced and welcoming, allowing students to experience their time at the school on their own terms; utilizing children's natural passions and inspiration to drive learning and connection to nature that results in deep lifelong connections to the outdoors. This welcoming tone is persistent throughout Earth Native, from the approach of the instructors to the ever-improving facilities on the 25-acre wooded campus.

In 2019, Earth Native ran 800 programs throughout the year and gave over \$18,000 in scholarships to low-income families and individuals. With such a wide range of programming provided to such a diverse audience, Earth Native's vision of providing deep, meaningful environmental education for all is truly deserving of the John Covert Watson Award for Vision.

**E. Lee Walker Award for Collaboration – Outdoor Learning Cadre, Austin Independent School District**

The Austin Independent School District Outdoor Cadre is a group of ten dedicated teachers that have come together to become leaders supporting outdoor learning in the district. As a group, teachers representing 5 elementary schools and 5 secondary schools have led activities and professional development on their own campuses encouraging installation and activation of their outdoor features. Participants have represented AISD at local and state wide conferences, sharing the ways in which they collaborate to make an impact for the district and their school communities. Through book studies, field trips, hands on activities and open dialogue, the cadre has committed to making nature equitable & accessible by promoting the use of school grounds as an extension of the indoor classroom.

Most notably, the cadre designed the Girls Outside Program and helped to write the first of many grants to fund the project. Girls Outside connects 30 girls annually from each campus to a mentor or mentee from a partner campus. Together, the girls take field trips to Austin ISD's Discovery Hill, Pedernales Falls State Park, and Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center to learn about the Hill Country watershed, career paths and develop a deep connect to nature. The girls also participate in a family camp out and an end of the year clean-up to deepen the family and community connections to nature. Girls Outside is entering into its 4th year, working with almost 300 girls annually and has become one of Austin ISD's leading nature-based programs. Many thanks to the teachers and staff from Austin HS, Brooke ES, Covington MS, Eastside Memorial HS, Mathews ES, Menchaca MS, Metz ES, O. Henry MS, Rodriguez ES, Clint Small MS for your support of the cadre and Girls Outside!

#### **Westcave Award for Enduring Dedication – Victor Emanuel**

Victor Emanuel is a lifelong, world-renowned birder; author of *One More Warbler* and founder of the first birding tourism company, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). As a

celebrity in the naturalist and conservations world, many folks might not be aware of his true passion for being a mentor to children. Buried in his memoir Victor states, “My greatest contribution in life is being a mentor...I believe that true reincarnation occurs when you share your philosophy with young people – or in the case of parents, with their children – and then that passion may incorporate parts of this philosophy into this or her own spirit and hopefully, in turn, will pass it along to a young person.”

Over the years, Victor has had dozens of mentoring relationships in Austin and around the globe. His birding camps have been a breeding ground for cultivating generations of environmental stewards and passionate nature educators worldwide. For going into nature with Victor is something of a baptism for anyone: he brings out the child in anyone, and those that do it see the world differently afterwards; and this is all the more true if one happens to be a child. We are thrilled to honor Victor with the Westcave Award for Enduring Dedication.

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Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center

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