

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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2018 Celebration of Children in Nature Award Winners

Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center Challenges Nature Deficit Disorder

Austin— May 10, 2018 — Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is hosting the 11th Annual Celebration of Children in Nature Awards Dinner & Presentation on the evening of Thursday, September 20, 2018 at the newly opened Fairmont Hotel. With emcee Evan Smith, Editor of the Texas Tribune and Host of the PBS Broadcast Overheard with Evan Smith, Westcave will be honoring four outstanding organizations and individuals that represent the most innovative and successful in regional initiatives to get kids in Central Texas out into nature more often.

The term “nature deficit disorder” refers to the growing concern that childhood in America has largely moved indoors. Today, kids are spending, on average, 12 hours per day in front of multimedia screens and less than 10 minutes each day outside playing and learning in nature. This shift in how we spend our time has serious consequences for the emotional, physical and cognitive health of children. Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center is working to change that through its support for the Children in Nature Collaborative of Austin (CiNCA).

2018 Award Recipients

John F. Ahrns Award for Environmental Education – Trevor Hance, Round Rock ISD

Trevor Hance has helped transform Laurel Mountain Elementary school into and Environmental Education wonderland! With its unique location and proximity to several acres of a Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, Trevor and the teachers of Laurel Mountain have embraced the opportunities to bring the classroom outside multiple times and days throughout the school

week. Trevor has also worked with numerous private and public partners to expand the outdoor learning environments at the school. In addition to the school's Preserve, there is a Grove filled with hammocks for reading, and a newly constructed outdoor learning classroom with solar panels and butterfly winged-shaped roof! With Trevor's leadership, Laurel Mountain has set a shining example of how school campuses can utilize the outdoor environment as a living laboratory for students to explore, learn and grow through hands on experience in engaging with one another in the natural world. Hats off to Trevor for his remarkable Environmental Education efforts at Laurel Mountain Elementary.

John Covert Watson Award for Vision - TreeFolks

For 30 years, TreeFolks has served the Central Texas region by empowering communities through the care and planting of trees. Since 1989, TreeFolks has planted over 2.5 million trees through parks and streambanks in the Austin area, home delivery of free trees, and urban-wildland interface forest restoration after natural disasters in Bastrop and Hays Counties. Like John Covert Watson, their vision to protect and conserve the natural environment in Central Texas will have a lasting effect on both the community at large and the natural environment for hundreds of years. Their emphasis on family-friendly education and planting events ensure children and their families are able to have a real impact in their neighborhoods and connection to nature that will last through generations. TreeFolks continues to grow environmental education programs with an awareness that the personal connection is what makes education effective and ensures environmental stewardship into the future, something that we are sure John Covert Watson would agree with!

Westcave Award for Enduring Dedication – Charlton Perry, St. Stephen's Episcopal School

For over 20 years, Charlton has been an innovator at St. Stephen's Episcopal School. He teaches in the History Department and runs the Devils Canyon Wilderness Program, where students go mountain biking, caving, canoeing and rock climbing. Additionally, he plans trips to Mustang Island for the 7th graders, and heads way out West with the 8th graders to adventure in Big Bend. Throughout the year, Charlton also organizes conservation work projects with the city for students to engage in restoration of local parks and preserves. Through these wilderness-based activities he has developed, Charlton has lead kids to learn self-confidence, trust, cooperation, leadership skills and teamwork. The middle-age childhood development is a critical time for youth to build social skills and engage in challenges that help them lift up their voice and test assumptions. Charlton provides those opportunities through his uniquely designed curriculum and experiential learning. Additionally, he works on the Campus Committee to build partnerships and share best practices to improve the quality of life on campus through a strong connection with nature. He sets a great example for his kids to live sustainably and find a deep and rich connection with nature to lead a healthy and happy life.

E. Lee Walker Award for Collaboration - National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)

As a part of a three-year campaign to educate, engage and empower, NPCA has developed local, regional and national partnerships to engage new and diverse audiences to by conducting Civic Voice Workshop Lessons with over 500 participants in working with 16 community partners. These future leaders actively educate their peers and advocate for national parks while developing a variety of skill sets that will serve them and their community in future endeavors.

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