

# Earth Day awards applaud environmental stewardship

By Janet Pinkston  
Environmental Quality Commission

“Confront every plastic spoon” was the message novelist Bobbie Ann Mason delivered at the Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission’s (EQC) Earth Day Awards ceremony. Each year, the EQC recognizes individuals and institutions who have contributed to protecting the environment.

Mason was chosen to keynote the event because her work celebrates western Kentucky and its people; the author challenged her audience not to be a throw-away society, not to be slaves to convenience. During her childhood on a Mayfield farm “there was no garbage pickup because there was no garbage. Everything mattered. We knew how to use everything, we saved everything... we couldn’t afford to be wasteful,” Mason said.

Mason encouraged a return to this approach, and a shift in public opinion may indeed be under way. In Bowling Green, for example, children at Richardsville Elementary School eat a cold lunch once a month to save energy by not firing up the stoves.

Other 2012 EQC Earth Day Award winners include:

- The **City of Greenville** preserved the only wooded parcel in the city’s business district by turning it into a 12-acre park with walking and jogging trails, a pond, a stream, an outdoor classroom and a preserve for wildlife habitat.
- **John Gagel**, a sustainability manager at Lexmark International Inc., persuaded colleagues to clean up Cane Run Creek and plant native species along its banks, which runs through Lexmark’s Shadybrook Park.
- **Larry Griffin, International Paper Inc.**, the Henderson mill manufactures 100-percent recycled containerboard for corrugated boxes and has made great strides in energy conservation and stewardship initiatives thanks to Griffin’s leadership as an environmental manager. The company diverted 2.6 million tons of discarded boxes from landfills, reduced fresh water consumption by 400,000 gallons per day and reduced energy usage

(Left to right) EQC  
Chairman Scott  
Smith; Lifetime  
Achievement Award  
recipients Nina  
and Dean Cornett  
and Secretary Len  
Peters, Energy  
and Environment  
Cabinet. Creative  
Services photo



by 50 percent needed to produce a ton of containerboard over a 10-year span.

- **Richardsville Elementary School, Warren County** is the nation’s first public school designed to consume a minimal amount of energy (net zero). Unique design features include solar panels that produce 2,500 kilowatt hours of electricity on a sunny day; clerestory windows that bounce sunlight onto curved ceilings to flood classrooms with natural light and a geothermal heating and cooling system.

- **Kentucky Division of Forestry (KDF)** is celebrating 100 years of service to Kentucky citizens. KDF provides protection from wildfire, technical aid to landowners and two nurseries that grow native seedlings for reforestation. In addition, it manages 10 state forests and provides numerous programs that provide Kentuckians with information about the importance of forestry to the state’s environmental and economic health.

- **American Synthetic Rubber Co.** (for details read “Urban meets wild in Rubbertown” on Page 6).

- **Robert and Adriana Lynch** operate a farm in Whitley County using best practices such as riparian buffers, fencing off forests from livestock, improving and protecting water sources, and planting trees and grasses that prevent erosion. The couple planted 4,000 hardwoods on their property. They also open their farm for tours and estimate hosting 2,000 guests.

- **Marshall County Conservation District** has promoted Earth Day for the past five years by providing free seedlings, energy-saving lightbulbs for those who sign energy conservation pledges

and e-scape recycling. The district also participates in local recycling of paper, plastic and cardboard. It provides help to landowners with their agriculture water quality plans and provides dead animal disposal. Other projects include Agricultural Day for fourth-graders, developing a nature trail at Lakeland Wesley Village, providing educational models for use in schools and help with tree identification and land markers.

- **Lifetime Achievement Award—Dean and Nina Cornett** have a long list of green achievements to their credit. They cleaned up a one-acre dump and turned it into a park. As filmmakers, they have educated thousands about bears, chestnut trees and the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska. They have been instrumental in focusing attention on Kentucky timber theft. Victims of timber theft are often left with environmental damage to their property as well as loss of income from the stolen trees. Many victims are absentee landowners who may not learn of the theft for months, and weak laws make thieves hard to prosecute, according to the Cornetts.

- **The Public Service Award—the Floyd County Conservation District** addresses not only the environmental education needs of the county, but provides technical expertise to local groups and landowners to implement best practices, conducts workshops that promote erosion prevention, restoration of wildlife habitat and programming specific to rural populations and crops. The district works with students involved in vocational studies to help them understand environmental and agricultural issues.