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CONTACT: Sande Snead for VEE
(804) 536-7009

VEE Marks 40th Anniversary by Recognizing Partners in Excellence

RICHMOND, Va. – A year of special activities celebrating the Virginia Environmental Endowment's (VEE's) 40th anniversary culminates at the Virginia Historical Society on Oct. 5 with the recognition of VEE's 22 Partners in Excellence in the morning, followed by a Banner Lecture at noon on the history and legacy of the Kepone disaster that led to VEE's creation. The lecture is open to the public, but tickets are required and can be purchased at the Historical Society the day of the event. Some lectures sell out.

Over its 40-year history, VEE has partnered with nearly 500 nonprofit organizations, universities, government agencies, schools and communities. Of those, 22 were selected as Partners in Excellence honorees and awarded $1,000 in recognition of their contributions to Virginia's environment. In addition, VEE made a $10,000 grant to a documentary being developed by a nonprofit film organization on the late U.S. District Court **Judge Robert R. Merhige Jr.** as a special recognition for his role in establishing the Endowment.

In February 1977, Merhige approved creation of VEE with $8 million as part of a settlement against Allied Chemical for polluting the James River with the toxic insecticide Kepone. This was the first time a federal court converted a pollution fine into a creative way to help the environment. Merhige was VEE's "founding father" and appointed its first Board of Directors and all subsequent board members until his passing in 2005.

Other honorees are listed according to the category that matches current VEE strategic investment priorities.

Water Quality Improvement

Elizabeth River Project received its first support from the Endowment, in this case, a start-up grant of $1,375 in 1992. The Project is known for its success in developing a robust partnership among industries, local communities, and government, to improve the Elizabeth River – a body of water that was once identified as a candidate for downgrading its status due to toxic pollution. VEE has supported several projects including the Learning Barge and recently partnered with ERP's affiliate, the Living River Restoration Trust, to establish the first local land trust for the Elizabeth River watershed.

Friends of the Rappahannock (Fredericksburg). Virginia is blessed to have several watershed organizations. One of them is the Friends of the Rappahannock. Since 1985, this organization has served as the voice and active force for a healthy and scenic Rappahannock River. Its efforts have included the removal of Embrey Dam, opening 700 miles of historic fish spawning habitat and the permanent protection of over 4,200 riparian acres. VEE has partnered with FOR repeatedly since 1989, including grants to help the organization expand its work downstream to the Chesapeake Bay. And a

recent VEE grant will assist Friends of the Rappahannock in its expansion into the upper Rappahannock basin.

James River Association was founded in 1976 by a group of citizens concerned about the health and future of the river. At that time, the James River was one of the nation's most polluted rivers due to Kepone contamination, discharges of raw sewage, widespread industrial pollution and inadequate wastewater treatment. However, the river's condition has improved remarkably over the last 41 years in no small measure due to the James River Association. VEE has been a long-time funder with recent grants supporting its work to increase citizen engagement, pass precedential legislation, continue its organizational growth, and expand its State of the James review.

The **Southern Environmental Law Center** was established more than 30 years ago with early support from VEE. Headquartered in Charlottesville, the organization now has more than 120 lawyers and policy experts working in six southeastern states and Washington, D.C. VEE has supported the law center's work since its inception on a wide range of issues, including protection of water quality, land use and transportation initiatives, defense of Virginia's wetlands and forest lands, and challenges to the Chesapeake Bay restoration.

Virginia Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts supports and strengthens Virginia's 47 conservation districts as they work on-the-ground with farmers and urban communities across the state. In addition, the Association engages young people through its Youth Conservation Camp and Envirothon Program. Its Youth Conservation Leadership Institute mentoring program for students, started with VEE funding, focuses on volunteer service and environmental stewardship.

Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). Many of the 100-plus research grants VEE has supported over the past 40 years were given to the scientists and coastal experts at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. The Institute is internationally recognized for its work, which has helped to shape environmental policies here and beyond. VEE has supported VIMS research and analysis in a wide range of areas: Kepone, fisheries management, wetlands and coastal science, and more. Most recently, VEE provided VIMS with funding to examine the current state of Kepone contamination in the James River.

Chesapeake Bay Restoration

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay. Founded in 1976, the initial mission of the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay was to coordinate citizen and community involvement for the Chesapeake Bay Program. The Alliance was one of the organizers of the "Choices for the Chesapeake" conference in 1983 which featured the signing of the very first regional Chesapeake Bay Agreement. Since then, the Alliance has developed programs such as Businesses for the Bay, River Sojourns, and Chesapeake Forests, as well as programs aimed at providing thousands of homeowners and volunteers with many opportunities to do their part. VEE is a longtime partner of the Alliance, recently helping to re-launch the Businesses for the Bay program in 2014 and providing support for the Alliance's efforts to conduct outreach to local governments for the next phase of the Bay TMDL.

Bay Journal Media. The *Bay Journal* has provided comprehensive coverage of Chesapeake Bay issues since 1991. Published by the nonprofit Bay Journal Media, the publication currently reaches over 50,000 readers and is distributed to numerous schools, nature centers, libraries, and marinas. *Bay Journal* op-eds regularly appear in more than 100 newspapers and reach about 4 million readers per month. VEE has recently supported expansion of Virginia coverage and awarded BJM a lead grant as it

broadens its outreach with the development of a *Bay Journal* publication aimed at local government audiences.

Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Since opening its Richmond office in the early 1980s at the invitation of VEE, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation now has offices in Richmond and Hampton Roads, an oyster restoration center in Gloucester, a world-class, energy efficient center in Virginia Beach and six outdoor environmental education programs across the state. The Foundation serves as the premier voice of the Chesapeake Bay and its rivers and streams. Recent VEE grants have supported the work of the Virginia No Child Left Inside Coalition and a circuit rider education professional to assist school science supervisors.

Land Conservation

The Chesapeake Conservancy (Annapolis, Md.)**.** Over the past 10 years, the Conservancy has quickly gained recognition, in particular, for its cutting-edge efforts in landscape-based conservation and use of innovative technologies. VEE was an early supporter of the Conservancy and is currently partnering with the Conservancy on the development of a watershed-wide analysis of the James River watershed that will provide critical information on the most effective places to invest in pollution reduction practices.

Land Trust Alliance (Washington, D.C.). The mission of the Land Trust Alliance is to save the places people need and love by strengthening land conservation across America. The organization leads America's land trust community, serving, mentoring and assisting more than 1,000 member land trusts across the country, including 36 land trusts in Virginia. VEE has worked closely with the Alliance in recent years to develop and enhance the private land trust community across Virginia, particularly in Southern Virginia. This work has included VEE's funding of regional land conservation forum and a "circuit rider" with expertise to assist new and established land trusts in the Commonwealth. VEE has also joined other funders to support LTA efforts to improve the link between land conservation and water quality in the Chesapeake Bay region.

The Nature Conservancy has grown from a pioneering U.S. land trust to one of the world's most effective global organizations. The Conservancy's Virginia Chapter has become a leader in the preservation of forests and woodlands, protection of Chesapeake Bay's aquatic species and climate change. The Conservancy received one of VEE's first grants. Recent support has focused on the Conservancy's efforts to construct an oyster reef in the Piankatank River, one of the largest such projects in the world.

Valley Conservation Council was **o**ne of the first local land trusts VEE funding helped to establish. Since 1991, the Council has been a pioneer in the development and implementation of riparian easements and conservation easements for working farms. The Council's work has helped permanently protect more than 160,000 acres while advocating for the adoption of land use policies that have helped guide growth in a more sustainable manner. VEE's recent support of the Valley Conservation Council includes funding for development of a farm-oriented conservation easement template designed to provide increased protection of agricultural lands and water quality in the Shenandoah Valley.

An initial grant from VEE in 2003 kick-started the creation of **VIRGINIA*forever*.** This diverse coalition of businesses, environmental organizations and outdoor enthusiasts has strongly advocated for increased government funding for water quality improvements and land conservation. In 2016, Virginia*forever* helped secure the largest public investment in nonpoint source pollution control in Virginia history. VEE

and Virginia*forever* recently partnered to conduct an update analysis of Virginia's level of natural resource funding compared to other states.

Virginia's United Land Trusts is a collaborative of more than 30 private organizations working across the state to conserve the Commonwealth's natural, cultural, historic, scenic and recreational resources, and working forests and farmlands. Established 15 years ago with grant support from VEE, its mission is to increase the effectiveness of the land conservation community of the Commonwealth. In Virginia, quasi-public and private land trusts have conserved more than 1.1 million acres of land; nearly 80 percent of which has been achieved since 2000, leading the Southeast states in the amount of acreage protected, and ranking fifth in the nation.

Environmental Education and Public Awareness

The Institute for Environmental Negotiation at UVA has gained international recognition as a leading environmental and public policy dispute resolution organization. Conceived and initially funded by VEE, the Institute works as a facilitator and mediator on issues ranging from community sustainability to land use and sea level rise. VEE recently provided the Institute with a grant to help facilitate a state government study of environmental education as well as a grant to work with three pilot localities to strengthen their coastal resiliency programs.

Virginia Conservation Network. In 1978, VEE provided a grant for the staffing of the Conservation Council of Virginia. Years later, the Endowment provided funding for the creation of another collaborative organization, this one with a legislative focus, the Virginia Environmental Network. The successor of these two organizations is the Virginia Conservation Network. The Network boasts a membership of over 120 partner organizations and serves as a facilitator for collaborative and coordinated action among these partners. It also provides a "constant conservation presence" in Virginia's General Assembly.

Virginia Junior Academy of Science has for nearly 80 years served to stimulate interest, research and life-long commitment in environmental sciences among secondary students. VEE has partnered with the Junior Academy to provide more than $600,000 for college scholarships to 64 high school students to date.

Virginia Military Institute Center for Leadership and Ethics is a long-time VEE partner, having hosted the annual Environment Virginia Symposiums in Lexington for the last 28 years. The Symposium has become the largest annual gathering of environmental professionals and advocates from government, business and industry, nonprofit organizations, and the consulting sectors. VEE has served as a conference host and has partnered with VMI every year since 1990 when the conference began.

Emerging Issues

Virginia Coastal Policy Center (The College of William & Mary Law School) is a relatively new entity which quickly has become a leader on coastal issues confronting the Commonwealth by providing science-based legal and policy analysis as well as advice to state and local decision-makers. The Center provides invaluable training opportunities for law students while helping to shape Virginia's coastal policy. Founded in part through a VEE grant, the Center's interdisciplinary approach draws on a wide range of expertise from within the College, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Virginia Sea Grant and across the country.

Wetlands Watch. From its early beginnings as a watchdog on wetland losses in Hampton Roads to its current role as one of the state's leading climate adaptation and resiliency advocates, Wetlands Watch is representative of small nonprofit organizations whose reputation, expertise, and influence continues to grow in Virginia and beyond. Recent VEE grants have supported its on-the-ground climate change work and its efforts to advance landscape conservation practices to deal with storm water runoff pollution and a Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional training and credentialing program.

West Virginia Rivers Coalition is a driving force for policy discussions on improving water quality and is a leader on water quality and safe drinking water in the Mountain State. VEE has been a long-time funder of the coaltion dating back to 1992 through the Endowment's Kanawha and Ohio River Valleys Grant Program. Due in part to VEE's recent support, West Virginia Rivers Coalition was able to quickly respond to a January 2014 chemical leak into the Elk River. This leak resulted in the largest-scale drinking water contamination event in the nation's history.

For details on VEE's 40th anniversary and more on all honorees, go to vee.org. For information on the Banner Lecture, go to https://tinyurl.com/yd4r3qdp.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2017, the Virginia Environmental Endowment is a nonprofit, grant-making foundation based in Richmond, Va., that is focused on improving the quality of the environment by using its capital, expertise and resources to encourage all sectors to work together to prevent pollution, conserve natural resources and promote environmental literacy.

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