

VIMS alum receives prestigious award

By Erin Kelly

(October 1, 2012) Bob Carroll, who received his Master's degree from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science in 2002, was 1 of 18 environmental educators from across the nation awarded with the Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators this past May—an honor given on behalf of the partnership between The White House Council on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Carroll and the other outstanding K-12 teachers who received this prestigious award demonstrated exceptional teaching skills and an innovative use of environmental education that connects the students to the world around them and their communities. EPA officials note, "The recipients encourage our nation's future leaders to take responsibility for being good stewards for our environment, and prepare them for success."

Carroll, a 7th-grade life science teacher at Plaza Middle School in Virginia Beach, says he was surprised when he heard that he would be receiving the award. "Only three educators are chosen from each EPA region," he says. "It is an honor to be recognized."

Over the past seven years, Carroll has earned a number of environmental grants that have brought almost \$50,000 to his school. Aside from the time spent in the classroom with his students, Carroll leads numerous field trips to the Lynnhaven River, Chesapeake Bay and even the Florida Keys.

In an effort to further educate students about the environment, Carroll recently started his own business, Virginia Beach Sea Camp and Kayak. "Through my business I have been able to take students on field trips where they get to kayak, surf, paddleboard, float, fish, crab, and pull nets all over the Lynnhaven River, the Bay, and the beaches around our area," he says. "The students become Bay-loving sea creatures who are ravenous for more water time. It's awesome."

Carroll says his time at VIMS helped him bring an expert voice to both his classroom and his business. Obtaining a Master's degree from VIMS' School of Marine Science allowed him ample time to spend out in the field—an aspect of marine science that he has always enjoyed the most. "I enjoy the down and dirty aspect of environmental education," he says.



Jumbo Lump: Bob Carroll a.k.a Jumbo Lump encounters a butterfly ray during an outing with his company - Virginia Beach Sea Camp and Kayak. Photo courtesy of Laurie Carroll Sorabella (The Oyster Queen)

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Reflecting on the time he spent at VIMS, Carroll says that it made him a better teacher in many ways. “In terms of the subject and grade that I teach, the scientific method is a very important topic, and my time at VIMS forced me to really own it,” he explains. “Having had to discuss journal papers and my Master’s work made the importance of the scientific method and experimental design very clear, which has made me be able to better explain it to my students.”

As a graduate student at VIMS, Carroll studied how fish, crabs and shrimp use different habitats such as salt marsh and revetment-hardened shorelines. “I call the research I did during my time at VIMS ‘cave man science’ because it took a lot of muscle, field time, and muddy feet,” he says.

Carroll’s passion for hands-on learning has led him to incorporate similar learning methods in his own classroom, while also adding some fun to his lesson plans. “We take frequent dance breaks,” he says. “I really enjoy being surrounded by the fun energy of my students.”

After earning his Master’s degree at VIMS, Carroll served as the education program director for VIMS’ Chesapeake Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (CBNERRVA). “I helped upgrade the field education program while at CBNERRVA, but I left because I wanted to try out the world of formal classroom education,” he says.

Carroll developed his love for the environment while growing up on the New Jersey shore. Before deciding to pursue a Master’s degree at VIMS, he worked as an environmental educator at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. “I got to lead field trips on canoes, boats, islands, and beaches all over the Bay,” he says. “We do a variety of similar environmental education activities in my classroom to promote learning more about the Bay.”

Carroll says the most rewarding part of being a teacher is working his unique teaching style into his lesson plans to create the classroom that he envisions, as well as one that the students will enjoy. “The more effort I put into a lesson plan, the more the students enjoy learning,” he says. “I enjoy getting to see the direct and immediate results of my work.”

As for his time as a student at VIMS, Carroll says his memories are countless. He fondly recalls everything from overlooking the York River while he studied in Hargis library, going out on a commercial scallop boat, making the voyage to Antarctica, and marrying VIMS alum Laurie Sorabella, who he proudly refers to as the Oyster Queen. “We are the crazy marine biologists in the neighborhood,” he says jokingly. “It’s a reputation that we work very hard to maintain.”

To learn more about Virginia Beach Sea Camp and Kayak, visit the Carroll’s website at: www.vbseacamp.com.



Carroll with his wife, fellow VIMS alum Laurie Sorabella, at home with their children and dog, Shiny.