

Media Relations

Hudson Teacher Receives 2010 Forest Watch Award

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Mike Gagnon (right) receiving the Forest Watch program's 2010 Gary N. Lauten Award from Barry Rock.

DURHAM, N.H. – Michael Gagnon of Alvirne High School's Wilbur H. Palmer Vocational-Technical Center in Hudson received the 2010 Gary N. Lauten Award for outstanding service and commitment to the University of New Hampshire's Forest Watch program at a ceremony held last week on the Durham campus.

Forest Watch, which began in 1991, is a unique way of conducting science with the help of primary and secondary school students across New England who collect and process data relating to air pollution damage in forest stands near their schools. Since its inception more than 350 schools have participated in the program, with some 50 to 100 actively engaged in monitoring white pines, a bio-indicator species for ground-level ozone (smog), in any given year.

 
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Gagnon served as program coordinator of [Forest Watch](#) for the past seven years before taking the Alvirne position in the fall and now, as a forestry teacher, will be working with the Forest Watch program "from the other side."

"I'll be teaching forest health and pathology issues as part of my curriculum and will be integrating Forest Watch as a vital component of this content," Gagnon says. He adds, "It was unusual attending this year's annual meeting because I am now among the ranks of the very teachers I trained as the program coordinator. And to receive the Lauten my first year as a teacher was very gratifying."

Gary Lauten was a former Air Force lieutenant colonel who died in December 2001 and served as the Forest Watch program coordinator from 1992-1999. In 2002, the program began recognizing teachers who best exemplify Lauten's devotion to Forest Watch's long-term goals.

For two decades, Forest Watch has demonstrated that students can collect valuable data for ongoing scientific research and learn science and mathematics by doing research in their local area. Student data have clearly shown how responsive white pines are to year-to-year variations in ozone levels. [NASA's New Hampshire Space Grant Consortium](#) has sponsored Forest Watch since 1991.

"Over the years, I've been very impressed with how well student data mirror annual variations in air quality," says Forest Watch director Barry Rock of the university's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space and the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment. "During a poor air quality summer, student data indicate poor tree health, but during a good air quality summer the data indicate improved tree health."

Rock notes that the annual award recognizes Lauten's commitment to making science accessible in the pre-college classroom. "He loved the program and became its heart and soul. And teachers love the program because it integrates biology with physics, math, Earth science, et cetera."

Gagnon, who teaches forestry, wilderness survival, and landscaping notes that Forest Watch now serves an educational role for him on several levels: as a community outreach project, a hands-on forest health

project, and as a component of educating students about forest measurements and satellite imagery.

"My students are FFA students who actively participate in leadership-building activities and community projects. Forest Watch will add a new depth to these goals by adding a hands-on research component," Gagnon says.

He adds, "Over the years, the Forest Watch members I have had the privilege of working with are a wonderful and dedicated group of teachers. In my many visits to their schools I have watched them work with their students and learned lessons that I am now able to put into practice in my own classroom."

Gagnon notes that he is thankful to Barry Rock and his graduate student Martha Carlson, who is now Forest Watch program coordinator, "for recognizing me for this award. Special thanks indeed need to go to Barry for all the knowledge, opportunities, and experiences that working for him through the years have brought me."

Says Rock, "Mike has been such a driving force in the Forest Watch program over the years that the Lauten Award could not have gone to a more deserving person. I can't wait to see how he brings the program to his classroom at Alvirne."

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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Photograph to download:

http://www.eos.unh.edu/newsimage/forestwatch_122010.jpg.

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