

Innovation Inspiration

COVID response, Nature Groupie honored as Innovators of the Year

Tuesday, May 17, 2022



FROM LEFT: INNOVATORS OF THE YEAR HALEY ANDREOZZI AND MALIN CLYDE OF NATURE GROUPIE, UNHINNOVATION INTERIM DIRECTOR MARC EICHENBERGER, UNH COVID LAB SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR KELLEY THOMAS, UNH POLICE CHIEF PAUL DEAN. PHOTO BY GRACE SILHA.

During the COVID pandemic, many of us embraced two new activities: Swabbing our noses to test for the virus and getting outdoors. UNHInnovation’s Innovator of the Year awards recently honored UNH faculty and staff who helped us do both. W. Kelley Thomas, professor and director of the Hubbard Center for Genome Studies, and UNH Police Chief Paul Dean were honored

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for their contributions to UNH's [COVID response](#) as the 2020 awardees; and UNH Extension's Malin Clyde and Haley Andreozzi of [Nature Groupie](#), the centralized website for conservation volunteer opportunities, received the honor for 2021.

"The J. Brent Loy Innovator of the Year Award honors UNH faculty or staff who have demonstrated exemplary innovation and successfully translated their ideas into social and economic impact," says Marc Eichenberger, interim managing director of [UNHInnovation](#). "I can't think of better examples, especially during these past two years, than UNH's extraordinary COVID testing program and Nature Groupie."

Thomas, who is a professor of molecular, cellular and biomedical studies and the [COVID lab's](#) scientific director, played an integral role in designing and launching UNH's state-of-the-art testing lab in the absence of established infrastructure such as a medical or veterinary school or even a CLIA (Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments) lab already on campus. In spring of 2021, under his leadership, the university started genomic sequencing of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, helping prepare for future variant outbreaks.

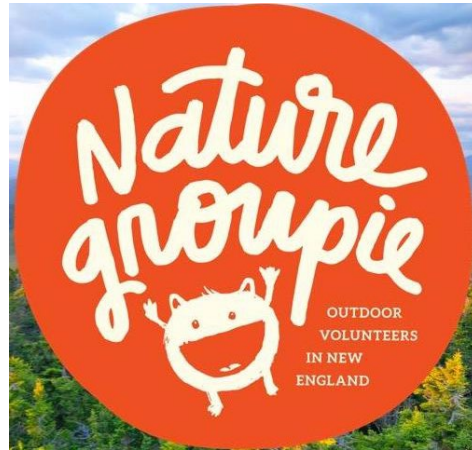
Dean serves as co-chair of UNH's Testing and Tracing Team, the task force responsible for launching the lab, and as co-director of the COVID Incident Response Team. He was instrumental in developing the campus testing and tracing strategy, including the innovative self-swabbing protocols and collection logistics.

"Paul and Kelley's innovation, ingenuity and commitment to the health and safety of the UNH community is inspirational and they are both incredibly deserving of this honor," says Marian McCord, senior vice provost for research, economic engagement and outreach. "The university is grateful for their expertise and leadership."

[UNH Extension's](#) Malin Clyde, community volunteer state

specialist, and Haley Andreozzi, wildlife conservation state specialist, are the 2021 Innovators of the Year as the driving force behind Nature Groupie, one of several successful mission-driven not-for-profit UNH spinouts.

Nature Groupie, which began in 2013 as a collaboration between UNH Extension and The Stewardship Network in the Great Lakes region, links outdoor enthusiasts with volunteer opportunities at places they love by sharing events that help forests, coastal ecosystems, communities and wildlife. Since that time, more than 5,000 volunteers have connected with 200-plus environmental groups through naturegroupie.org to clean rivers, restore wildlife habitats, maintain trails, plant trees and do environmental research in New England.



A true spinout inspired by market need, Nature Groupie leveraged resources of UNHInnovation to participate in its [I-Corps training](#) and pursue trademarking. A Kickstarter campaign raised initial funding for the launch of Nature Groupie, and online sales of apparel branded with their playful, energetic logo help sustain the business.

Established in 2011, UNHInnovation's Innovator of the Year award is named after the late [J. Brent Loy](#), plant geneticist, inaugural recipient of the award and by far UNH's most prolific innovator. He developed more than 80 new varieties of squash, pumpkins, gourds and melons during his career, representing the longest squash and pumpkin breeding program in North America.

His seed varieties, sold in seed catalogs throughout New England and the world, have created more revenue for UNH than any other faculty-generated intellectual asset.

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