

VOLUNTEER SHOWCASE

August 2012
Alabama

Senior Citizens Honored During National Volunteer Week

Senior citizens are valuable assets as volunteers. A statement made on the website "Center for Volunteering" (www.volunteering.com), said that seniors spend more time doing voluntary work than younger adults.

Madison County Alabama Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff members Kathy Walker and Anthony Hudson agree with that statement. The local office reaps great benefits because of two Earth Team volunteers they honored during 2012 Volunteer Week: Bertie Weitzel, 86 years of age, and Inez Whiddon, 77.

Anthony said, "We are honored to recognize these two volunteers, not because of their age, but because of their commitment and dedication in volunteering for our activities."

Kathy said, "I think it is awesome that anytime I have a need I can give Mrs. Weitzel or Mrs. Whiddon a call, and if they are available, they always say yes. I cannot handle 30 kids in a class or 30+ teachers in a workshop without their extra hands to help keep things moving."

"It makes me want to be young again so I can farm."

-- Inez Whiddon, Earth Team volunteer

Mrs. Weitzel said she enjoys the time she gives as a volunteer. She helps other seniors at Agape Assisted Living Facility with one of Kathy's signature conservation crafts, the soil baby. The Agape residents held a contest for the best cared for soil baby. This was a perfect activity for Mrs. Weitzel to share her conservation concerns and to make sure that all of the residents, including those in wheel chairs, got to participate.



Madison County SWCD/NRCS honors Earth Team volunteers. (l-r) Anthony Hudson, NRCS District Conservationist; Earth Team Volunteers Bertie Weitzel and Inez Whiddon; and Kathy Walker, Madison County SWCS District Administrative Coordinator.

Soil babies are constructed of knee-high hose, rye grass seed, soil, and decorations. After placing the seed in the toe of a knee-high (to grow grass hair), soil is packed in to form a ball. A knot is tied in the hose to hold the creature together. The knot side is placed in a jar of water. Soil babies are individually decorated; fabrics covering the jar, jiggle eyes and felt cutouts on the face, and even bows in the soon-to-grow hair. In 10-15 days the seeds germinate and grass hair grows through the hose. Hair can be cut and styled as desired.

Kathy said that building soil babies is a conservation reminder to all that having good soil, fertilizer, sunshine, and the appropriate amount of water is important to grow and sustain hardy plants. She said, "This activity shows that people of any age can still enjoy learning or be refreshed on things that they were able to do in the past, such as gardening."

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One of Ms. Whiddon's favorite activities is assisting with teacher workshops. She and her husband, Ray, have helped with this week-long event for many years. They help register the 30+ teachers, are "extra hands" needed to pass out or collect items, and help load and unload the buses.

The Whiddons have also attended and helped with the annual "Changing Face of Agriculture" tours since 2009. Mrs. Whiddon said, "It makes me want to be young again so I can farm. It is amazing to learn what can be done and what the Madison County SWCD/NRCS staff does to help the environment. I learn while I am volunteering."

Mrs. Whiddon added that, "Kathy encourages me to volunteer and anytime you are with her, you are going to have a good time. You can't help someone else have a good time without having a good time yourself. Volunteering brings joy and fulfillment to my life."

Kathy Walker hopes the effort of these ladies will encourage others to sign up as volunteers. She said, "We enjoy working with our Earth Team volunteers. They are vital to the Huntsville field office. They tell me they look forward to helping and always get more back than they give."

Anthony said "teaching the importance of soil and water with lots of hands-on activities can be a challenge without the "extra hands" to help keep things on track and flowing well. We appreciate the help that these two individuals give to the conservation effort."

Dr. William Pickett, Alabama NRCS State Conservationist says, "The Earth Team is the official volunteer workforce for NRCS and is making a difference across the nation. NRCS is proud of our Earth Team volunteers' commitment to conservation and we thank Mrs. Bertie Weitzel and Mrs. Inez Whiddon for being valued members of our conservation team."



Two "soil babies" created by Earth Team volunteers. Soil babies are constructed of knee-high hose, rye grass seed, soil, and decorations.



The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

If you are interested in volunteering, contact the National Earth Team office at (888) 526-3227 or visit your local NRCS office.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/people/volunteers>