

Contact: Robyn DiFalco, Executive Director
Butte Environmental Council
(530) 891-6424
robynd@becnet.org

BEC RECOGNIZES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

Chico, California – In celebrating its 39th anniversary, the Butte Environmental Council is looking to recognize environmental heroes in our community and also looking back over the decades to recognize those who've given years of service on behalf of the environment.

BEC is proud to honor the following individuals with this year's awards:

- **John Merz – *The Michael McGinnis Lifetime Achievement Award***
- **Andy Keller – *The Colleen Jarvis Environmentalist of the Year Award 2014***
- **Joni Clark Stellar – *The Barris Farms Service Award***

This year BEC will recognize Chico resident **John Merz** with the **Michael McGinnis Lifetime Achievement Award**. The award, named after founding member Michael McGinnis, is intended to recognize an individual who has led lifelong efforts in environmental advocacy and education.

John Merz joined the community in the mid-1970s, where he soon joined BEC and began his decades of dedication to improve the environment within Chico and the greater Sacramento Valley region. In 1983 John began to focus on the Sacramento River, co-founding the Sacramento River Preservation Trust. He has led the effort to advocate for healthy watersheds throughout the region, working to protect riparian habitat and restore native species, in particular endangered salmon populations. John worked as an employee with BEC in the 1970s, served as BEC General Manager in the early 1990s and has served on the Board of Directors a few times over the years.

"Old Man River" has also been active in Chico politics, first on the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission, then as an elected board member on Chico Area Park and Recreation District (CARD). John is currently finishing his second term as a Member of the Chico Planning Commission. John is also co-founder of the Snow Goose Festival, and has worked with a wide range of other local nonprofits in both the environmental and public policy realm. As Michael McGinnis tells us, "If you look at John's history, it's more than just the Trust. All these things weave together in his unwavering commitment to protect the environment."

Founder and Owner of ChicoBag Company, **Andy Keller** has been selected as **Environmentalist of the Year for 2014** for his efforts to enact a plastic bag ban in Chico and in California (both of which achieved success this year) and to provide and promote a viable alternative to single-use disposable bags. Ten years ago, Keller invented the ChicoBag, a compact, reusable shopping

bag that makes it convenient for consumers to get in the habit of bringing their own bag to the store. During the past decade, Keller's entrepreneurial efforts have built a successful local business with global impact, while he has also worked diligently to address legislative solutions to the problems associated with plastic bag litter.

The 2014 **Barris Farms Service Award** goes to **Joni Clark Stellar**. Joni is being honored with this award for her service to the local grassroots effort to ban hydraulic fracturing (aka "fracking") in Butte County. Joni became the public face of the campaign this past summer when she stepped forward as the plaintiff in a court challenge to the citizen-driven initiative to ban fracking in Butte County. Without sufficient funds to hire an attorney, the group sought to represent themselves "pro per" in a Writ of Mandate requesting that the Judge rule to allow the petition to go forward to the voters. A former school teacher with a background working with environmental nonprofits, Joni bravely stepped forward as the sole individual to represent the group. She has served in a key capacity as Treasurer, but has also offered her vision, leadership, and organizing expertise to this grassroots effort. "The Frack-Free Butte County campaign has been characterized by people stepping up with the courage to do things that they've never done before – and doing them very well," said fellow organizer Chuck Greenwood. "In her leadership and her example, Joni may well be the best of us."

Recipients were carefully chosen by the Butte Environmental Council board last month. The awards will be presented at BEC's 39th Anniversary Gala fundraiser on Saturday, October 18th at the Arc Pavilion. Tickets are \$45. The event will feature a Caribbean-themed meal prepared by Kaelen Davis of Santino's Catering, a Silent Auction, and live music by guitar soloist Stevie Cook and local harpist Brenda Lockie-Knight.

Present and past award recipients have helped BEC become the successful environmental organization that it is. Many past award winners have contributed significantly to the Bidwell Parks & Chico Creeks Clean Up, the Endangered Species Faire, the Chico Bicycle Music Festival, the Code Blue series of citizen workshops on regional water issues, and the Dioxin awareness campaign in Oroville. BEC also provides recycling education to Butte County schools through the Recycling And Rubbish Education program (RARE).

The Butte Environmental Council is a non-profit environmental organization based in Chico, California. BEC's mission is to protect and defend the land, air, and water of Butte County and the surrounding region through action, advocacy, and education. Since 1975, BEC has played a significant part in shaping the environment and policies of Butte County and surrounding areas.

For more information about the Gala event visit www.becnter.org/events/gala2014

For additional information of contact info for the award recipients, contact:

Robyn DiFalco, Executive Director robynd@becnet.org 530-891-6424, BEC Office

On the day of the event, press inquiries may call cell phone 530-588-3605.