



## **The Mariners' Museum and Park Receives Prestigious Governor's Environmental Excellence Award**

*Award Recognizes Lake Stewards Program for Promoting Environmental Stewardship Among Students*



**Newport News, VA, May 16, 2025** — [The Mariners' Museum and Park](#) is proud to announce it has been named a silver medal winner of the 2025 [Governor's Environmental Excellence Award](#), which recognizes efforts that protect and improve Virginia's environment.

The honor highlights Lake Stewards, an innovative, hands-on initiative that empowers ninth-graders to actively improve the health of Mariners' Lake® — and by extension, the James River and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

This award acknowledges those who consistently exceed regulatory requirements, excelling in methodology and impact.

### **The Lake Stewards Program**

Lake Stewards engages students and educators through high-quality, environmental education programming at no cost, while increasing environmental literacy and empowering students to embrace an active role as environmental stewards.

Through this immersive experience, ninth-grade students grow native eelgrass in their classrooms, then plant the grass in Mariners' Lake to improve water quality. As they learn about watershed ecosystems and their roles in preserving them, they discover ways they can take action in their communities.

“We believe that hands-on learning is one of the most powerful ways to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards,” said Mariners' Park Director Erica Deale. “Through the Lake Stewards Program, students are actively restoring ecosystems. It’s incredible to watch young people realize that they have the power to make a real difference in the health of their environment.”

Initially launched as the B-WET program with Newport News Public Schools in 2021, the program transitioned to Lake Stewards in 2024 and expanded to include students from Hampton City and York County Public Schools, a testament to the program’s effectiveness.

Lake Stewards has three primary goals:

1. **Build Knowledge**
2. **Give Students Agency**
3. **Build a Sense of Belonging**

Lake Stewards reflects a core element of The Mariners' mission: to connect people to the world's waters and to each other. As students care for the Lake, they also build connections with their classmates, The Mariners' Team, and their community.

### **Partners in Environmental Excellence:**

Several organizations partnered with The Mariners' to provide resources and ensure Lake Stewards is an ongoing success:

- Newport News Public Schools
- Old Dominion University

- Christopher Newport University
- James River Association
- NOAA Monitor National Marine Sanctuary
- Peninsula Master Naturalists
- Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Through the collaborative efforts of The Mariners' and these local institutions, Lake Stewards not only meets immediate educational needs but also sets the stage for long-term, sustainable environmental stewardship and engagement across the region.

Media interested in interviews or more information about this award should contact Senior Director of Advancement Sabrina Jones at [sjones@MarinersMuseum.org](mailto:sjones@MarinersMuseum.org).

---

The Mariners' Museum and Park connects people to the world's waters because through the water – through our shared maritime heritage – we are connected to one another. The organization is an educational, private 501(c)(3) nonprofit institution accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and preserves and interprets maritime history through an international collection of ship models, figureheads, paintings, and other maritime artifacts. The Mariners' Museum® is home to the USS *Monitor* Center, and is surrounded by the 550-acre Mariners' Park, the largest privately owned and maintained park that is free and open to the public in North America. The Mariners' Museum Library is the largest maritime library in the Western hemisphere. Because of the Museum's world-class collection and its reputation for high-level exhibits and programs, in 1998, the U.S. Congress designated The Mariners' Museum as one of only two maritime museums that comprise America's National Maritime Museum. The Museum galleries are open to the general public with \$1 admission, and the Mariners' team will continue to offer FREE virtual programs for those who prefer to engage online with us or through our social media platforms and blog posts. The Mariners' Park and Noland Trail is open for daily use. For additional information, visit [MarinersMuseum.org](http://MarinersMuseum.org), call (757) 596-2222 or write to The Mariners' Museum, 100 Museum Drive, Newport News, VA 23606.

###