
2016 Educator of the Year

Eloise Clark and Rebecca Whippie of the Frederick H. Hooper Institute

The CCCD is honored to recognize Rebecca (Becky) Whippie and Eloise Clark of the Frederick H. Hooper Institute in Walpole NH as the 2016 Educators of the Year. Eloise and Becky are an inspiration to the youth of Walpole; they nurture their curiosity about the natural world, help them develop the power of observation, and make sure they are not afraid to get outside.

Eloise grew up on a dairy farm in Orange Connecticut and loved being in the outdoors. When she was fourteen she was asked to help teach swimming and realized she really liked working with kids. She has been doing exactly that since the Fall of 1977 when she became the Director of the Frederick H. Hooper Institute, the role she continues to hold today. For fifteen years Eloise worked alongside Fritze Till and for the last fifteen she has partnered with Becky Whippie on educating the youth of Walpole in agriculture, forestry, botany, soils and environmental science.

Becky started as a Hooper Institute Educator in 2001; prior to that she taught Horticulture for seven years at Keene



High School. Becky grew up in Keene NH on a small family farm and received her BS in Elementary Education from Keene State College. She always wanted to be a teacher and enjoys incorporating art into her work. Both Becky and Eloise come from strong agricultural families and had plenty of time to explore the land during their youth. Today they share their love for the land and inspire the next generation to appreciate and enjoy all the natural and agricultural resources our region has to offer.

Through their work at the Hooper Institute they visit each classroom at the Walpole and North Walpole schools on a weekly basis as well as work with youth groups. Becky focuses her energy on the pre-K through fourth grade classrooms and Eloise works with the older children. They both value their relationships with

the students and the strong bonds that develop over years of weekly connections. “We get to see their interests develop and grow, it is a delight,” shared Eloise. Jackie Ronning a Walpole teacher expressed “Eloise is a wonderful resource for our community and students.

Her lessons are impeccable. They are always well planned and include some type of game, hands-on activity or sketching.” One great example of these lessons is when the sixth graders study the Connecticut River watershed. Students learn about the natural and human history of our valley and how water moves through it. The unit culminates in a two-day canoe trip on the river in June.

Becky and Eloise manage three school gardens which are the sites of many lessons in the fields of agriculture, soils and botany. They see this as a great way to mix things up and liberate students from the classroom. “Students who have never planted a seed in soil have been able to see the magic of gardening under Becky's supervision. Everyone feels at home with Becky. She is down to earth and fun to be with!” shared Jackie. By planting seeds, weeding, watering and harvest, students learn about the life cycles and care of plants. Children also prepare tasty dishes from the garden produce. In 2013 with a desire to expand these efforts Eloise partnered with the Conservation District to install a 18’x32’ high tunnel at the Walpole Elementary School to extend the gardening season. Now the school children successfully raise leafy greens for the



school cafeteria in the spring and fall each year.

For thirty six years the Hooper Institute has sponsored the Farm and Forest Project in the Walpole School. This is where they partner with community businesses to host fourth graders to learn about the Town's working landscape through visits to local farms and forest products businesses. They visit dairy, beef and horse farms, Christmas trees, a maple sugaring operation, apple orchard, woodturning shop and a post and beam business.

When the students are sent home for summer vacation Eloise and Becky continue to educate through summer camps. “Parents are guaranteed their children will come home dirty and wet each day” shared Eloise with a smile on her face as she gave me details of all the fun experiences the participating children get to have. In 2015, 110 Walpole youth took part in camps where Hooper themes of agriculture, forestry, botany,

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soils and environmental science were explored with hands-on activities. Older campers did woodworking and explored natural settings and farms in Walpole while younger campers got to participate in fun events like “Dairy Day” where they can make their own butter and ice cream.

When it seems youth have grown too old for camps the Hooper Institute has another option for them. Teenagers can apply to be part of the summer work program. This was launched by Eloise Clark in 1997 and since that time farmers have taken the role of mentor, educating youth and demonstrating a strong work ethic. “I am grateful as a parent that Eloise has devoted herself to this work. She has enabled many teens to make their first work experience positive by placing them in summer agricultural work programs through the Hooper. Most importantly, she is a wonderful human being with a kind heart,” shared Jackie Ronning. Twenty-five teenagers were involved in the summer work program in 2015. Over the span of ten weeks, they worked 1,836 hours in the community. They worked at horse, dairy and produce

farms, a vineyard and orchard, veterinary hospital, the recycling center and Walpole Community Garden. “It seemed like a great way to get kids out in the community and interested in the field of agriculture,” shared Eloise. “Some students participate to be outdoors and some are highly motivated because they want a career in agriculture.”

Eloise and Becky also manage the Farm and Forest Museum housed at the institute. The museum is in partnership with the Walpole Historic Society. Over 10,000 kids have visited the Museum since the 1980s. People from the larger community are also invited to visit the museum and learn about the history of agriculture. It is open to school groups and the general public by appointment.

Beyond their commitment to education in the classrooms, gardens, and camps they are also active community members generously giving their time as volunteers. Eloise has served on the Keene Conservation Commission, UNH Cooperative Extension Advisory Council, Cheshire County Conservation District Board, and is a founding member of the Friends of Open Space in Keene NH. Becky is currently on the UNHCE Advisory Council and has been a past member of the Westmoreland Parent Teacher Association, a Brownie Leader, and the Scenery Advisor for the Drama Club. It is with great honor that the CCD presents Eloise Clark and Becky Whippie with the 2016 Educator of the Year Award.

