

Montie Kust Receives 2nd Annual Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award

The City of Alexandria's Department of Transportation & Environmental Services, Environmental Policy Commission, and the Alexandria Sanitation Authority are proud to announce Montie Kust as the recipient of the second annual Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award.

Ms. Kust, a resident of Alexandria since 1957, has always considered her nearly three-acre property a wildlife sanctuary where she not only helped her own children appreciate the natural wonders around them, but opened up her land to educators, environmentalists, birders, and everyday citizens. In 2006, she created a conservation easement over her property in order to protect it as a nature reserve. For this contribution to Alexandria's environmental sustainability, Ms. Kust was awarded the 2006 Alexandria Conservationist of the Year by the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust. In addition, Ms. Kust hosts several public-outreach events on her property every year. These events include invasive plant-pull parties and garden tours. The tours highlight her niche gardens, which include a re-created Sweet Bay Magnolia bog, organic fruit and vegetable gardens, fern and meadow gardens, and woodland wildflower patches. Box turtles, whose numbers continue to fall throughout Virginia, thrive on Ms. Kust's land that is supported by the wild May Apples.

Ms. Kust joined numerous efforts by the Virginia Native Plant Society to control invasive species. She worked with her fellow neighbors and environmentalists to ensure that a proposed erosion-control project in the Monticello Park creek was more natural, and later planted Ferns and Tulip Tree seedlings, supplied by the Alexandria Parks Department, in the impacted area. Now 88 years old, Ms. Kust continues to work for a more ecologically healthy and beautiful world. Her dedication and service to the environment is an example for all of us.

The Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award is named in honor of Mrs. Pickering's lifelong dedication to preservation and conservation in the City of Alexandria. Frances Ellen Pickering, a long-time activist, first gained recognition for her lobbying efforts that, more than 30 years ago, helped to create the Mount Vernon Trail between Alexandria and Washington. An active preservationist and conservationist, she was deeply committed to preserving and enhancing the City's waterfront. She urged the adoption of the City's Open Space Plan, lobbied to preserve Founder's Park and protect it from high-rise development, and implemented the planting of 1,000 citizen-donated cherry trees during her tenure as chair of the Alexandria Beautification Commission. Mrs. Pickering was also elected to City Council and a member of numerous City boards and commissions, including the Alexandria Sanitation Authority.

The Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award is sponsored by the City of Alexandria's Department of Transportation & Environmental Services, Environmental Policy Commission and the Alexandria Sanitation Authority. Established in 2009, the award formally recognizes outstanding citizens, groups, organizations, or corporate neighbors who have demonstrated their commitment to protecting the natural environment and promoting environmental sustainability. The 2010 award will be presented on Saturday, April 24th at Alexandria Earth Day at Ben Brenman Park (<http://www.alexearthday.org>). Ms. Kust will have a tree planted in her honor at the event.