



## NAI Shining Star Liz Neroni

Naturalist for Preservation Parks of Delaware County

Liz's passion for connecting kids with the environment is on a par with few other informal educators. She demonstrates outstanding enthusiasm for the natural world and is gifted at passing that excitement on to adults and children alike. Her public programs never fail to impress, but even a chance meeting with her on a trail and the visitors proceed with a new appreciation for the environment through which they are walking.



Four years ago she embarked on a journey to raise awareness for the plight of the Monarch and so planned a weekend of events to focus on the butterflies. That program now draws hundreds of participants. She also involves several local elementary schoolteachers whose students search for and foster Monarch caterpillars in their classrooms. They are taught not only how to care for their caterpillars but how to tag the adult butterflies before they release them for their flight to Mexico.

Some local students have been so influenced by the program they approached their local municipal authorities to change an ordinance that had listed milkweed (the Monarch caterpillar's host plant) as a "noxious weed" and had banned it from local lawns. They successfully brought about the change!

In an effort to educate more of the public about the value of native plants, Liz took on the considerable task of establishing native plants in several large concrete sidewalk planters. She included signs explaining the benefits of "going native!" Her efforts were recognized when the group honored her with an award. Other Ohio 'Mainstreet Associations' have taken notice and are now incorporating natives into their urban landscapes.

Most recently, recognizing a growing trend, Liz presented the idea of establishing 'natural play areas' within the parks. She designed spaces equipped with trunks and logs and tunnels for climbing and balancing. She worked closely with our parks operations technicians to create the areas. The natural play areas have proven so popular with the kids that there are plans to expand them.

*Nominated by Robin Mayes, Farm Educator for Gallant Farm of Preservation Parks.*