

## **Roy Alexander wins Mecklenburg County's 2009 Conservation Award**



Roy advocates the protection of West Branch Wetland



Roy enjoys Catawba Wildflower Glen with tour participants Hayden Boyd and Lacy Dick



Roy examines a pink lady slipper at Redlair

Roy Alexander is dedicated to protecting natural habitats and has carried out that vision most recently as Executive Director of the DLC. Since 2003, he has taken on a major challenge: How to help preserve an important wetland along the West Branch of the Rocky River. His success in those efforts earned him Mecklenburg County's 2009 Urban Conservation Award.

Mecklenburg Soil & Water Conservation honored Mr. Alexander at a May 7, 2009 dinner in Charlotte. The award is sponsored by the North Carolina Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts and goes to an individual or organization for conservation efforts in an urban setting. Mr. Alexander was nominated by Michael Kirschman, Division Director of Nature Preserves & Natural Resources for Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation.

The 23-acre wetland area off Davidson-Concord Road east of town was endangered by development. Biologists who studied the area determined it was ecologically significant as a habitat for plants and wildlife. But an upland area near the wetland was slated to be developed as a neighborhood of luxury homes.

Mr. Alexander was involved in negotiations with the developer of Summer's Walk as well as with town and county officials about how to ensure the survival of the

wetland. Before the county stepped in last year, the conservancy had begun fund-raising and was working with the town of Davidson trying to figure out how they might purchase the property.

"A host of individuals and organizations were instrumental in the preservation of this site, all coordinated by Roy Alexander," the nomination said. They included Davidson College and biologist Michael Dorcas, the town of Davidson planning staff, Mecklenburg County Real Estate Services, Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation, and various interested public and organizations, including NC Wildlife Federation, Mr. Kirschman said.

Mr. Alexander, a 1964 Davidson College graduate, came to Davidson Lands Conservancy after working 20 years at the Discovery Place science museum in Charlotte, where he was director of the rain forest, aquatics, and earth sciences. He had been a board member of the conservancy and jumped at the chance to become the organization's first executive director. Since then, he has been an active participant in town planning meetings, town board sessions, meetings with developers, and even helping to build a shed for the weekly Davidson Farmers' Market.



Roy and Sterling Martin build a shed for the Farmers' Market

He said this week the award really honors the work of a group of people who managed to pull off the project at just the right time. "It was just an incredibly fortunate window of time we were working on it," Mr. Alexander said. "The real estate market was causing the developer to be willing to sell. And the county was still in a position to buy," having money from a bond issue previously approved by voters.

In September 2008, Mecklenburg County purchased the 23 acres of wetland and 67 acres of bordering upland habitat, designating it as the West Branch Nature Preserve. This ensures the natural area will be preserved. Mecklenburg County Park & Recreation proposes to build a nature center on the site to give the public access to an important part of the region's natural heritage.

Adapted from [www.davidsonnews.net](http://www.davidsonnews.net)