

The Greensboro Public Library's Thomas Berry Award

Brief History

by Peggy Whalen-Levitt

Margaret Berry, sister of Thomas Berry, initiated the first Thomas Berry Award in partnership with the Greensboro Public Library in April 2005.

The Greensboro Public Library presented the first Thomas Berry Award at a ceremony that took place at the Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch Library with Mary Evelyn Tucker as speaker and **Charlie Headington** as award recipient, Professor of Religion at UNCG and Master Permaculture Gardener.

The second Thomas Berry Award ceremony took place on November 10, 2007 at the Hannah Brown Finch Memorial Chapel at Greensboro College with Peter Berry performing The Universe Story and **The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World** as award recipient. Pricey Harrison made a surprise appearance at this event to award Thomas the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the state's highest civilian award.

The third Thomas Berry Award ceremony took place on November 11, 2011 at the Frank Family Science Center at Guilford College with a premiere screening of the film "Journey of the Universe: An Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth and Human Transformation" and talks by David Schenck and Carolyn Toben with **Valerie Vickers**, eco-educator, as award recipient.

The fourth Thomas Berry Award ceremony took place at the Greensboro Historical Museum on November 9, 2012 with a showing of the film "Thomas Berry: The Great Story" and a Native American flute performance by Cuseami. **Nelson and Elaine Stover** were the award recipients for their work with Environmental Greensboro and Green Schemes.

The fifth Thomas Berry Award ceremony took place at the Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch Library on November 6, 2014 and included book talks by local authors influenced by Thomas Berry's vision: Nelson Stover, *Through Three Portals*, John Cock, *Our Universal Spirit Journey*, Carolyn Toben, *Recovering A Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* and Peggy Whalen-Levitt, *Only the Sacred: Transforming Education in the 21st Century*. There was also a soundscape, "The Dream of the Turtle Falling Asleep" by William Hueholt and Kelsey Paquin. The award recipient for 2014 was **Sarah B. Dorsey**, for her creation of a sustainability film series at UNCG.

The sixth Thomas Berry Award ceremony took place at the Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch Library on November 6, 2016. Sarah Dorsey gave a talk and there were two award recipients: (1) **Andrew Levitt**, for his performance piece "The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry," and his book *All the Scattered Leaves of the Universe: Journey and Vision in Dante's Divine Comedy and the Work of Thomas Berry* and (2) **Randall Romey**, for his work with the beautification of Greensboro as a landscape architect.

Assistant Director Steve Sumerford presented the award on behalf of the Greensboro Public Library at the first four ceremonies and Jon Bradsher, new Assistant Director, presented the fifth. Melanie Buckingham, Environmental Librarian at the Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch Library presented the sixth award. Committees formed in partnership with the Greensboro Public Library to plan the ceremonies as meaningful contexts for remembering Thomas Berry.

The planning committee for the 2011 Award included:

Margaret Berry
Melanie Buckingham, Greensboro Public Library
Ty Buckner, Guilford College
Kevin Redding, Piedmont Land Conservancy
Ann Berry Somers, UNC Greensboro
Suzanne Sullivan, Guilford College
Steven Sumerford, Greensboro Public Library
Carolyn Toben, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
Kathy Treanor, Piedmont Land Conservancy
Peggy Whalen-Levitt, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
Valerie Vickers, Environmental Stewardship Greensboro

The planning committee for the 2012 Award included:

Margaret Berry
Melanie Buckingham, Greensboro Public Library
Carol Hart, Greensboro Historical Museum
Corinne Berry Jones, niece of Thomas Berry
Ann Berry Somers, Biology Department, UNCG
Steven Sumerford, Greensboro Public Library
Carolyn Toben, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
Peggy Whalen-Levitt, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
Valerie Vickers, Environmental Stewardship Greensboro

The planning committee for the 2014 Award included:

Martha Hoekstra, Greater Kirkwood Community
Anne Hummel, Greater Kirkwood Community
Bill McNeil, Environmental Stewardship Greensboro
Ann Berry Somers, Biology Department, UNCG
Nelson Stover, Emerging Ecology
Peggy Whalen-Levitt, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

The planning committee for the 2016 Award included past award recipients:

Margaret Berry
Melanie Buckingham, Greensboro Public Library
Sarah Dorsey, Music Librarian, UNCG
Ann Berry Somers, Biology Department, UNCG

Nelson and Elaine Stover, Emerging Ecology & Green Schemes
Carolyn Toben, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary
Val Vickers, Eco-educator
Peggy Whalen-Levitt, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World

In years past, the nomination process for the award included the following announcement and call for nominations from the Greensboro Public Library:

The Thomas Berry Award recognizes an individual or organization that has demonstrated a sustained effort to implement environmental programs based on the life and writings of Greensboro native Thomas Berry. This award, presented, by the Greensboro Public Library, honors the legacy of one of Greensboro's most influential authors. His works have notably influenced the intellectual/spiritual history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nominations are open until _____. Nominees must be residents of Guilford County. Nomination applications are available by emailing the Assistant Director of the Library.

In 2016, the nomination announcement was changed to read:

The Thomas Berry Award recognizes an individual or organization engaged in imagining the human-Earth relationship through scholarship, writing, poetry, the arts or environmental programs. This award, presented triennially by the Greensboro Public Library, honors the legacy of one of Greensboro's most influential authors. His works have notably influenced the intellectual/spiritual history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Residents of Guilford County are eligible for the award. Nominations are open until August 15, 2018. The award recipient will be notified by September 15, 2018. The 2018 award ceremony will be held at the Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch Library in the afternoon of November 11, 2018.