



Press Release

Virginia Outdoor Writers Association/Dominion 2012-13 Collegiate Undergraduate Writing Contest Winners Announced

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Winners of the VOWA (*Virginia Outdoor Writers Association*)/Dominion 2012-2013 Annual Collegiate Undergraduate Writing Contest were announced on March 16, 2013 at the organization's Annual Meeting held in the beautiful Staunton, Augusta, Waynesboro region of the Shenandoah Valley. There, in the gracious Stonewall Jackson Hotel and Conference Center three Virginia Tech women, all studying in VT's Natural Resource Department, made an historic sweep of the 3 top contest prizes. The theme for this year's contest was a memorable outdoor experience or special interest.

First Place Winner, receiving a \$250 cash prize donated by Dominion, **Zoe Carroll**, is a junior studying Wildlife Science hailing from Earlysville VA. Her winning essay entitled Getting the Bird Flu recounts her volunteer intern experiences working with baby birds at a wildlife rehabilitation center. "Okay," she writes, "so it wasn't actually the one that makes people ill, but rather the one that inspires people to the point of maybe even becoming ornithologists." With interests in mammals, birds, and marsupials, Zoe looks forward to graduate school after completing her BS and would ideally love to work as a researcher or a biologist for the National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, or the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

The second place winner, claiming a \$150 cash prize donated by Dominion, **Leslie Beard** is also a VT junior majoring in Natural Resources Conservation with a focus in Recreation Management. Leslie, who resides in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, credits her love of nature to her Aunt Claudia, an outdoorsy woman who provided her with a grand introduction to the outdoors through a trip to Lake Tahoe. Leslie's essay, To Life, Outside details her Tahoe adventures and is dedicated to her Aunt who died of cancer in September of 2012. Leslie's goals

are “not set in stone yet, but I know that I will enjoy nature in its primal state and I aim to encourage and help others do the same throughout my lifetime.”

This year a new award for the best entry relating specifically to the Virginia was initiated by *Cooperative Living Magazine* which is published by the Virginia, Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives (VMDAEC). The winner of this *Cooperative Living Magazine* Award, **Whitney Clark** received \$100 and will have her entry, Knowing the Knob, published in *Cooperative Living Magazine*. Whitney, a senior who will graduate in May with a BS in Natural Resource Conservation and a minor in Forestry, writes about her adventures in the wind and rain to climb atop McAfee’s Knob, a remote location outside Blacksburg Virginia along the Appalachian Trail. Originally from Smithsburg MD, Whitney’s career goals are to work in the wildlife conservation field; her story and photographs will charm *Cooperative Living* readers.

Zoe, Leslie, and Whitney read their winning essays to a group of 65 members and guests gathered at a very special joint conference and annual meeting of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association (VOWA) with the Mason-Dixon Outdoor Writers Association (M-DOWA representing 5 surrounding Mid-Atlantic States) – some of the best writers on the East Coast! A celebratory lunch was graciously provided for all by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). Mark Taylor, President of the Outdoor Writers of America (OWAA), the national writers organization was among the guests and congratulated the winners and gave them an OWAA student membership. Judges for the contest were *Cooperative Living Magazine* editors Richard Johnstone and Bill Sherrod, and Freelance Writer Marika Byrd of Glen Allen VA.

VOWA is very proud of these young writers, future stewards of our precious outdoors, who deeply touched all present with their writing; and most grateful to our judges, to Dominion, *Cooperative Living Magazine*, NSSF, and the VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Outdoor Report in which our 1st, 2nd place and other top entries will be published for helping us to make this contest and celebration of our winners possible. Thanks also go to the Greater Augusta Regional Tourism, Staunton Convention and Visitors Bureau, and Waynesboro Department of Tourism for enabling us to have such a fabulous venue to honor these students in a magnificent part of Virginia.

The *Virginia Outdoor Writers Association, Inc.* represents a coalition of writers, photographers, and video/film producers who inform various media on the out-of-doors, its enjoyment, and conservation. Through this association, VOWA members strive to improve themselves in their craft and increase their knowledge and understanding of the outdoors. Anyone who is interested in reading the winning entries or entering the annual contest can access that information at www.vowa.org.