

You are here: [Home](#) > **VT Staff Employee of the Week**

## Virginia Tech Staff Employee of the Week

August 8, 2006

**Name:** 4-H Virtual Forest Development Team

Classified Staff Members:

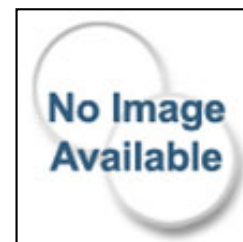
Carl Este, AHNR Information Technology

Gabrielle Amos Minnich, University Relations Visual & Broadcast Communications

Joshua Napier, University Relations Visual & Broadcast Communications

Elaine Oliver, AHNR Information Technology

Karen Cronin (retired), University Relations Visual & Broadcast Communications



**Nominated For:** Governor's Award for Innovation, and Teamwork 2005

**Nominated By:** James E. Johnson, Natural Resources

### Summary

Despite the importance of forests to Virginia's citizens, forest management is not well understood by much of the general public. Key informant groups composed of foresters and forest landowners have continually expressed concern that "what is taught in the schools" about forestry and natural resources is often based on emotion and misinformation rather than science. With 75 percent of the US population located in urban areas and the majority of today's youth being raised without a connection to the land, the availability of science-based natural resources educational material is critical.

One way to introduce youth to forestry is to build a virtual environment that exposes students to forest management activities. In fact, research shows that 65 percent of children aged 3 to 17 live in homes with computers. Between home and school, 91 percent of 6 to 17-year-old youth have access to the internet. While not a substitute for hands-on field experience, the worldwide web is a useful medium to present a variety of materials to youth. With this in mind, a team of foresters, youth development specialists, and technology experts from Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia Tech developed the 4-H Virtual Forest.

Described as the premier free forestry and natural resources software available on the web today, the 4-H Virtual Forest website, <http://www.ext.vt.edu/resources/4h/virtualforest/>, includes seven learning modules that cover the following subjects: land-use management, renewable resources, photosynthesis, tree identification, old-field succession, tree measurements, and timber harvesting. A wide variety of technology was used to create the final project. Modules are animated, colorful, and contain a variety of sounds and navigation elements. In addition, most of the modules contain interactive learning activities, where youth take a quiz, enter data, create a reaction, etc., to reinforce concepts learned in the module. The 4-H virtual forest is flexible enough to be used in a variety of ways, such as in the computer lab, presented to a classroom using an LCD projector, or given as homework.

Although designed with Virginia's youth in mind, 4-H Virtual Forest is receiving national and international exposure. More than 9,500 teachers and extension personnel have received notice of 4-H Virtual Forest via printed and on-line newsletters, and 25,000 full-color, animated bookmarks were printed and distributed to Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H agents along with a cover letter and CD.

Faculty Team Members included:

Lex Bruce, Agriculture & Extension Education

Joe Hunnings, 4-H/Youth Development

Jeff Kirwan, Forestry

Jason Fisher, AHNHR Information Technology, Halifax County

Daniel L. Goerlich, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Halifax County

Jim Willis, ANR/Natural Resources, Russell County

About the ["Staff Employee of the Week"](#) Program

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