

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Missoula-based non-profit published in prestigious magazine

ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL FEATURED IN CONDÉ NAST WORLD TRAVELER

SEPTEMBER 4, 2009 MISSOULA – ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL (EPI) WON AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEST FOR SUBMITTING ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE TRAVEL AMONG CITIZENS ALL OVER THE WORLD. THROUGH ASHOKA CHANGEMAKERS AND CONDÉ NAST, THE WORLD TRAVELER CHALLENGE WAS CREATED IN ORDER TO FIND WAYS TO “OPEN THE JOYS AND BENEFITS OF TRAVEL [...] TO THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DISCOURAGED OR RESTRICTED FROM EXPLORING AND CONNECTING TO THE WORLD.”

ECOLOGY PROJECT INTERNATIONAL (EPI) IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO DEVELOPING PLACE-BASED, ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN LOCAL EXPERTS AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO ADDRESS CRITICAL CONSERVATION ISSUES. LAUNCHED IN 2000, EPI’S VISION IS TO CREATE AN ECOLOGICALLY LITERATE SOCIETY IN WHICH THE WORLD’S YOUTH ARE EMPOWERED TO TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN CONSERVATION. SINCE ITS INCEPTION, OVER 5,000 PEOPLE HAVE PARTICIPATED IN FIELD PROGRAMS IN FOUR ECOLOGICALLY VITAL LOCATIONS – THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF COSTA RICA, THE GALAPAGOS ISLANDS, THE SEA OF CORTEZ IN MEXICO, AND THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM (GYE).

WHILE LIVING IN COSTA RICA DURING THE 1990S, EPI CO-FOUNDERS SCOTT PANKRATZ AND JULIE OSBORN RECOGNIZED THAT DESPITE THE AMPLE PRESENCE OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH TEAMS AND PROLIFIC SCIENTIFIC STUDIES, MANY CRITICAL HABITATS AND SPECIES CONTINUED TO DECLINE. SEA TURTLE EGGS WERE SOLD AT LOCAL MARKETS AND PILES OF TRASH WASHED UP ON THE BEACH DURING RAINSTORMS. ALMOST ALL OF THE RESEARCHERS THEY INTERACTED WITH WERE FOREIGNERS, AND VERY FEW SPOKE ANY SPANISH.

THE GULF BETWEEN LOCAL PEOPLE AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY WAS EXPANSIVE. SCOTT HAD RECENTLY FINISHED A GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION AT THE TETON SCIENCE SCHOOL IN WYOMING, AND JULIE HAD COMPLETED HER GRADUATE WORK IN BIOLOGY AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY. JULIE AND SCOTT COMBINED THEIR PEDAGOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC EXPERTISE IN 1998 AND BEGAN FORMULATING A PLAN TO PARTNER LOCAL STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES WITH SCIENTISTS WORKING ON CRITICAL CONSERVATION ISSUES.

TODAY, TWO-THIRDS OF ALL EPI’S PARTICIPANTS ARE LOCAL, LEARNING OF THE ECOLOGY OF THEIR BACKYARD. THE REMAINING ONE-THIRD ARRIVES FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO

MEET AND COLLABORATE WITH THEIR INTERNATIONAL PEERS. THESE STUDENTS COLLABORATE WITH PROFESSIONAL SCIENTISTS ON REAL-WORLD CONSERVATION PROJECTS, AND THROUGH THIS PROCESS, COME TO UNDERSTAND ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES. EPI PROGRAMS COMPLIMENT CLASSROOM-BASED THEORY AND CURRICULUM TO ENHANCE SCIENTIFIC LEARNING AND LITERACY.

EPI'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ENHANCES CONSERVATION THROUGH THE CREATION OF A SCIENTIFICALLY LITERATE PUBLIC WITH DIRECT EXPERIENCE IN NATURE, AND A POPULACE THAT IS BETTER EQUIPPED TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT NATURAL RESOURCES IMPORTANT TO THEIR COMMUNITY'S ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH.

THE MAJORITY OF EPI'S STUDENTS COME FROM FINANCIALLY DESTITUTE FAMILIES, WITH LITTLE CHANCE TO TRAVEL INTERNATIONALLY, OR EVEN EXPLORE BEYOND THEIR COMMUNITIES. EPI'S PROGRAMS CREATE GLOBAL CITIZENS BY FOSTERING COOPERATION BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL, AND REGIONAL STUDENTS THROUGH RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE. IN AUGUST, A GROUP OF STUDENTS AND TWO TEACHERS FROM COSTA RICA PARTICIPATED IN EPI'S YELLOWSTONE ECOLOGY PROGRAM, INTERACTING WITH MISSOULA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, WHILE EXPLORING THE GREATER YELLOWSTONE ECOSYSTEM AND LEARNING ABOUT THE GREAT PREDATORS OF THE AREA, DOWN TO NATIVE PLANTS AND TREES.

DESPITE THE DOWNTURN IN THE ECONOMY, EPI'S PROGRAMS CONTINUE TO BE IN HIGH DEMAND. TO MAKE ROOM FOR THEIR GROWING ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOP INTO A RESOURCE FOR THE VIBRANT CONSERVATION EDUCATION NETWORK THAT EXISTS IN MISSOULA, EPI RECENTLY PURCHASED AND MOVED INTO THE HISTORIC SWIFT BUILDING, TWO BLOCKS EAST OF THE MISSOULIAN. IN CELEBRATION OF THIS MOMENTOUS STEP, EPI WILL BE HOSTING A COMMUNITY "FIESTA" ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17TH. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EPI'S WORK IN MISSOULA AND ABROAD, CALL (406) 721-8784 OR EMAIL EPI AT INFO@ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG. MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT [HTTP://WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG](http://WWW.ECOLOGYPROJECT.ORG).

EPI WILL BE FEATURED IN THE READER'S CHOICE ISSUE OF CONDÉ NAST WORLD TRAVELER IN NOVEMBER. EPI'S WINNING ENTRY, "SAVE WORLD BIODIVERSITY THROUGH TRAVEL," IS AVAILABLE ONLINE AT [HTTP://WWW.CHANGEMAKERS.COM/EN-US/CONDENASTTRAVELER/CONNECT](http://WWW.CHANGEMAKERS.COM/EN-US/CONDENASTTRAVELER/CONNECT).

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