

2004 Norman A. Berg Conservation Legacy Award Recipient

Dan Durett

Dan Durett has had a distinguished career breaking new ground in both cultural and natural resource conservation in major urban centers, including Atlanta, Baltimore, Nashville, and Washington, DC. Dedicated to innovation, Durett has held increasingly responsible positions with organizations as diverse as the National Park Service, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, The United Negro College Fund, and currently with the National Council for Science and the Environment. He is the founder of Danhiko International, a private sector initiative to advance communication among scientists of African heritage and descent.

Dan Durett was born on September 4, 1950, in Brooklyn, New York, and was raised in the Marcy Projects public housing development. As President of his Senior Class at Eastern District High School he received the New York Daily News' John F. Kennedy Citizenship Award (1968). He received his B.A. from the State University of New York at Binghamton, Harpur College (now Binghamton University). In 1973 Atlanta University awarded him an M.A. Degree in History. Durett completed post-graduate studies in city planning theory, urban history, and African-American Studies at Emory University in Atlanta.

Durett's early experiences in conservation began in 1975 when the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office asked him to complete the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Landmark Nomination and the Atlanta University National Register Historic District Nomination. His career in cultural and natural resource conservation continued throughout the 1980s when Baltimore's Department of Recreation and Parks and the Parks & People Foundation called on him to assist in leveraging public/private support for revitalizing the city's park and recreation resources. This included writing The Druid Hill Park Impact Study, which described the history and evolution of Baltimore's first, 19th century urban landscape park. His commitment to expanding the prominence of natural resource conservation in secondary and post-secondary education in the minority community is evidenced by his work with the Howard University's School of Human Ecology's nascent Department of Environmental Sciences. He identified approaches for incorporating cultural and natural resource management techniques into training curriculum and academic course schedules for both secondary and post-secondary schools and colleges.

In February 1978 he became Technical Preservation Historian to the National Park Service's Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS). After leaving the HCRS he joined the National Trust for Historic Preservation where he established the Minority Heritage Initiative to introduce diversity into the organization's outreach efforts.

In 1995 he was selected by the United Negro College Fund to join its Fairfax, Virginia headquarters staff. Dan Durett established the Department of Environmental Education Programs (DEEP). DEEP's initial program focus was a \$5 million EPA-funded Program for Environmental Justice Education and Research (PEJER) that empowered more than 75% of UNCF's sister institutions to engage in environmental equity activities both on campuses and in their neighboring communities.

Over the next three years, he proved himself as an "environmental diplomat" and forged new partnerships between the UNCF and national conservation and environmental education organizations. Among these partnerships the following four are outstanding examples of his ability to bridge distances between individuals, organizations, and the public and private sectors.

The CSX Scholars Program (1998) where he played a critical role in bringing together the CEOs of three nationally recognized educational, conservation, and corporate entities --- UNCF's William H. Gray, II, I) the National Audubon Society's John Flicker and current Treasury Secretary John Snow, then President of the CSX Corporation. The CSX Corporation committed \$1.5 million to the initiative. Through this program exceptional students pursuing degrees with an environmental emphasis at member institutions of UNCF and other targeted historically black colleges and universities received full one-year renewable scholarships and paid summer internships at CSX and Audubon.

The Strategies For Ecology Education, Development And Sustainability (SEEDS) funded by the Mellon Foundation, in partnership with Ecological Society of America (ESA) -began in 1996 as a collaborative effort to work towards increasing the number of minorities in the field of ecology. Program was initiated when Dan Durett from the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) and Dr. Alan R. Berkowitz (representing both the ESA and the Institute of Ecosystem Studies) joined forces in 1996 to increase the number of minorities in ecology. This was one of the first collaborative efforts between a scientific professional society and a consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The program has been tremendously successful in establishing or supporting ecology programs at 10 HBCUs, Dillard University, and Oakwood College, Johnson C. Smith University, Tuskegee University, Wiley College recruiting a new group of minority students into ecology graduate programs and careers, developing faculty interest, and giving purpose and direction to the work of the ESA in education and diversity issues. SEEDS, has been shown to be an effective model for stimulating undergraduate student's interest in pursuing ecology careers, in enhancing faculty development, in creating new ecology offerings, and in increasing cultural diversity within the ESA. Over 18 ESA Chapters have been established at MSIs among which are Alabama A&M University, Normal, AL; College of Menominee Nation, Keshena, WI; Florida A&M University, North Carolina A&T, Greensboro, NC; Northwest Indian College, Bellingham, WA; Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT; Greensboro, NC and Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, ND.

The Texas Consortium for Water Quality Research, (TCWQR) funded by the Huston Endowment in 1997 created a partnership among the four UNCF Texas-based institutions: Huston-Tillotson College, Austin, TX; Jarvis Christian College, Hawkins, TX; Paul Quinn College, Dallas TX; and Wiley College, Marshall, TX. Dr. Alexandrine Randriamahefa (Wiley College) and Dr. Godwin Mbamalu, (Benedict College) served as lead principal investigator and program evaluator respectively. TCWQR focused on developing pioneering science strategies in the area of water quality management in the largely rural East Texas region. where minorities comprise more than 38% of the population and where the per capita income was slightly above \$12,000 annually.

The Building Environmental Stewardship (BES), (1997) www.uncfsp.org/bes/about.asp funded by the Department of Energy with Second Nature (\$1,775,000) was a five-year initiative proposed by Dan Durett, and Anthony D. Cortes. A key focus of BES was to bring the presence and contributions of UNCF's sister institutions into Second Nature's existing efforts to integrate sustainability concepts, such as social justice and environmental health, into all aspects of learning on college and university campuses. BES was built around three integral components: Education for Sustainability Training, Technical Assistance, and Networking. BES also expanded the reach of partnerships and consortia of higher education institutions concerned with environmental sustainability and equity issues. An underlying aspect of the BES philosophy was rooted in challenging the way that people think about, value, interact and operate with each other and the natural world.

Since 1992, Dan Durett has worked with the NCSE (formerly the Committee for the National Institute for the Developed and coordinated environmental science with the advocates and activists of the environmental equity and justice movements, forging understanding and cooperation to tackle the threats to our shared environment. Currently, he directs the Minority Programs Office of the National Council for Science and the Environment (NCSE). The NCSE's mission is to improve the scientific basis for environmental decision-making. As Director for Minority Programs, Durett works to ensure that the voices of communities of color are heard throughout the science community and to assure that Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are recognized for their past and present contributions in the fields of research and education, and for connecting conservation and environmental science to community needs.

Dan Durett brought his considerable expertise in bridging the interests of the natural and the cultural resource communities to the Biodiversity Education Summit I, held at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City, in June 1998. The summit included representatives from the World Wildlife Fund's environmental education program, the National Center for Science, Literacy, Education, and Technology and the AMNH's Center for Biodiversity and Conservation and the Chicago Field Museum.

More recently, Durett has facilitated new partnerships between federal agencies and minority scientists, educators, and outreach specialists located at Minority Serving Institutions and elsewhere to meet the conservation management, environmental

science and technology missions. Examples of his recent written work in this area include:

- The EPA/ORD Postdoctoral Fellowship Program: An Assessment of the Recruitment and Retention of Women and Minorities. A Report to the Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development December 2003.
- Strategies To Increase The Role Of Minority Serving Institutions As Partners In Meeting The Science And Technology Goals Of The Natural Resources Conservation Service. A Report to the Natural Resources Conservation Service February 2003.
- Leadership for the Scientific Dimension of Environmental Justice A Report to the Ford Foundation June 2002.

Future initiatives Durett is engaged with include international outreach to link the many individuals, organizations, and colleges and universities he has worked with over the years with their peers in developing countries. Other areas of interest include addressing the educational enhancement of under-represented populations in science and developing strategies to address the human capital needs of government and private sector entities for highly trained minority scientists. A volunteer mentor to students at Newark, New Jersey's Barringer High School, Durett is committed to passing his experience on to the next generation of environmental leaders.