

## BRITA HAMPTON

### This Teacher Lady's Crazy about Promoting Responsible Living during Our Time on This Planet

By Victoria Bourne | The Virginian Pilot  
Jul 10, 2008; Section: Beacon; Page: TXBE3

Brita Hampton's car says a lot about her. But when she's not driving the hybrid with the personalized plates, she's walking or biking the one mile from her home to Star of the Sea Catholic School, where she teaches middle-school science.

Environmental awareness influences her habits at home and at school. Her husband jokingly calls her "that crazy lady that takes bags to the grocery store," she said, and her students noticed when she switched from bottled to tap water.

She said she doesn't mind being remembered for the "crazy" things she does to reduce her impact on the planet.

"I'm accountable to myself," she said. "When I meet my Creator and she asks me what I did to make a difference, I can say, 'I tried.'"

Hampton, who is also Star of the Sea's science coordinator, uses simple techniques to reduce, reuse and recycle in the classroom, such as encouraging students to use both sides of a sheet of paper for notes and copies.

More complex projects and activities, such as the one that required eighth-graders to collect the trash they produced over a number of days, also illustrate the need for environmental awareness.

Portions of her lesson plans incorporate Project Learning Tree supplemental material, which Hampton said helps her get the science curriculum across in an engaging way, reinforcing concepts she teaches in class through hands-on activities, sometimes outdoors.

Project Learning Tree is the environmental education program of the American Forest

Foundation. In Virginia, it is sponsored by the Department of Forestry, Virginia Forestry Association and Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources.

For her exceptional use of the program's material, her own teaching skills and commitment to environmental education, Hampton was one of five people selected nationwide as Project Learning Tree's 2008 Outstanding Educator of the Year.



STEPHANIE OBERLANDER | SPECIAL TO THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT

**Number of years at Star of the Sea Catholic School** Five

**What do you enjoy most about being a science teacher?** Challenging what students think they know about science, scientific concepts, ideas, etc.

**What do you enjoy least?** Needless paperwork

**Describe the first time you became aware of the impact your actions have on the environment** (During a) 1985 summer vacation with my family – it seemed like we visited every national park west of the Mississippi. I was struck by the size, beauty and majesty of each park and came to the realization that the Creator put us here to protect places like these. I realized that I was

responsible for the area, in which I lived, (that) my choices and actions had consequences for my local environment as well as the entire world, (and) I better start doing the right thing as soon as possible.

**Why is environmental education important?**

Because the environment in which one lives has a direct effect on every organism within it, including humans. If the environment is healthy and productive, then life as we know it can thrive. If the environment is polluted, harmful and toxic, then life as we know it won't last long.

**What kinds of teaching resources does**

**Project Learning Tree provide?** The PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide (a huge collection of 96 hands-on, thought-provoking activities); Energy & Society program kit (a fun, goofy DVD and guide that exposes students to the various energy resources we use every day); Secondary Modules (more content-driven activities geared toward high school students); as well as professional development opportunities .

**Your celebrity twin separated at birth** Jane Hathaway from "The Beverly Hillbillies"

**What was your childhood ambition?** To become a member of the Poor Clares (currently of Barhamsville, V a.), a cloistered, contemplative religious order for women.

**Top three books** "The Dance of the Dissident Daughter," Sue Monk Kidd; "Failure is Impossible: Susan B. Anthony in Her Own Words," Lynn Sherr; "Reason for Hope: A

Spiritual Journey," Jane Goodall and Phillip Berman

**If I won \$10 million,** I would pay off family debt and medical bills, and then set up an organization that provides funds for teachers to participate in quality professional development programs.

**Describe yourself in two words** Passionate and spiritual

**Guilty pleasure** Sleeping in

**Favorite movie** "Mary Poppins"

**Favorite restaurant** Mojito Cafe at the Oceanfront

**Of what achievements are you most proud?** Completing my master's degree and finishing my first half marathon

**If you could choose your theme song, what would it be?** "Unwritten," Natasha Bedingfield

**If I were a super hero,** I'd be Big B, and I'd have the power to convince everyone to do their part to save the planet.

**What skills do you hope to impart to your students to help them become responsible environmental decision makers?** Creative thinking, problem solving and persistence. I want them to know they can and do make a difference; everyone has a part to play and it is up to them to choose to do so.