



United States Department of Agriculture

*Natural Resources Conservation Service Earth Team*

# Volunteer Showcase

## ***Student Searching for Thesis Project Leads to 24 Years as Earth Team Volunteer***

Linda Johnson, a student at the University of West Florida, was looking for a thesis project when she walked into the Natural Resources Conservation Service office in Crestview, Fla. 24 years ago. And District Conservationist Darryl Williams needed her help.

He was a one-person staff facing deadlines for the mapping and research needed to fund repairs on the West Baker Gully in Okaloosa County. A tropical storm had carved out the gully that blocked access to a neighborhood, destroyed a wetland and dumped sediment into Blackwater River and Perdido Bay.

Williams signed Johnson as an Earth Team volunteer. She mapped the West Baker Gully project for her degree in environmental resource management. The project was funded and the repairs were made. Two graduate degrees later, Johnson, now a PhD, still volunteers for NRCS and for the Yellow Rivers Soil and Water Conservation District as a district supervisor, a state/county-elected official.

With a variety of resource concerns affecting northern and southern Okaloosa County, and a growing urban population, Johnson says natural resource sustainability is more important than ever. In the north, farmers raise row crops and work with NRCS to resolve erosion problems; while

in the south, where urban areas are located along beaches, the agency works with partners to protect coastal dunes.

Johnson's favorite memory is helping hundreds of schoolchildren plant sea oats to stabilize dunes along Beasley Park in the early 1990s. Those sea oats held those dunes through hurricanes Opal, Erin, and Ivan and tropical storm Alberto. "This is why I've done this for 20-plus years: because it helps everyone," said Johnson.

Williams recognized Johnson's service during National Volunteer Week by stating, "For over 20 years you have volunteered your time and personal resources for the betterment of our natural resources within Okaloosa County and those you come in contact with daily. Thank you!"



*Linda Johnson*



*Stabilizing dunes by planting sea oats.*

The Earth Team is the volunteer component of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. If you are interested in volunteering, contact the National Earth Team Office at 888-526-3227 or visit:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/EarthTeam>

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