

REAL WOMEN PROFILE

BY TIFFANY BERTSCH

Laurina Lyle educates the world about water through Project WET

Laurina Lyle has always been interested in the environment. From her studies in school, to her current position as executive director and national network coordinator of Project WET U.S.A., Lyle said she has always strived to remain environmentally active. Lyle, however, never imagined that she would end up directing her environmental interests toward water.

In college, Lyle worked on her first Ph.D. in plant taxonomy and said she had every

BALANCE: What do you consider your greatest strength?

BALANCE: What do you consider your greatest weakness?

LL: These two questions have the same answer, which is “living outside the box.” My childhood was quite exceptional. My father was in the Air Force and we had the privilege to travel the world — England, Germany and Turkey are a few countries we lived in. A new location meant new things to learn and explore. I’d recognized early on that one’s quality of life was an accident of birth. Hence, humans in general adopt the conventions of wherever they live. The saying, “When in Rome do as the Romans” means that to fit in you have to act like everyone else. I never had that pressure. The strength it gave me is my ability to see the world through an unfiltered lens — a panoramic view. This fuels my creativity and gives me vision that I have found to be an unusual characteristic. The weakness of this that I have to work hard to “fit in” when necessary. Sometimes I’m a little too outside the box and that can be a barrier.

BALANCE: Who are your heroes/role models?

LL: The amazing people I work with at the Project WET Foundation. Our CEO, Dennis Nelson, has been my hero for the past 15 years since I met him. It was his vision to produce Project WET. He saw the necessity for water education, starting with a small pilot project in North Dakota to today an international program in 55 counties. It is because of him, that I have the opportunity to do what I do. I want to do that too. I want to increase the capacity of the people around me to do good work.

BALANCE: What’s your favorite book?

LL: I’m a bookworm, so it’s usually the current book I’m reading. If a book can keep my attention for 50 pages then it’s my current favorite. A favorite author is William Faulkner. But if I were snowed in for months, I could stay sane with a copy of *Grimm’s Fairytales* or *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*.

BALANCE: What is the key to balancing your roles in personal, family, career and health matters?

LL: I think the key is that these are all aligned to being a caring person and using your time wisely. Time is the currency of our lives. I love the quote, “Time is something we never get enough of.” So taking care of your body, mind, and spirit is the best thing you can do to have more time on this wonderful earth. Caring for and spending time with your family is the best gift you can give of yourself.

Your career should be worthy of your time. Why waste a minute on something that isn’t going in the direction you have set out for yourself? If you are waiting tables at a restaurant (as I did all through my high school and undergraduate years), ask yourself, “How can this experience help my career?” Learning how to keep a customer happy is a great skill to have and a hard one to earn.

As for health, my tagline is “If you don’t take care of your body, where are you going to live?” Can that be any simpler?

BALANCE: What is the best advice you ever used?

LL: Stay in the present. There is nothing you can do about the past. And the future hasn’t happened yet.



Tiffany Bertsch

BALANCE: What’s your dream job?

LL: It’s the job I have right now as the executive director of the Project WET USA program. My career plan has been to end my path with the greatest positive impact on the environment and people’s lives as opportunity will allow me. While I haven’t known “what” exactly that might be, each career choice has been made with this end result in mind. Today, I can positively impact the lives of millions of parents, teachers, children and communities across the USA. That is a privilege and a dream come true.

BALANCE: What do you most want to change about yourself?

LL: Patience. I’d love to have more of it. I get impatient and want things to improve faster.

BALANCE: What do you most love about yourself?

LL: That I care. I am a caring person. This is my personality and my genetic make-up made me this way. I’m grateful for that.

BALANCE: What do you do to relax?

LL: I draw, paint, knit, read and listen to Pandora radio. If my dog Belle could talk, I think she’d ask me if we live in a library. But most of all I find that being out in nature and hiking is a wonderful way to recharge.

intention of becoming a fern expert. However, "Fern experts were in no demand at that time," Lyle said, laughing. With that in mind, she began looking at other options.

While exploring new possibilities, Lyle said she became overwhelmed because "there are so many different environmental issues to worry about." At that point, she decided to narrow it down to one field that would really make an impact: water.

"I decided to turn my energies to water because, without water, there is no life," Lyle said. After college, with her energies re-focused, Lyle taught education and environmental studies at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn. She also worked as a principal investigator/research associate in the Center for Excellence for field biology at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tenn. While in Clarksville, Lyle taught biology and also coordinated Tennessee's Project WET program.

Through the program, Lyle helped raise awareness about water issues and educated informal educators. Although she said the program began as a "slow go," it eventually grew and is still active at Austin Peay State University today.

While working with Project WET in Tennessee, Lyle was offered the opportunity to continue working with the program in Bozeman, and she accepted. That was more than three years ago. She has been the executive director and

national network coordinator of Project WET U.S.A. ever since.

"I am very happy with that decision," Lyle said of moving to Bozeman to work for Project WET. "I had no idea that I would be doing this, but I love it."

Today, Lyle said Project WET has nearly 70 programs nationally. Additionally, Project WET programs exist in approximately 55 countries. The project's mission is to "reach children, parents, educators and communities of the world with water education."

Currently, Lyle said the Bozeman team has been working on Project WET U. — a curriculum targeted at "any adult who would like to learn more about water and how to be a water educator" — which she said will be up and running in the new year. Additionally, the team has created a website, discoverwater.org, where tweens can learn more about water.

"We have to have a way to reach children who won't go through the school system," Lyle said. "This website was built in tween language and helps them to discover water and the role it plays in our lives. This is our gift to the world."

In the future, Lyle said a major topic for Project WET will be "water, weather, climate and change" and how they are all connected.

"I really love a beautiful, healthy environment where all organisms are thriving," Lyle said. "That is one of my core beliefs."

For more information about Project WET, visit projectwet.org.

BABES of 2011



Include your child's photograph in this special keepsake edition that will publish in the Chronicle on Sunday, January 22. Please fill in the form and send it along with the **\$25 photo publication fee** to:

BABES OF 2011, c/o Bozeman Daily Chronicle
 PO Box 1190, Bozeman, MT 59771

OR email your information and photo to
babesof2011@dailychronicle.com

The deadline for receipt of photographs is 5 p.m. on Friday, January 16, 2012.
Questions? 582-2600

Thank you and congratulations on the new addition to your family!

BABES OF 2011 *Please Print All Information Clearly*

Baby's Full Name _____

Date of Birth _____ Weight _____ Length _____

*Birth date must be between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2011

Parents' Names _____

Your Phone Number _____

PAYMENT INFORMATION:   

Check # _____ Credit Card # _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature _____

Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope with this form for photo return.

BOZEMAN DAILY
CHRONICLE