



24th Heinz Awards Honors Outdoor Afro Founder Rue Mapp for Championing Diversity in Conservation Leadership

Mapp's nonprofit, founded to inspire African Americans to reconnect with the outdoors, is raising up and training a new national network of conservation leaders

PITTSBURGH, September 12, 2019—The Heinz Family Foundation today named Rue Mapp, founder and CEO of the nonprofit Outdoor Afro, the recipient of the prestigious 24th Heinz Award in the Environment category. Ms. Mapp is honored for her role in developing and training a national network of African American conservation leaders, for building a more diverse voice in natural resource stewardship, and for inspiring African Americans to rediscover their historic connections to the outdoors.

As part of the accolade, Ms. Mapp will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

Ms. Mapp launched Outdoor Afro in 2009 as a blog to share the impact that the outdoors had on her growing up, and to establish a framework and community for African Americans to connect with and organize outdoor activities. Established with the tagline “where black people and nature meet,” Outdoor Afro has since grown into a national nonprofit with more than 35,000 participants and volunteer leaders building communities in 30 states around the country. Its digital and social media platforms reach more than 50,000 followers each day with stories, photos, classes and events.

“When I started Outdoor Afro, the intent was to get more people who look like me to be in the outdoors, and to realize the benefits that I had received through outdoor engagement over a lifetime,” says Ms. Mapp, whose childhood in northern California was spent exploring streams and forests and learning how to hunt, fish, camp and raise livestock. “The response was tremendous. Not only have we shifted the visual representation of who gets outside, we have also shifted the representation of who leads outside, and that’s been a very powerful thing. That elementary school principal, that human rights attorney, that architect, that military vet – all are part of our community of leaders. Through Outdoor Afro, people from all walks of life and different professions have found this fire in their belly to lead others to experience and love the outdoors.”

Developing African American leaders in the fields of conservation, and outdoor activity and management is a key component of Outdoor Afro’s programming. Leadership training summits are held annually, with attendees learning about conservation efforts and how to advocate for natural resources; the health benefits of nature; trip planning; leave-no-trace principles; proper clothing and gear; and community organizing approaches. Once trained, leaders volunteer to organize local meetups in their home regions for hiking, biking, camping, skiing, kayaking, birding and more, as well as larger destination trips to national parks and historical sites.

Ms. Mapp acknowledges the historical narrative in this country that has caused many African Americans to be wary of the great outdoors. The woods were once a place where racial violence took place and in the mid-20th century, discriminatory Jim Crow laws discouraged African Americans from visiting public parks and enjoying outdoor amenities.

Outdoor Afro's mission is to overcome these narratives and use nature as a vehicle to help black communities address the violence in their past and present. As an example, the group has organized opportunities for people to find solace in nature through "Healing Hikes."

"After the Ferguson riots, rather than taking to the streets to protest, we took to nature," Ms. Mapp says. "I led a group hike down into the Redwoods, and there we felt all of our care, all of our stress falling away. We didn't all have the same perspectives or the same viewpoints, but in that space of peace, there were no police in riot gear, no helicopters overhead – we were able to hear each other. I had this moment of realization that we were doing what African Americans have always known we could do, and that was to lay down our burdens by the riverside. That's when I knew that nature was a healer."

Despite Outdoor Afro's rapid growth and national impact, Ms. Mapp notes that some traditionally led outdoor conservation organizations still do not understand or take the group's mission and leadership work seriously.

"I have had people say, 'Rue, it's so nice that you take the poor black children into the wilderness,'" says Ms. Mapp. "There's a trope around how the environmental movement has worked with black communities that is very much about rescuing young kids from the 'hood' and taking them to the woods to have some kind of evangelical experience, and after that we drop them off and we all feel good about ourselves. That's not what this work is about. It's about people who are embedded in the community restoring outdoor leadership back home. And to help people, through Outdoor Afro, get their nature swagger back, to get that know-how, and to learn how to tap into nature as a resource and an instructor for how to live your life."

Outdoor Afro's current efforts include a campaign to teach life-saving water skills to children.

"I am deeply grateful for the trust that people have put into our work, and the resources we have been given, and so I want to make good on that trust. This year's focus is to give every African American child in our sphere of influence the opportunity to learn how to swim. This is in response to the reality that black people were excluded from beaches and public pools for such a long time that it created this missed opportunity for them to learn how to swim. This has unfortunately been passed along for generations, and today you have black children drowning at five times the rate of their white peers. That's our legacy of Jim Crow. Outdoor Afro is here to do something about that in a way that's much bigger than a conversation online."

As part of her work challenging traditional conservation organizations to be more inclusive, Ms. Mapp consults with the outdoor industry, environmental nonprofits, and the national park system, as well as national and state administrations, and has been instrumental in helping shape national leaders' understanding of how federal public land policies affect people of color.

“The Heinz Awards honor Rue for recognizing that a lasting imprint of our country’s racially divided past has resulted in a generational loss of connection to the restorative beauty, and physical, emotional and mental health benefits of the outdoors among African Americans,” said Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “Through Outdoor Afro, Rue is not only inspiring individuals and families to reconnect with nature through a national network of programs and activities, she is equipping new environmental leaders who bring a fresh perspective to conservation efforts while advocating for the protection of our parks and wilderness places.”

Established to honor the memory of U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards this year recognizes those who have made significant contributions in five distinct areas of great importance to Senator Heinz: Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Now in its 24th year, the Heinz Awards has recognized 144 individuals and awarded more than \$28.75 million to the honorees. For more information about the awardees visit www.heinzawards.net/2019.

In addition to Ms. Mapp, the 24th Heinz Awards honored the following individuals, who will receive their awards in Pittsburgh on October 17, 2019:

- **Arts and Humanities: Kevin Jerome Everson**, a prolific independent filmmaker and visual artist who draws from original and found footage to create experimental films that explore the lives and communities of working-class African Americans, and the nature of work;
- **Human Condition: Sarah Szanton, Ph.D., ANP**, a leader in the development of the Community Aging in Place Advancing Better Living for Elders (CAPABLE) program, an intervention that uses older adults’ own goals to guide the provision of home repair services along with in-home nursing and occupational therapy to improve mobility and independence, and decrease healthcare costs;
- **Public Policy: Amanda Nguyen**, founder of Rise, whose courage in sharing her personal story of sexual assault and perseverance in securing protections for victims of sexual violence has resulted in the enactment of the national Sexual Assault Survivors’ Bill of Rights of 2016 and the introduction and passage of similar legislation in more than 25 states across the country and internationally; and
- **Technology, the Economy and Employment: Brandon Dennison**, founder of Coalfield Development Corporation, a family of social enterprises focused on building a new economy for Appalachia and restoring its environment by putting unemployed young adults and laid-off coal miners back to work and equipping them with skills for a lifetime of employment.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of Ms. Mapp or any of the other recipients, please contact Maya Brod at mbrod@burness.com or 301-467-4917.

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About the Heinz Awards

Established by Teresa Heinz in 1993 to honor the memory of her late husband, U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of greatest importance to him. The awards, administered by the Heinz Family Foundation, recognize individuals for their contributions in the areas of Arts and Humanities; Environment; Human Condition; Public Policy; and Technology, the Economy and Employment. Nominations are submitted by invited experts, who serve anonymously, and are reviewed by jurors appointed by the Heinz Family Foundation. The jurors make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which subsequently selects the Award recipients. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit www.heinzawards.net.

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