

AREA

Earth Keepers get Sierra Club award

MARQUETTE — The Upper Peninsula Earth Keepers announced several projects for next year on Thursday night as they received the Michigan Sierra Club's White Pine Award for past projects.

Past Earth Keeper projects included recycling hundreds of tons of hazardous waste, energy conservation programs and the protection of Lake Superior.

Numerous Earth Keeper Initiative faith leaders, volunteers and student members accepted the award at the Peter White Public Library during a meeting of the Sierra Club Upper Peninsula Group.

"The White Pine Award is intended to recognize a group outside of the Sierra Club which has been doing things to help protect the environment," said Dr. Jon Rebers, chairman of the Sierra Club Central U.P. Group.

The U.P. Earth Keepers, involving the congregations of over 150 U.P. churches and temples, held three annual Earth Day collections at dozens of sites across northern Michigan that removed almost 370 tons of household hazardous waste from the environment.

The Earth Keeper Initiative is co-sponsored by the Cedar Tree Institute, the Superior Watershed Partnership, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and 10 faith communities: Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalist, Baha'i, Jewish, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and Zen Buddhist.

The group's youth arm, the Northern

Michigan University EarthKeeper Student Team (NMU EK), has several projects planned in the next few months.

"A few of our goals that we have set are an Eco-Christmas Initiative," said Sarah Swanson, the outgoing NMU EK project director. "We are going to encourage people to be more eco-conscious when they are purchasing gifts for family and friends over the holidays."

"We also plan to recycle some televisions in February, now that they are switching to the different form of (high definition) television," she said. "We will be planting a bunch of trees on Earth Day."

People have "an inescapable relationship with their environment" and that is connected to other social issues, said Ben Scheelk, the new NMU EK student team project coordinator from the Student Leader Fellowship Program.

"Issues like hunger and poverty — those are just as much an effect on the environment as anything else because these people are then forced to use the wood around them to burn and cook food," he said.

Scheelk invited the public to "a humble meal" to "tackle these issues" at 6 p.m. on Nov. 24, 2008 at Grace United Methodist Church on Fair Avenue in Marquette.

The White Pine Award is presented annually by the Michigan Chapter of the Sierra Club to a non-member organization or group which has shown extraordinary dedication to protection of the environment.



The Michigan Sierra Club presented its White Pine Award to the Upper Peninsula Earth Keepers on Thursday at a ceremony in Marquette. In the back row from left are David McCowen of Lake Superior Friends (Quakers); the Rev. Jon Magnuson, Earth Keeper Initiative cofounder and executive director of the nonprofit Cedar Tree Institute; Dr. Jon Rebers, chair of the Sierra Club Central U.P. Group; Dr. Rodney Clarken, leader of the Marquette Baha'i Community and one of the original signers of the Earth Keeper Covenant; the Rev. Teshin Paul Lehmborg, head priest of Lake Superior Zendo, a Marquette Zen Buddhist temple; Nancy Irish, a representative of the Marquette Unitarian Universalist congregation; and Natasha Koss, a representative of the Superior Watershed Partnership. In front from left are Sarah Swanson, the outgoing Northern Michigan University EarthKeeper Student Team project director; and Ben Scheelk, the new NMU EK project coordinator from the Student Leader Fellowship Program. (Photo courtesy Cedar Tree Institute)