2012 Delaware Geographic Service Award Nomination

Dr. Peter W. Reese

I am writing to place in nomination the name of Dr. Peter W. Rees for the 2012 Delaware Geographic Service Award. Dr. Rees is a faculty member in the Geography Dept. of the University of Delaware. In addition to his consistent and substantial contributions to the geographic education of undergraduate and graduate students, Dr. Rees has worked tirelessly for more than twenty years to bring geographic knowledge, perspectives and skills into K-12 classrooms in Delaware. Three important contributions stand out:

- In 1989 Dr. Rees worked with representatives of the National Geographic Society and with the Delaware Dept. of Public Instruction to found the Delaware Geographic Alliance. This organization has grown to a membership of more than 600. The Alliance promotes geographic literacy by providing Delaware teachers with quality professional development in geography. Under Dr. Rees’ leadership, key teachers received in-depth training from National Geographic and ESRI and returned to Delaware to share their knowledge in teacher institutes and training sessions introducing the use of GIS. Dr. Rees led two-week summer institutes for teachers from 1990-2000 and taught numerous special courses designed to meet the needs of teachers who wished to integrate geography into their classrooms.

- In the early 1990’s the State of Delaware began a comprehensive overhaul of the school curriculum. Sensing an opportunity to establish the place of geographic instruction, members of the Delaware Geographic Alliance became involved in the drafting of the Social Studies and Science standards. The result was a program that includes real geography instruction at every grade level K-12. Dr. Rees served for three years on the leadership team of the Social Studies Commission, contributing to the drafting of the standards. In subsequent years, he penned Understanding the Geography Standards, a reference document for educators designed to guide planning of curriculum and assessment related to the standards. Dr. Rees also served as an item reviewer for the state testing system for many years, assuring the content validity of the state assessment.

- High school teachers in Delaware expressed a need for high-quality, engaging instructional materials based on the new standards. In response, Dr. Rees secured a research grant from the National Geographic Society and launched the Delaware Geography Health Initiative. Each of the eight instructional units in this collection is based on a real problem facing Delawareans. Each unit includes GIS reference maps based on data collected by Dr. Rees and his team. Each unit challenges students to build and apply spatial analysis skills in the solution of problems. The units were published in CD-Rom format and have been widely distributed within the state at workshops and trainings sponsored by the Delaware Geographic Alliance. The Delaware Dept. of Education has adopted the eight units of the CD for use within the Delaware recommended Curriculum. During the summer of 2011, a new course for 9th grade students was launched by the Delaware Dept. of Education. The eight units of the Delaware Geography Health Initiative provide the basic building blocks of the course. Dr. Rees has participated in training sessions launching the new course.
• Dr. Rees main contribution to service has been for 43 years the training of students in geography who have gone on to be important figures in the Delaware GIS community (Vern C. Svatos was one of my early students who took a number of my urban geography courses), and working with teachers to support and encourage their ability to use GIS in Delaware’s K-12 classrooms.

• Dr. Rees founded the Delaware Geographic Alliance in 1988, today the principal vehicle in the state for strengthening geography and GIS instruction in Delaware’s K-12 community. Coordinated the Alliance from 1988-2005, which has now grown to over 600 members; for 20 years, developed and ran summer institutes and teacher workshops highlighting GIS and geography instruction methods. Secured funding from numerous sources, including the National Geographic Society, the State of Delaware and ESRI, totaling $1.376m to support the Alliance, including three Eisenhower Professional Development grants (total $55K) to run two-week summer workshops providing GIS instruction to K-12 teachers.

• Served for three years on the leadership team of the Social Studies Commission that formulated and adopted the first explicit standards for geography instruction in Delaware. Subsequently served for 14 years as the geography content reviewer of items for the state assessment (DSTP).

• Dr. Rees selected and secured positions for teacher candidates to train as instructors in GIS and Geospatial Analysis at national workshops sponsored by National Geographic Society. Received the UD 2009 Excellence in Advising and Mentoring Award involving many years of directing students towards careers in geography, and numerous K-12 teachers, who have gone on to become leaders in the GIS and geographic education communities in the state.

• Published scholarly articles focusing on GIS, for instance:

• Dr. Rees secured $46K Grosvenor grant from the National Geographic Society to support the Delaware Geography-Health Initiative, a series of eight instructional units for high school based on a real problem facing Delawareans. I was the primary author of each unit that uses GIS reference maps based on original data and challenges students to build and apply spatial analysis skills in the solution of problems. The units were published in a CD-ROM format (2007) and have been widely distributed within the state through workshops and training sessions sponsored by the Delaware Geographic Alliance. Recently, these instructional units have been adopted by the Delaware Department of Education as part of the state recommended Social Studies Curriculum, to be used by all 9th-grade students in the state as part of a mandated geography course.