

Margaret Shelton Earns YWCA Environmental Award

by Mary Robertson

Leland farmer Margaret Shelton was recognized as a “Woman of Achievement” by the YWCA May 20 for her work promoting sustainable agriculture and protecting the environment. Panelists cited Shelton’s decades of environmental activism in the area in honoring her at this year’s banquet, noting she was a leader in working against BECO, a high-sulfur crude refinery proposed on the Cape Fear River, and in the campaign to stop the Hugo Neu Landfill in Brunswick County.

In addition to her environmental work, she has been involved in helping

bring fresh local produce to area residents. She helped create the Riverfront Farmers’ Market in downtown Wilmington, and works with “Feast Down East” (formerly Southeastern North Carolina Food Systems Program), which helps link small farmers with local markets in an effort to create a sustainable local food supply. “Farmers’ markets provide a location for farmers to sell directly to the public. Locally grown is fresher, has better flavors, and better nutrition goes along with this. Chefs at some of our best restaurants are aware of the flavor difference and are seeking out local farms and featuring them on their menus,” says Shelton. “Purchasing from the local farmer boosts our area’s economy. The money that goes to the farmer is in turn spent locally. Networking among farmers, chefs, and distributors is growing, to the benefit of all.”

She opened Shelton Herb Farm in 1986 on land her family had been working for two centuries. Surrounded by natural savannah and hardwood forest, her farm now serves as a teaching place for organic, pesticide-free farming practices.

With hundreds of varieties of herbs, vegetables, native plants and edible flowers, there is always something to plant or harvest. Shelton is busy year-round supporting local community gardens and providing fresh organic herbs and microgreens to local restaurants. Retaining the wilder

segments of the farm, with meandering darkwater branches and thick underbrush, means a thriving population of birds, butterflies, and carnivorous plants call the farm home as well.

Shelton helps educate farmers of all types through her Facebook page, newsletter and workshops at local farmers markets. She notes the mild Southern winters allow for gardening year-round. “You can jump in at any time.”

Shelton hopes encouraging residents to eat local, organic produce will not only help sustain local farmers but will help residents realize the health benefits of eating more mindfully. “I started growing vegetables because I wanted to know what my family ate. Food grown without pesticides and heavy chemicals: that’s what I want to eat. I want it to be natural and organic to feed my family.”

The Women of Achievement Awards ceremony is held annually by the YWCA of the Lower Cape Fear, celebrating a select group of women and young leaders nominated by their peers. The YWCA was founded as a nonprofit membership organization committed to self-determined social change for women of all racial, ethnic and economic groups.

Shelton Herb Farm is open Monday through Saturday from 8–5, at 340 Goodman Road in Leland. Bring the kids, and you can buy for your home garden transplants of vegetables, herbs and flowers year-round—from a more extensive selection than can be transported to area markets. In addition to Riverfront, you can find Shelton’s products every week (in season) at farmers’ markets at Poplar Grove, Southport, Shallotte, Wrightsville Beach, and Leland. See Shelton’s new website, www.sheltonherbfarmnc.com, or call (910)253-5964 to see dates each is open.

Wilmington’s Riverfront Farmers’ Market is open Saturdays 8–1 on N. Water Street through December 17, and reopens April 2012. Fresh fruits, berries, vegetables, plants, herbs, flowers, eggs, cheese, meat, seafood, honey, baked goods, legumes, pickled items, jams and jellies, wine, art and craft.



photo by Valerie Robertson

Margaret Shelton welcomes visitors to her 200-year-old farm Monday through Friday between 8 and 5. Call ahead to make sure she is home, as she participates in many farmers’ markets. Kids are welcome, and can meet Holly (the dog) and Nutmeg (the pig), and numerous turkeys and guinea fowl who help prepare the land for planting. Well-mannered pets welcome, but please keep on a leash so as not to disturb the free-ranging poultry.