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For Immediate Release

Riverbend Environmental Education Center Honored to Receive Two Awards: The PA Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence & The Go for The Green Award presented by Lower Merion Township's EAC The Upper Merion Area School District Middle School Receives a Third Award

Gladwyne, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) awarded 21 organizations across the state the prestigious 2017 Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in Harrisburg on April 25. Among those deserving organizations was **Riverbend Environmental Education Center** in partnership with the Norristown Area School District for *Building STEM Skills through Aquaponics* — a collaboration launched with the district in 2015. The Riverbend-developed, peer-reviewed aquaponics curriculum has been delivered for two consecutive years, giving 500 Norristown seventh graders the opportunity each year to learn about ecosystems, farming, and sustainability.

Riverbend Executive Director Laurie Bachman says, "An important goal for Riverbend is to use aquaponics as a vehicle for building STEM skills for students since it is those skills that can lay the foundation for future academic and career success. In 2016-2017, the program has taken off in the Upper Merion School District and with additional schools in the region. Not only does the curriculum advance STEM principles in an exciting and relevant way, it strives to increase environmental science literacy, another major program goal."

"The Environmental Excellence Awards show just how many Pennsylvanians, from fourth-grade students to factory owners, care deeply about the air, land, and water in their communities," said Governor Wolf. "We all benefit, as their commitment to tackling important environmental challenges improves our quality of life statewide."

Inquiry-based science learning is a hallmark of the program in which middle schoolers guided by their teachers grow plants and fish in classroom systems. The systems use 50-gallon aquariums and are installed in all seventh grade classrooms across three middle schools.

This week, **Lower Merion Township's Environmental Advisory Council** announced Riverbend as the 2017 recipient of **Go for the Green Award** in the education category. The award is given to schools, universities, and affiliated student or youth organizations in Lower Merion Township or Narberth Borough to raise environmental awareness and highlight environmental achievements. Benefitting our local community is Riverbend's Aquaponics Greenhouse and ongoing education for school children and residents of all ages. The greenhouse serves as a living learning lab. In addition to providing curriculum units for school students, field trips, and teacher professional development, Riverbend strives to educate our local community including adults and families through its Our Table, Our Planet series and public weekend programs. Included in the Our Table, Our Planet series are intimate BYO suppers held throughout the year in which adults gather to enjoy creative gourmet food and learn about food topics such as foraging, aquaponics, and other aspects of sustainable agriculture.

Congratulations also goes to the **Upper Merion Area School District Middle School** for capturing yet another award in connection aquaponics. **Manko Gold Katcher & Fox, WAWA** and **6ABC** presented the award on April 18th to the middle school for its Basil Lemonade Project using Riverbend's Building STEM Sills through Aquaponics program. Each year this \$5,000 award goes to two schools in the Delaware Valley that demonstrate excellent environmental programs with projects that enhance and improve the quality of life in their communities.

Aquaponics is the combination of aquaculture and hydroponics, the science of growing fish and plants together in a single integrated, soilless system. Though still in the early stages of its development, it is widely determined to be among the most sustainable agriculture methods, using just 10% of the water required by traditional agriculture. With an estimated human world population of more than 9 billion people by 2050, experts predict water and food scarcity to be increasingly common, making aquaponics a timely topic.

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ABOUT RIVERBEND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER -- Riverbend Environmental Education Center is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization located at 1950 Spring Mill Road Gladwyne, PA. Its preserve made up of diverse natural habitats is located on 30 acres and is open seven days a week for visitors. Riverbend offers a full menu of environmental education programs including school curriculum, teacher training, school field trips, exploration camp, public programs, weekly nature classes and special events.