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Award honors environmental action

By **KEVIN BRACISZESKI**
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Julie Johnson, of Ludington, was honored recently by the Lake Michigan Federation for her many years of work in promoting environmental awareness in Mason, Manistee and Oceana counties.

Johnson, who is a teacher with Manistee Area Public Schools, is president of A Few Friends of the Environment and the World, an organization she co-founded with Kate Love in 1989. She said the two formed the group while discussing all the people they knew who had cancer, including her father, Charles Chambers, and a friend, Laura Darschild.

"They died about a year later, but at least something good came of it," Johnson said.

Since that time, Johnson and

AFFEW have been active in many local efforts to improve the local environment and educate people about their responsibilities to the planet.

One of those efforts is the annual Christmas tree recycling program in Ludington which was launched in 1991. AFFEW worked with the local Michigan State University Extension Office, the Mason County Road Commission and the City of Ludington to implement the program that chews the trees into chips for use at the Ludington State Park.

"Now it's pretty much an automatic thing," she said about the program.

AFFEW also organizes an annual hazardous waste collection day for Ludington and a local battery recycling program.

The group has also organized educational programs on topics that include Lake Michigan sand dune mining, renewable energy sources and organic gardening.

"We have 45 to 50 members," Johnson said, adding modestly, "I'm president because no one else wants to do it."

Johnson was one of seven people who were selected by the Lake Michigan Federation to receive its annual Great Lakes Stewardship Awards for 2002 during a ceremony held Sept. 13.

"We are very proud of the many efforts at the community level to protect Lake Michigan and its coastal resources," said Tanya Cabala, the federation's Michigan director.

"There is much that can be done at the local level. By recognizing the achievements of these

citizens, we not only praise their diligence, but also hope to encourage other similar efforts.

Johnson and the six other award winners were presented with certificates and photos of dawn on the Lake Michigan shoreline at Illinois Beach State Park.

"I felt honored when I found out I was going to get the award," Johnson said. "I wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of the (AFFEW) members and board members."

Johnson and other members of AFFEW will be active again Saturday when they take part in the annual Michigan Coastal Cleanup.

The group will pick up trash from 18 miles of Lake Michigan Shoreline from Summit Park to Big Sable Point.