



Keep Durham Beautiful Inc.  
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## PROFILE

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### **MEET LAURA WEBB SMITH, AN ORGANIZER FOR COMMUNITY GOOD**

Laura Webb Smith is no stranger to getting her feet wet and muddy. Smith has been an educator, communicator, outreach specialist and project manager with the Durham Public Works Department for the last 17 years.

Smith's extensive knowledge of environmental issues began in her undergraduate environmental science studies at the University of Virginia. She then moved on to get her master's degree in environmental management and teaching at Duke University. A love for teaching blossomed when she combined her interests to become a certified environmental educator.



*Laura Webb Smith, environmental educator for the Durham Public Works Department / LinkedIn*

“We do a lot of work [in the public works department], but the public has to be a part of it,”

Smith said. “We are so much more powerful when working together.”

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Smith's passion for leading projects focusing on pro-environment behavior change led her to partner with Keep Durham Beautiful for Creek Week and Big Sweep events. This partnership began before KDB was officially founded, and has since grown into biannual events encouraging Durham locals to take accountability for their local environments.



*Laura Webb Smith poses while cleaning up Ellerbe Creek / Duke University, Nicholas School of the Environment*

“This started as a waterway-focused cleanup, but we have since included picking up litter on streets and trails,” she said. “We understand that gravity carries everything downstream, so picking up litter from the source can prevent future marine life tragedies and microplastics from polluting the water.”

Smith's favorite part of these cleanup efforts is seeing community members take ownership of their neighborhoods. She affectionately recalled a woman who would bring her neighborhood together the night before cleanups to share a meal at her house. The public works

department and KDB empowered her with the resources and confidence to bring her neighbors together to do good for their environment. “Through these combined efforts in the last few years, we've really seen our partnerships start to bear fruit,” Smith said.

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Environmental accountability is a family affair for the Smiths. Laura's children have been joining her in cleanups since they were 3 years old. Now that they are in late elementary and high school, she has recruited their friends to join them in cleaning up the areas across from their schools.

“My kids learned from an early age that storm drains are for rain only,” she said. “Litter cleanups are one of those actionable activities that all people can do. This empowers the kids to feel pride, a sense of place, and giving back to their community.”

Aside from her work, Smith enjoys spending her free time swimming in rivers around North Carolina. Growing up in the northeastern region of the state, she has fond memories of spending days at her family's favorite spot on the Chowan River.

“There is nothing like swimming in that fresh water,” she recalls. “Unless there is an algal bloom, but that's a whole other issue.”

Smith's work has not gone unnoticed. She was named Project WET Facilitator of the Year, served as president of Environmental Educators of North Carolina, and has spoken at many conferences about her work. She successfully led a green infrastructure project in Ellerbe Creek to install 41 rain gardens, 108 cisterns, and 106 trees in a subwatershed.

Smith's colleague Tania Dautlick, the executive director of KDB, expresses how Smith “is a valuable asset to any team... She is an expert in her field and adapts her environmental education approach to meet the needs of audiences of all ages and backgrounds. I have learned a lot from Laura and consider her a valued colleague and friend.”

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