

Environmentalist: Della Schall Young

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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In Minnesota most of us take water for granted.

After all this is the land of 10,000 lakes. We are surrounded by water. But Della Schall Young is not most of us. She knows the true value of water.

As a youth, Schall Young would travel to Liberia, where her grandmother lived, and would have to process the water to make sure it was safe to drink. That experience in many ways shaped Schall Young, helped define the person she is today and ignited her career path.

“That experience always stuck with me and I knew I wanted to do something to protect that (water) resource,” said Schall Young, who recently accepted a position as a regional manager with Burns & McDonnell, an engineering, architectural, construction, environmental and consulting services firm headquartered in Bloomington. “Now my focus is overall lake and river health, both for consumption and recreation.”

Schall Young joined Burns & McDonnell this past July, following positions with the engineering consulting firm of H.D.R., MnDOT and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. With Burns & McDonnell, she is responsible for helping businesses and municipalities navigate regulations such as the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) program as well as those associated with restoration and protection of water and native land resources.

Schall Young is doing her best to get young people – and particularly young people living in urban environments – to appreciate the state’s natural resources. As the troop leader of Girl Scout Troop 15981, Schall Young engages her girls in a variety of nature outings.

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“Whether it’s going on a canoeing trip or hiking at Ft. Snelling, we have so many treasures right here,” said Schall Young. “One of my favorite places is Frontenac State Park (southeast of Red Wing). You can see eagles; you can see other different wildlife. It’s just beautiful.”

Schall Young hopes her involvement with youth can inspire more African-Americans and females to take an interest in environmental engineering.

“You talk about African-Americans in this profession, but it’s also interesting being a female in the male dominated field,” said Schall Young, who possesses a Bachelor of Science in environmental sciences/studies and a Master of Science in water resources science – both from the University of Minnesota. “This is a great profession. And who would have thought I would be here? I’m an African-American female with a birthmark that takes up half of my face and I could have felt like I was the victim, but my advice is to keep doing what you’re doing and people will see your gifts and your talents.”

Being a bit of a trailblazer is nothing new to Schall Young. At the University of Minnesota, Schall Young was a charter member of the Kappa Pi chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. She is also a member of the American Council of Engineering Companies, Minnesota and serves on the Friends of the Mississippi River Board.

It’s evident that the highly driven Schall Young is judged on her work and not her gender nor ethnicity.

“Consulting firms are here to make money. They don’t have you here because you are Black or because you’re a woman. They have you here because you’re talented,” said Schall Young.