

Outdoors

“The mountains are calling and I must go.”

—John Muir

ARC program receives high honor, continues to help local students

Adventure Risk Challenge (ARC), a local leadership, literacy and wilderness program for high school youth, has been given a top honor by a national group.

ARC was presented with the Exceptional Environmental Steward Award by the Merced Group of the Tehipite Chapter of the Sierra Club at their end-of-year banquet. ARC offers month-long immersive summer programs in Yosemite, Tahoe and Sequoia for California youth. Mariposa County High School students have participated in ARC's programs, most recently MCHS junior Isaac Camorlinga.

In announcing the award, Rod Webster, the Sierra Club Merced Group's chair, said, “ARC is doing the critical work of raising up tomorrow's environmental stewards. In addition to working hand-in-hand with English instruction during the school year, ARC's month-long summer immersion course is a perfect culminating experience.

“What young person would not be changed by challenging adventures like backpacking, soloing overnights, rock-climbing, kayaking, ropes courses and more. All of this mixed with the ongoing goal of English literacy development and other lifelong lessons in self-confidence, public speaking and leadership.”

ARC was founded in 2004 by Katie Zanto, who had a background as a classroom English teacher and Outward Bound instructor. She melded these experiences to create the program. Since 2004, ARC has offered 33 immersive

month-long summer courses, graduated over 300 summer participants and provided programming for more than 2,000 academic-year participants.

Sarah Ottley, ARC's executive director, thanked the Sierra Club Merced Group for the award.

“It was an honor to receive the Exceptional Environmental Steward award for 2020. There are many ways that the mission and work of the Sierra Club align with the mission and work of ARC,” she said. “I trust that

our programs will continue to promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources, doing justice to this award. I was particularly delighted to share space with John Muir Laws, who was the keynote speaker during the Merced Group's virtual banquet.”

The Sierra Club Merced Group is a voice for environmental advocacy in the region. They focus their efforts on issues that impact the everyday lives of our local communities.

Webster said, “Environmental advocacy is important at all levels, from our own backyard perspective to a worldwide



Submitted photo
Mariposa County High School junior Isaac Camorlinga is shown on a overlook above Yosemite Valley on ARC's month-long summer course.

view. But it is really in local grassroots involvement that passion and activism grow. When people have had personal experiences in nature they become vested — they understand the value of those experiences and become convicted to help preserve their availability for all. The local Sierra Club chapters today are looked to as a source of expertise and opportunity for folks can turn to explore the great outdoors. Clearly, to continue the legacy of stewardship we rely on successive generations to accept their role in continuing to care for our natural spaces.”

He added, “ARC is making a significant

contribution to filling this need. They are meeting students ‘where they live’ helping them in their everyday schooling and offering them extensive outdoor experiences year-round.”

ARC is supported by Yosemite Conservancy, the Yosemite Bug Rustic Mountain Resort, Sierra Meadows Resort (Ahwahnee), local Mariposa individual donors and many others.

If you'd like to learn more about the organization's work and mission, visit www.adventureriskchallenge.org. High school students interested in ARC's 2021 summer courses can apply on their website.