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NWF'S OSBORNE-JELKS TO ACCEPT ITC'S THEOECOLOGY AWARD *Costen's Tribute to Excellence in Environmentalism*

February 1, 2010, Atlanta, GA - Before “going green” became synonymous for environmental stewardship, Na’Taki Osborne Jelks was helping to organize low-income and communities of color to fight against toxic waste sites and environmental injustice, leading youth groups to develop campus and community-based solutions to environmental challenges, and speaking to audiences across the country on the attributes of saving the planet and the people and wildlife who inhabit it. On March 26, 2010, the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) will present the Costen Award for *TheoEcology* to Osborne-Jelks for her exemplary work in environmentalism at the Charter Day and James H. Costen “Tribute to Excellence” Awards Dinner, 6 p.m., Hyatt Regency Hotel, in downtown Atlanta. The *TheoEcology* initiative, recognizing the partnership between faith and conservation, is one of the primary goals of the seminary’s Strategic Plan.

For more than ten years, Osborne-Jelks has traveled the nation and parts of the globe carrying a message of environmental justice and responsible conservation on the planet to protect its human, wildlife and plant resources, on behalf of the National Wildlife Federation. Her role includes managing state advocacy campaigns and coalition building to advance NWF’s education advocacy platform in the Southeast states and engaging underrepresented communities in conservation efforts to combat global warming, create green jobs, and train the next generation of environmental leaders. It is an important assignment for her that she began preparing for during adolescence when her mother was stricken with cancer and the cause thought to be resultant from exposure to toxic wastes from petrochemical plants near her neighborhood in Baton Rouge, LA. Her mother survived and Na’Taki resolved that her career would best serve others as an advocate for communities most inundated with environmental stressors but least represented at environmental decision-making tables as well as informed health practices, and responsible conservation.

While working to help people in environmentally degraded communities find their voice and develop the necessary skills to speak and act out against polluters who impair and threaten their quality of life, Osborne-Jelks has helped to change the landscape of African American communities on Atlanta’s west side which are impacted by numerous environmental hazards. Notably among her many achievements, twelve years ago, she co-

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founded the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance. Each year during a week-long summer environmental leadership and outdoor immersion program, called *Earth Tomorrow*, she leads youth from underserved communities on camping trips and other outdoor excursions, introducing them to the beauty of nature and acquainting them with different plant and animal life while also introducing them to “green” jobs, developing their environmental literacy and leadership skills, and engendering a healthy respect for preserving and protecting the world in which they live.

Osborne-Jelks graduated with a dual degree from Spelman College and Georgia Institute of Technology in Chemistry and Civil and Environmental Engineering in 1996. She earned a Masters in Environmental and Occupational Health from Emory University in 2002. In addition to her position as Manager of Education and Advocacy Programs for the National Wildlife Federation, Osborne-Jelks has served as adjunct professor of Community Health at Morehouse School of Medicine and is currently an adjunct professor of Environmental Science at her alma mater, Spelman College.

Na'Taki is married to Rev. Ken Jelks, Manager of Sales for Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasters (AIB-TV) and an associate minister at Antioch Baptist Church North. They are the proud parents of a three-month old son, Kenyatta Lorenzo Jelks Jr. (K.J.).

Further details about the Charter Day and James H. Costen Awards dinner are available at 404-527-7718 or on the ITC website at www.itc.edu.

ITC is a consortium of six different denominational seminaries including: Gammon Theological Seminary, Morehouse School of Religion, Turner Theological Seminary, Phillips School of Theology, Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary, and C.H. Mason Theological Seminary. The Center also welcomes students of other denominations to matriculate as part of its Harry V. and Selma T. Richardson Ecumenical Fellowship, named for its founding president and his wife. The Lutheran Theological Center is also housed on the ITC campus and its students enjoy the benefits of the ecumenical afro-centric academic environment.

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