



MIKE SCHWARTZ/THE TUSTIN NEWS

Martin and Jennifer Rigby, right, own Acorn Naturalists which was named Environmental Business of the Year by the League of Conservation Voters. On the left are finches on a sock-type feeder in a semi-secluded corner of the parking lot.

Environmentalists awarded

By **GEORGE STEWART**
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The co-founders of an Old Town Tustin company are so committed to the environment and environmental education they are receiving top honors in the field.

Martin and Jennifer Rigby started Acorn Naturalists as a consulting firm in 1990. Their clients were, and are, zoos, parks, museums and aquariums that want to design and develop educational programs.

It was the dream of a lifetime for the Rigbys, who met in college and discovered their common love of camping, hiking and studying the environment. She left a full-time job as education curator at the Santa Ana Zoo, and he left a 20-year job as assistant general manager at the Orange County Water District to start Acorn Naturalists.

They started their mail-order business in 1991, selling resources for the trail and classroom through a 32-page catalog. The catalog grows every year, and this year it has 212 pages.

They opened their large store and bookshop at 155 El

Camino Real and, in 2003, fulfilled their vision by opening the Center for Science and Environmental Education there.

This year, the center was named Environmental Business of the Year by the Orange County League of Conservation Voters, a Sacramento-based non-partisan organization that informs office holders about issues related to the environment.

Also this year, the Rigbys received the Howard Bell Award for outstanding achievements and contributions as leaders in the field by the Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education.

"We're thrilled and honored," said Jennifer Rigby. "We're very pleased to be recognized for a 15-year effort that has largely gone unnoticed."

The center consists of a large, working library and a conference room upstairs for clients working on projects and programs. Downstairs is the classroom area for teacher workshops with speakers, usually for free. Tustin Unified School District teachers meet there regularly, as well as members of Tustin Educational Achievement with Com-

munity Help (TEACH) and other nonprofit groups.

Jennifer said the center makes Acorn a rare destination store in Old Town Tustin.

"Because we have this community center," she said, "a lot of people are coming from all over to Tustin to attend a lecture or a meeting, and they're intrigued by Old Town Tustin."

The Rigbys also were honored for their business practices and the conservation principles apparent in the very design of the building and landscaping.

From storm water diversion practices and drought-tolerant native landscaping, to the energy-efficient features and recycling programs, to the organic filtration system that makes their pond a perfect ecosystem for fish and reptiles, they strive to have a model of what businesses can and should do.

"The idea," said Martin Rigby, "is to connect the children's lives with the environment in which they live in a tangible way. That's Jenny's specialty."

CONTACT THE WRITER: (949) 553-2919 or gstewart@ocregister.com