Citation:

Joe Kchodl began to develop his fossil collection and subsequent search for knowledge as a boy growing up in the fossil-rich Niagara Falls area. Following his graduation from Niagara University with a degree in Education in 1979, he assembled a collection of marine invertebrates from the Niagara Frontier and donated it to the Schoelkopf Geological Museum in Niagara Falls. After serving in the military, he resumed collecting, this time specializing in trilobites.

In 1993, Joe moved to Midland, Michigan, where he continued to collect, and began his significant involvement in informal science education in paleontology. He started by speaking to elementary and secondary classes and other groups on fossils. The character he created for these programs, PaleoJoe, has become a recognized personality in the community. He developed a program called Family Fossil Fun for the Midland Community Center and then developed it into an ongoing TV series called “Fossil Fun” on the local Midland City Television channel. In 1999, Joe was honored as a finalist in the Philo T. Farnsworth Video Competition for an episode of that series. For the past two years, PaleoJoe has given special instruction in fossils to more than 1,600 school children each March at the Hall of Ideas of the Midland Center for the Arts. Meeting state science requirements and giving enrichment opportunities to teachers and their students is a goal of the Hall’s science outreach program of which PaleoJoe has now become a major component. Recently Joe developed the idea for trilobite and fossil trading cards, which are given free to local children when they visit the Hall of Ideas museum or when PaleoJoe visits schools. It is a 16-card series with plans for a second set in 2002.

Joe’s large personal trilobite collection has also become well-known as an educational resource. His exhibit, entitled “Trilobites Treasures: Arthropods of Ancient Seas” recently ran for four months at the Hall of Ideas where he also mounts a monthly exhibit of fossils.

Joe has produced a two-part video on the famous trilobites and other fossils of Caleb’s quarry in Middleport, New York. He helped produce a three-part video series with Drs. Tomaz Baumeiller, Gregg Gunnell and Bill Sanders from the University of Michigan on fossil collecting and preparation. In the early 1990s he participated in field work in the Czech Republic, where he met Dr. Radvan Horny of the Czech National Museum. Joe donated tools and equipment to the museum.

Joe’s enthusiasm for paleontology is infectious. His commitment to teaching is obvious. His generosity in sharing his discoveries with professionals and non-professionals alike is a model for others.

It is with great pleasure that the Paleontological Research Institution presents its 2001 Katherine Palmer Award in recognition of outstanding contributions to the science by a non-professional to Joe Kchodl.