

## EPA Honors New York Environmental Champions

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on May 13 honored 28 individuals and organizations and businesses from across New York State with Environmental Champion Awards for their achievements in protecting public health and the environment. EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck was joined by Murray Fisher, founder of the New York Harbor School, to present the awards to this year's recipients at a ceremony at the EPA's offices in Manhattan. Annabelle Ng and Robin Shum from Great Neck, New York also won an honorable mention in the national President's Environmental Youth Award competition. The awards are presented annually.

"It is a privilege for EPA to be able to recognize the dedication and accomplishments of these environmental trailblazers," said Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck. "These individuals and organizations from across New York are an inspiration, encouraging us to do our best to protect the environment every day."

The Environmental Champion Award winners from New York (in alphabetical order) are:

**Alexandra Ferguson** is an eco-aware pillow company that uses recycled materials. The company uses recycled poly-fill inserts made from recycled water bottles to stuff the pillows. The products are all made in the USA. The company is located in Brooklyn, NY.

**Arm-of-the-Sea is a Hudson Valley** performance group that combines art and ecology to promote environmental protection. Their performances resonate with audiences of all ages and demographics. The group raises environmental awareness and inspires environmental action through

their shows.

**Dr. Christopher Gobler** is a Stony Brook University marine biology professor. Dr. Gobler's research focuses primarily on plankton ecology, ecological functioning and trophic status of estuaries, and how phytoplankton influence biogeochemical cycles of organic carbon, nutrients, and trace metals in aquatic ecosystems. Dr. Gobler's laboratory group researches the functioning of aquatic ecosystems and how that functioning affects humans or can be affected by humans, climate change and coastal ocean acidification.

**Dani Glaser** is the creator and co-director of the Westchester Green Business Challenge, a public/private partnership with the Business Council of Westchester. Under Ms. Glaser's leadership, this program has grown to more than 300 businesses in Westchester County. Ms. Glaser developed and launched Westchester Green Business-Certified, a rigorous program for organizations to earn certification for their environmental stewardship efforts. Ms. Glaser also developed the Green Team Spirit program, which provides organizations with the tools and expertise needed to successfully integrate sustainable business practices into company operations.

**The Great Healthy Yard Project** is a non-profit organization that works to improve and protect drinking water quality. The organization encourages people to go to their website to pledge to reduce or eliminate their pesticide use and to not throw prescription drugs or chemicals down drains or toilets. The Great Healthy Yard Project has published a book to educate the public on this topic. Nearly 900 people have taken the pledge via the website.

**Helen Hays** is the chairperson of the Great Gull Island Committee at the American Museum of Natural History. Ms. Hays works to protect terns, which are seabirds that nest on Great Gull Island in Long Island Sound. Ms. Hays has also conducted research on the adverse effects of PCBs on marine life. She has managed the Great Gull Island project for almost 40 years, and has been a mentor to hundreds of students. Ms. Hays has authored dozens of scientific papers and has traveled the world to protect seabirds.

**John Wackman** is the founder of the Hudson Valley Repair Cafe Initiative, which was established to reduce the amount of solid waste that enters landfills. Mr. Wackman's group hosts Repair Cafes – community gatherings where coaches teach residents how to repair household items or repair the items themselves so that these items are not thrown away. Since its inception in 2012, the Repair Cafes have diverted tens of thousands of pounds of solid waste from landfills and saved tens of thousands of metric tons of carbon emissions.

**Dr. Joseph Gardella, Jr.**, a distinguished professor at the University of Buffalo, served as co-chair of the Community Action Council (CAC) associated with the Niagara Falls Storage Superfund Site in Lewiston, NY. Dr. Gardella dedicated hundreds of volunteer hours and played a paramount role in facilitating a dialogue with community and the public that resulted in the decision to remove radioactive waste from the site.

**Laura Petit** is the founder of the New Paltz ReUse Center and manages the ReUse, Recycling and Composting Centers. Ms. Petit and her team spearheaded New Paltz's Zero



Waste Partnership program with EPA. She wrote New Paltz's comprehensive Zero Waste Action Plan and coordinated with local businesses, schools and governments to establish a network of information and support for sustainable materials management. The New Paltz ReUse Center hosts many community engagement activities including Repair Cafes, Zero Waste Days, Textile Collection Days, Tool Shares and Composting Workshops.

**Lauren Singer**, a graduate of NYU's environmental studies program, Ms. Singer has committed herself to a zero-waste lifestyle. In the past three years Ms. Singer produced only a 16-ounce Mason jar's worth of trash. Ms. Singer also started The Simply Co., which produces safe sanitation products. She provides tips for a waste-free lifestyle on her blog, "Trash is for Tossers."

**Dr. Maida Galvez** is a pediatrician and director of the EPA Region 2 Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit. Through her clinical consultations, outreach, education and advocacy work, Dr. Galvez has promoted public health. She has spearheaded several research projects involving environmental exposures and children's growth and development. Dr. Galvez works closely with partners on children's environmental health initiatives and has spoken on behalf of children before national committees, state legislatures and local governments.

**Dr. Marcus Martinez** is a medical doctor who serves the community of Hoosick Fall, New York. He has worked with Healthy Hoosick Water, a local group that has been instrumental in encouraging government officials to investigate perflourooctanoic acid (PFOA), which was detected in the municipal water supply of Hoosick Falls. Through his medical training, Dr. Martinez has assisted health officials in addressing various health-related issues raised in the Hoosick Falls community, including indications for medical monitoring of PFOA,

benefits and risks of breastfeeding and questions related to blood donations.

**Materials for the Arts**, a New York City municipal reuse center, is turning garbage into art. In 2015 alone, the organization diverted 1.5 million pounds of materials from the waste stream. The organization distributed materials that can be used to make art, free of charge to more than 2,000 art organizations, public schools, community organizations and government agencies.

**Michael Hickey**, a resident of Hoosick Falls, New York, discovered perflourooctanoic acid (PFOA) contamination in his local public drinking water supply. Suspecting PFOA contamination and knowing that water systems are not required by law to test for PFOA, Mr. Hickey took his own water samples and analyzed them at his own cost, calling attention to this important issue. As a result of his testing, the Village of Hoosick Falls has installed water treatment technology to ensure that residents are drinking clean water.

The **Northeast Recycling Council, Inc.** provided resources, publications, trainings and technical assistance to Indian Nations, communities, schools, and businesses throughout New York. These programs have delivered innovative and sustainable solutions with measurable environmental results. These efforts have included tackling electronic-waste, recycling in schools, and composting and organics management, among other environmental issues.

**NY Sun Works** builds innovative science labs for urban schools that feature hydroponic farming technology that gives students the opportunity to grow food while learning hands-on about nutrition. The labs also teach students about water management, efficient land use, climate change, biodiversity, sustainable development and other issues. NY Sun Works has completed work on a Science Barge which is a prototype of a sustainable urban floating farm and environmental education center.

**Protectors of Pine Oaks** is a non-profit organization that supports the stewardship of Staten Island's existing parkland, bluebelt corridors and nature preserves in order to protect Staten Island's natural areas. The organization advocates for environmental protection and preservation through education, walks, newsletters and other sponsorships of environmental education.

**The Rockland County Solid Waste Management Authority** is being recognized for its strong recycling, composting and household hazardous waste programs. The county provides compost bins and rain barrels at cost. The county's Household Hazardous Waste Facility is notable because of the large amount of toxic tonnage it diverts from landfills, its re-use program, and its achievements in electronic-waste collection.

**Sarah Womer** founded Zero to Go, an education-based waste management company focused on composting and recycling. Among the services offered by the company are zero-waste event services, compost pickup, and the sale of compostable products (cups, plates, etc.). In three years, Zero to Go, under Ms. Womer's leadership, has diverted 50 tons of waste through 41 events and the organization's bicycle-powered compost service.

The **"Save the Rain"** program is a comprehensive stormwater management plan, run by Onondaga County, intended to reduce pollution to Onondaga Lake and its tributaries. During heavy rains, stormwater flows into the local sewer system, causing heavy flow periods that can overload the system. This program keeps rainwater from ending up in the sewage treatment system by planting wetlands, using porous sidewalks and roads, and building underground storage tanks. To date, the county has advanced more than 180 green infrastructure projects, which include permeable pavement, green spaces, green roofs and rain barrels.

**Shavonne Smith** and her staff at the Shinnecock Environmental Depart-



ment are addressing climate change impacts, particularly shoreline erosion, extreme weather and temperatures, and the protection of the vulnerable population within the Shinnecock Nation in Suffolk County. Ms. Smith works with partners to protect plants, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources through the development of a Shoreline management plan that includes beach nourishment, restoration of the eel grass beds in Shinnecock Bay, construction of an oyster reef, and monitoring of groundwater levels on the Shinnecock Reservation in partnership with U.S. Geological Survey.

**Dr. Sherri Mason**, Associate Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry Department at SUNY Fredonia, is leading the charge on the study of microplastics in Lake Erie. In collaboration with the 5 Gyres Institute and SUNY Fredonia, Dr. Mason conducted the first-ever analysis of plastics pollution in the bodies of water and found high plastic particles within the Great Lakes.

**Sodexo Dining Services** at SUNY Oneonta, is a dining services business that is addressing sustainability issues on the SUNY Oneonta campus. The company established projects aimed to reduce food waste through composting, donation, food waste audits, and the implementation of trayless dining halls, which has reduced food waste by 15 percent and reduced water consumption by 250,000 gallons each semester. Additionally, Sodexo donates vegetable oil from dining halls to heat College Camp, a facility run by the student association. Sodexo diverts 800 to 900 gallons of used oil from the landfill each year and saves the college \$10,000 per year on fuel costs.

**Sustainable Westchester, Inc.** is a consortium of local governments that focuses on sustainability initiatives. The group established a Community

Choice Aggregation, allowing municipalities to choose their own clean electricity sources. The organization also established the Municipal Solar Buyers Group, which enables Westchester County municipalities to form a purchasing group to collectively negotiate with solar developers to install photovoltaic generation projects on municipal properties. This is expected to double the county's solar capacity.

**Thomas Lowe** is Director of ReNU Niagara, Niagara University's community outreach office. He is also Chair of the Niagara Beautification Committee, a founder of Greenprint Niagara, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Niagara Falls Heritage Area and the City of Niagara Falls Youth Bureau, among other environmental advocacy work.

**Town of North Hempstead** distributed fishing line collection receptacles on docks and waterways in order to protect wildlife from the dangers of becoming entangled in fishing line. The discarded monofilament line receptacles provide a low-cost, yet highly-effective project that reduces plastic pollution in waterways, as well as informs citizens on the importance of ocean stewardship.

GRACE Communications, a non-profit dedicated to creating a more sustainable food system, developed the **Water Footprint Calculator** to allow people to track their water use and to create awareness about how people use water. The calculator was the winner of the Graphic Design USA's 2015 American Graphic Design Award and is one of a few calculators that includes virtual water use. This tool is used by hundreds of thousands of people in New York and California and will soon be released in Spanish.

**Dr. William Boeck**, Professor Emeritus of Niagara University, served as a technical support member of the Community Action Council associated with the Niagara Falls Storage Super-

fund Site in Lewiston, NY. He has dedicated many volunteer hours as a Community Action Council member and has served as an invaluable community voice as chair of the Radiological Committee. Dr. Boeck was instrumental in facilitating a dialogue that resulted in the recent decision to remove radiological waste from the Superfund site.

## 2015 PRESIDENT'S ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH AWARDS

Every year, students and educators compete nationally for the honor of receiving the President's Environmental Youth Award. There is only one winner in each region, along with honorable mention recipients. Two of this year's honorable mention recipients are from New York.

### HONORABLE MENTION

Annabelle Ng and Robin Shum "Optimization of a Photosynthetic Microbial Fuel Cell based on *Rhodospirillum rubrum*" Great Neck, New York

Annabelle Ng and Robin Shum are New York high school students who are working on the growing problem of global energy usage. Realizing that fossil fuels have had, and will continue to have a great impact on the world, they experimented with a specific bacterium, *Rhodospirillum rubrum*, to assess its potential as an alternative fuel source. With help from two of their teachers, Dr. Carol Hersh and Dr. James Truglio, they ran experiments to test the optimization of a photosynthetic microbial fuel cells based on the usage of *r. rubrum*. Through these experiments, they were able to see that *r. rubrum* could be tapped as a potential alternative energy source.

For more details, visit: [www.epa.gov/aboutepa/environmental-champion-awards](http://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/environmental-champion-awards).