



A non-profit association that provides statewide proactive leadership on waste reduction and recycling through education, advocacy, collaboration, programs and services.

For Immediate Release

Media Contact:

Karin Sieg, Executive Director
Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin
execdirector@arow-online.org
(715) 343-0722

Meleesa Johnson, President
Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin
meleesa.johnson@co.marathon.wi.us
(715) 446-3101

Recycling and Waste Reduction Efforts throughout Wisconsin Honored

The Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin Holds Annual Awards Ceremony

Elkhart Lake, WI (March 8, 2017) – The Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW) proudly held their annual awards ceremony last week at the 2017 Wisconsin Integrated Resource Management Conference (www.wirmc.org) in Elkhart Lake, at The Osthoff Resort. The ceremony, held on March 2nd, recognized individuals and groups for outstanding work in the field of recycling and waste reduction.

This year AROW added two new categories and presented a total of four awards and one certificate of recognition.

“As the voice for recycling and waste reduction in Wisconsin, AROW always looks forward to honoring the achievements of those working hard in our industry. This year we are incredibly pleased to also recognize the efforts of our next generation, the Emerging Leaders.” said Meleesa Johnson, AROW’s President. “This year’s recipients clearly demonstrate the power of education at all levels. From students in elementary school to those in our universities, along with their excellent teachers and mentors, together we all learn from each other to make a difference in our industry. It’s important to thank and honor these important individuals and groups.”

The recipient of the prestigious **Christy Dixon Recycler of the Year Award** was Rick Meyers, Sanitation Services Manager for the City of Milwaukee. This recognition is given to an individual whose career demonstrates the highest professional standards. Rick has spent all of his career on waste reduction and recycling efforts. Starting in 1999 Rick began his career at Kirkwood Community College as an “area resource specialist” working to find options for disposal of industrial wastes and also building waste diversion plans for businesses. Eighteen years later Rick now serves as the city of Milwaukee’s sanitation service manager, coordinating not only the state’s largest recycling program, but also overseeing the launch of the city’s organics collection and composting program.

Ms. Johnson further stated, “Rick and his staff work to provide a broad recycling and waste reduction education and outreach program to the most culturally and economically diverse city in Wisconsin...a challenge that Rick and his staff embraces with thoughtfulness and creativity.”

For those of us that have been lucky enough to work on projects with Rick we have learned that staying the course with advocacy, even when frustrating political winds are smashing against you and toppling roadblocks at your feet, doesn’t necessarily mean upping caustic rhetoric. We learned that being assertive doesn’t have to mean being untenably aggressive. We learned that even when it appears the battle is lost, the war is not over. We learned that Rick Meyers is the kind of person for whom the Christy Dixon award was made.”

The **Outstanding Achievement in Recycling Award** is awarded to an individual or group that has excelled in their recycling program. This award was given to the Sparta High School Earth Club for their Food Waste Diversion Initiative.

The students researched and raised the funds to purchase an Ecovim Digester. This is a food waste dehydrator/composter that converts food waste into clean water and a dry soil amendment. Quoting Joe Cook, the club advisor, “The community outreach grew legs like a giraffe.” The students provided the education and labor for the disassembly line under the watchful guidance of citizen volunteers. The students named the equipment “Big

Chuck” after the lead maintenance man Chuck, who continues to be very supportive of this project. The School Board and the school administration are also very supportive of this project. To keep the Ecovim equipment operating at full capacity in the summer months, the school accepts food waste from Hansen’s IGA grocery store chain. The students provide tours and give presentations about the project. They also sell the soil amendment created and allow teachers to use the money to purchase warm winter gear for needy students. They have raised over \$1,000.00 selling the amendment.

The **Outstanding Achievement in Education Award** is given to an individual or group that has excelled in environmental education, specifically related to solid waste and recycling. Applicants may be from the public, private or nonprofit sector. This year’s award went to Rob Michitsch, professor at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point.

Rob began teaching at UWSP in August 2009. Since then, he has been an incredible help and inspiration to hundreds of students desiring to succeed in the waste management profession. Rob is a professor of Soils/Plant Analysis, Biogeochemistry, Solid Waste Management and Composting, as well as an academic advisor and overseer for student internships in waste related fields. In his classes, Rob stresses the importance of viewing waste as a resource rather than something to be disregarded and discarded. By incorporating the importance and benefit of waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting in his curriculum, Rob instills a sense of relevance and excitement in students to push the industry past its current bounds. Rob influences students to broaden their scope by considering topics from small scale personal waste production to the broad concept of international waste management. Without Rob, the UW Stevens Point Waste Management Program would not be what it is today.

Rob also does more than his share to give students opportunities outside of the classroom. He promotes education through experience and is continuously watching for opportunities to pass along to students in the waste field. Through his continued efforts, Rob has been an invaluable asset not only to the countless students as they pursue their degrees in waste management but also to the industry for providing knowledgeable and able professionals.

On a local community level, Rob has been integral in connecting the university (UWSP) and the Stevens Point / central Wisconsin area. He is very willing to share his knowledge and connections to businesses, nonprofits and local governments and requires his students from his higher-level waste management class to work on real-life projects benefiting local communities or businesses.

One of our new categories is the **Outstanding Achievement in Waste Reduction & Recycling – Student Award**. This award goes to an individual of higher education or recent graduate that has excelled with their overall activities, or a specific project, supporting waste reduction, sustainability, recycling, and/or organics management. This year’s recipient was Alex Thomas, a Biology and Waste Management double major at UWSP, with minors in Sustainable Energy and Soil Science.

Alex takes on his impressive academic career in conjunction with his ongoing work and involvement with the campus’ Student Government Association. During his time at UWSP, Alex has been very involved in research, the campus Greenfund, student organizations, and volunteer activities. When it comes to Alex’s recycling vision, this was his response: "My vision for recycling is to make it become the easiest end of life choice for consumers. I want to see it become the integrated normal so that landfilling what is in our waste stream is the exception, not the normal." As well, while acting as the Sustainability and Waste Systems Intern for the Milwaukee County Zoo this past summer, Alex set and then met a goal to implement procedures at the zoo to compost 150 tons of animal waste per year.

Overall, Alex is very motivated to make changes in the recycling and solid waste management arena. He is also very motivated to educate others and improve recycling and solid waste management wherever he can. He is a focused person that constantly performs his work to the highest level and impacting any community he becomes a part of.

Another new category for AROW was the **Outstanding Achievement in Recycling: Youth Emerging Leader Certificate of Recognition**. This certificate went to Jackson Pauls, a 9-year old from Eau Claire, WI. To the untrained eye Jackson seems like a normal kid, but to those who have had the privilege to get to know him can testify he is anything but normal. When Jackson plays baseball his eye is not only on the ball but on the lack of recycling receptacles at the local parks. Most kids would shrug it off and toss their empty Gatorade bottle into the trash, but not Jackson. Instead he has raised the issue of no recycling with the City of Altoona and met with the City’s Park and Recreation Department, Eau Claire County Recycling, and Boxx Sanitation to come up with a solution to get recycling at the local parks.

At first the City of Altoona was reluctant, but this didn't stop Jackson. He began saving his own money, getting offers from companies to supply recycling bins, and after constant meetings with the Parks and Recreation Department, he was able to prompt the department to contact vendors to get a discount by using Jackson as their reasoning for needing one. Jackson has also convinced the City of Altoona to start small. They will start with a pilot program for the 2017 summer season. He will continue to fight for permanent recycling bins at local parks and is now encouraging the youth basketball organization to switch to cans instead of plastic bottles due to the lifespan of a recycled can, which can be recycled endlessly.

For more information on each of our award recipients please go to our awards page on the AROW website at www.arow-online.org/awards

AROW is a membership-based organization, serving the recycling and waste reduction interests of citizens, organizations, municipalities and businesses across the state. For those who support recycling and wish to see more waste diverted into productive use, consider joining the cause by becoming an AROW member.

##

About the Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW)

Founded in 1990, AROW is an association representing Wisconsin's recycling, waste reduction and sustainability professionals. The organization provides leadership through education, advocacy, and collaboration and promotes effective, efficient and sustainable material recovery initiatives. For details on AROW, its positions and programs visit www.arow-online.org.