



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

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## For Immediate Release

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## AROW Honors Recycling and Waste Reduction Efforts Throughout Wisconsin at Annual Awards Ceremony

**Stevens Point, WI (March 3, 2021)** – The Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin (AROW) proudly held their annual awards ceremony virtually last week at the 2021 Wisconsin Integrated Resource Management Conference ([www.wirmc.org](http://www.wirmc.org)). The ceremony, held on February 24th, recognized individuals and organizations for outstanding work in the field of recycling and waste reduction.

This year AROW gave out a total of five awards.

“AROW always looks forward to honoring those working hard in our industry. This year’s recipients clearly demonstrate the strength of recycling in Wisconsin with achievements in private industry as well as education,” said Meleesa Johnson, AROW’s President. “AROW is the voice for recycling and waste reduction in Wisconsin and we are proud to recognize these individuals and groups.”

The prestigious **Christy Dixon Recycler of the Year Award** was awarded to Mark Walter, Business Development Manager for Brown County Port and Resource Recycling located in Green Bay, WI. This recognition is given to an individual whose career demonstrates the highest professional standards. Mark has been a leader in the waste and recycling industry for over a decade. He serves on the Governor’s Council on Recycling and is the Treasurer for the Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin.

In his time with Brown County, Mark Walter has been a pillar in the recycling industry. Mark’s career spans resource recovery and conservation in a variety of ways including curbside recycling, household hazardous waste, and even Port of Green Bay operations. Mark works extensively with municipalities and private companies to ensure there are sustainable recycling options, even included developing the Department’s first strategic Solid Waste Plan. Mark has a commitment to education – including educating the public and has even taught GIS classes at the University of WI Green Bay.

As a member of the AROW, Mark has been very involved in the Product Stewardship Committee. Mark was key in leading the group to research and move forward initiatives on a variety of materials, but even more importantly Mark worked to build a network of passionate individuals to advocate for change and built state-wide capacity around understanding what product stewardship is and is not.

The **Outstanding Achievement in Waste Reduction and Recycling Award** was awarded to Recycling Connections, of Stevens Point, WI. This recognition is given to an individual or group that has excelled in their recycling program.

For the last 40 years Recycling Connections has been making an impact in the recycling world. In its early days, the organization collected and processed a wide variety of recyclables throughout Portage County, WI via its network of drop-off sites and a curbside collection program in the City of Stevens Point. When Wisconsin's Recycling Law came into effect in 1991 requiring municipalities to manage recycling programs, the organization shifted its activities away from collection and processing in exchange for providing education and program support services, while also expanding beyond basic recycling and waste reduction, such as conducting a 3-county Mercury Reduction Program and promoting backyard composting. In 1998 they created a group compost bin purchase program that has helped municipalities successfully educate and encourage residents to manage their yard materials and food scraps more efficiently onsite, in their own yards. Since this program began, over 15,000 bins have been purchased throughout Wisconsin and in portions of Minnesota and Illinois. Beginning in 2021, this program will be expanding and offered to communities nationwide.

Recycling Connections continues to expand its services and programs and has just recently launched their Near Zero Event Services. They will work with businesses, organizations, municipalities, and schools to plan events that reduce their environmental impact and can meet waste reduction goals.

The **Outstanding Achievement in Education Award** for an Individual was awarded to two outstanding individuals from Outagamie County Recycling and Solid Waste: Alexandra Nett and Marissa Michalkiewicz. The **Outstanding Achievement in Education Award** for an Organization was awarded to Dane County Department of Waste and Renewables. This award is given to an individual or group from the public, private, or non-profit sector that has excelled in solid waste or recycling environmental education.

Alexandra Nett and Marissa Michalkiewicz together are Outagamie County's recycling outreach team. Alex Nett is the Recycling and Resource Recovery Administrator and Marissa Michalkiewicz is the Recycling and Solid Waste Program Coordinator. Together they are responsible for the education and outreach efforts for Outagamie County as well as acting as the point people for the Tri-County Recycling Partnership between Brown, Outagamie, and Winnebago Counties.

There is no doubt that all Recycling Educators struggled with COVID-19 restrictions in 2020, but when Alex and Marissa faced the challenge of retooling their more traditional recycling outreach plan – which was centered around Material Recovery Facility (MRF) tours, group presentations and classroom visits - they undertook this task with enthusiasm and ingenuity. Alex and Marissa not only tailored their delivery methods to fit COVID-19 restrictions, they went above and beyond and introduced personable characters, developed storylines and employed new outreach platforms to engage younger generations of recyclers. Alex and Marissa created YouTube and TikTok videos with modern script and *actors* who are employees at the MRF. Their TikTok video "Holiday Lights Do Not GO in Your Recycling Cart", went viral within the first day of posting and currently has over 433,000 likes. These educational outreach efforts have been featured in multiple local live news broadcasts, local radio news broadcasts, a local newspaper, and is mentioned in industry magazines *Plastic News* and *Waste Advantage Magazine*.

Dane County Department of Waste and Renewables (DCDWR) was recognized for their work on reimagining waste through the creation of a mobile education trailer called The Trash Lab. It contains interactive, museum-like displays that engage and educate visitors on the topics of reduced consumption, recycling, renewable energy, and environmental stewardship. The Trash Lab has three distinct sections that inspire visitors to RETHINK their relationship with waste, PROTECT their environment, and REDESIGN their production and waste systems.

DCDWR partnered with the Madison Children's Museum to bring the lab to life and designed the trailer with sustainability in mind. Ninety percent of the materials used to create the Trash Lab had a previous life and were reclaimed or repurposed for this project, including the trailer itself. The interactive displays inside the trailer focus

on waste minimization, the creation and science behind biogas and its use as a renewable energy, and sustainable materials management through reduced consumption, reuse, and recycling.

The Trash Lab has also been designed to advance equity and inclusion of solid waste and recycling education. The Trash Lab can be hauled to events and taken to schools that may not otherwise have the means to travel to the DCDWR's site to learn about solid waste and recycling. The Trash Lab is wheelchair accessible and there are also booklets available for visitors who wish for a Spanish translation of the exhibit material.

When not on the road to an event or school, the Trash Lab will be primarily housed at the DCDWR's site to supplement tours. DCDWR receives over 800 visitors to at the County's landfill and renewable natural gas (RNG) plant every year. The majority of these visitors are students, and the tours offer an excellent opportunity for lessons in environmental stewardship, science, engineering, and technology. Visitors learn about solid waste management and how landfills protect our air, soil and groundwater as well as how the DCDWR is responsible for the management and operation of Dane County's landfills, renewable natural gas (RNG) facilities, Clean Sweep, construction and demolition (C&D) recycling facility and various other recycling programs, such as tires and shingles recycling, and a bicycle exchange program. The Trash Lab will enhance visitors learning experience at DCDWR by offering interactive ways to engage with the knowledge they have gained during the tour.

The **Outstanding Achievement in Waste Reduction & Recycling – Student Award** was awarded to Sujata Gautam. This award aims to recognize the next generation of recycling enthusiasts and professionals. It is given 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.

Sujata Gautam is a woman of many passions with a level of enthusiasm that matches. She is goal-orientated and strives to reach a sustainable future while encouraging those around her to do the same. She has worked as a graduate intern at Dane County's Department of Waste & Renewables since fall of 2019 while she has also been studying for her master's degree in Social Innovation and Sustainability Leadership at Edgewood College.

Some of her many accomplishments for the Department of Waste & Renewables have included updating the Department's website to be more user friendly and personable, creating a virtual facility tour, and working on the Department's vision of sustainability, safety, and equity and inclusion. This was done by creating and managed various working groups, under a project coined Operation Spark Plug.

Sustainability and responsible materials management do not turn off when the work or school day ends; it extends to every aspect of her personal life. From where she lives (and works), to her transportation, food, and clothing choices, Sujata is always weighing the impacts. Sujata was recently featured by Sustain Dane for her minimalist lifestyle. For a period of time she limited her waste generation to what she could fit into a glass jar.

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

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### **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](http://www.arow-online.org).