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**For immediate release**

October 17, 2025

**Contact**

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Teresa Bradley, President, Board of Directors

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Subject: National Recycling Coalition Announces 2025 Award Winners: A Record Year of Innovation in Recycling, Organics Management, and Circularity

**National Recycling Coalition Announces 2025 Award Winners: A Record Year of Innovation in Recycling, Organics Management, and Circularity**

**Wichita, KS — October 2025** — The National Recycling Coalition (NRC) proudly announced the recipients of the 2025 National Recycling Awards during the National Recycling Congress, at Wichita State University. The awards ceremony, led by Peter Adrian of the Solid Waste Agency of Lake County (SWALCO), celebrated the most forward-thinking and impactful leaders, organizations, and programs advancing recycling, organics management, and circularity across the nation.

This year marked a milestone for the NRC Awards Program, with **more than 60 nominations—the highest number in NRC history**. The breadth and creativity of this year’s nominees reflected a national surge of innovation in waste reduction, resource recovery, and community engagement.

Awards Chair Ann Gibbs commented, “The quality of nominations this year was truly exceptional. We saw an incredible range of creative, practical, and replicable solutions that are transforming recycling and circularity nationwide. Choosing the winners was both inspiring and incredibly difficult because the work being done across the country is so strong and diverse.”

Peter Adrian, who served as the emcee for the in-person ceremony, echoed that enthusiasm. “It was energizing to see so many leaders gathered to celebrate real progress,” Adrian said. “These awardees aren’t just maintaining recycling programs, they’re reinventing them. They’re turning food waste into renewable energy, building equitable, community-led systems, and proving that circularity isn’t just a goal, it’s the future of sustainable development.”

This year’s winners represent a remarkable breadth of creativity and measurable impact in advancing a circular economy. **Domtar’s Kingsport Mill** was recognized for transforming into Tennessee’s largest 100% recycled containerboard facility—a model of industrial-scale circularity that diverts hundreds of thousands of tons of recovered fiber annually. **Green Era**, located on Chicago’s South Side, was honored for its pioneering urban anaerobic digester that converts 85,000 tons of food waste into renewable natural gas and compost while reinvesting in local jobs and workforce training.

Educational leaders also shined: **Santa Monica College’s Sustainable Materials Management Program** and **Salinas Valley Recycles** are preparing the next generation of zero-waste champions through immersive, bilingual education that equips students to lead sustainable change. **earthday365** continues to elevate regional circularity in St. Louis, diverting over 6,700 tons of waste each year through restaurant certification, hard-to-recycle events, and community engagement.

**Osceola County’s Responsible Recycling Osceola Program** earned national praise for its multilingual outreach, glass pulverizer demonstrations, and creative school partnerships that have reached over 40,000 residents. The program’s success in reducing contamination and inspiring community pride has positioned it as a scalable model for equitable, hands-on recycling education.

For advancing state-level recycling policy and waste reduction, **Senator Jana Hughes** was highlighted for her leadership on introducing legislation to support battery stewardship and waste incentives. She plays a critical role in policy frameworks in enabling circular systems.

Finally, the prestigious **Lifetime Achievement in Recycling Award** was presented to **Susan Kinsella**, Executive Director of *Conservatree* and founder of the *Environmental Paper Network*. Kinsella’s decades of leadership in sustainable paper and procurement have shaped national policy, jumpstarted recycled paper markets, and united more than 250 organizations around the world in advancing responsible production and reuse. Her work exemplifies the long-term vision and collaboration at the heart of the recycling movement.

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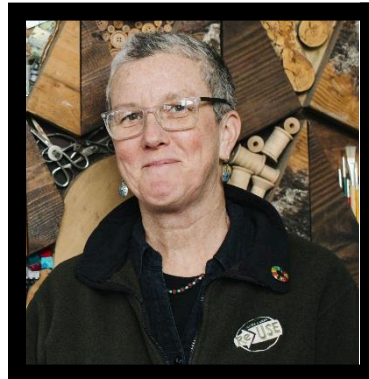
## Celebrating Leadership Across the Nation

2025 Winners:



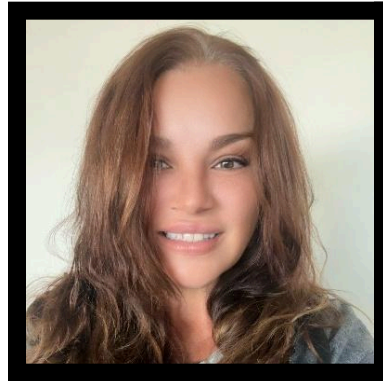
**Lifetime Achievement in Recycling – Susan Kinsella** – Executive Director of *Conservatree* and founder of the *Environmental Paper Network*, whose decades of leadership transformed recycled paper markets and sustainable procurement worldwide.

**Honorable Mention – Lifetime Achievement in Recycling – Diane Cohen** – Founder of Finger Lakes ReUse, a national leader in reuse innovation, job creation, and workforce development.



**Board Director of the Year – Teresa Bradley** – Recognized for outstanding leadership, contributions, and dedication to advancing circularity and NRC's mission.

**Recycler of the Year – Lisa Puckett** – CEO of BayArea Compliance, creator of the NETZERO360 program, and national leader in waste recovery and ESG-integrated compliance systems.



**Bill Heenan Emerging Leader Award – Delaney Demro** – Program Manager at SUNY ESF’s Center for Sustainable Materials Management, advancing TRUE Zero Waste certification and DEI-focused reuse initiatives.

**Outstanding Higher Education Program – Sustainable Materials Management Program at Santa Monica College (accepted by Victoria Charles)** – A pioneering community college program offering degrees and certificates in zero waste and sustainable materials management, building a vital workforce pipeline for the circular economy.





**Outstanding K–12 School Program – Salinas Valley Recycles (accepted by Sara Papineau-Brandt) –**

Inspiring youth through field trips, classroom lessons, and Green Teams that teach recycling, composting, and environmental leadership across Monterey County, CA.

**Outstanding Not-for-Profit Business Leadership – earthday365 (accepted by Jessica Watson) –** Drives regional circularity in St. Louis through large-scale public engagement, restaurant certification, and waste reduction programs that divert 6,700+ tons annually.



**The Fred Schmitt Award for Outstanding Corporate Leadership – Domtar Kingsport Packaging Mill (accepted by Jan Martin) –**

Tennessee’s largest 100% recycled containerboard facility, demonstrating industrial-scale circularity through recovered fiber, water efficiency, and local partnerships.

**The Beth Brown Boettner Award for Outstanding Public Education & Outreach – Osceola County’s Responsible Recycling Osceola (accepted by Paul Conover & Nicole Enverga) –** A creative, multilingual education initiative engaging more than 40,000 residents through demonstrations, school partnerships, and art contests.





**Outstanding Recycling Innovation – Green Era (Chicago, IL)** – Operates the nation’s first large-scale urban anaerobic digester, turning 85,000 tons of food waste into renewable energy and compost while reinvesting in workforce training.

**Outstanding Recycling Organization – Oklahoma Recycling Association (accepted by Jerry Schuber)** – Celebrated for three decades of education, outreach, and collaboration that advance recycling across Oklahoma.



**The Tim McClure Award for Outstanding Community or Government Program – Pennsylvania Resources Council’s Glass Recycling Program (accepted by Sarah Alessio Shea)** – Developed community-based glass recycling infrastructure, diverting over 4,200 tons of glass and supporting local jobs.

**Outstanding Elected Leader – Nebraska State Senator Jana Hughes** – Championed the Safe Battery Collection and Recycling Act and other initiatives strengthening Nebraska’s recycling and waste management systems.





**Outstanding Diversity Leadership – Terry Craghead (Fertile Ground Cooperative)** – Founded a worker-owned cooperative that transforms waste into community wealth while advancing equity and inclusion in Oklahoma City.

Honorable Mentions include:

- **Honorable Mention – Outstanding Not-for-Profit Business Leadership – Servolution Network** – Diverts over 50,000 pounds of household hazardous waste annually by turning collected paint into “Re-Mix” paint for community restoration projects.
- **Honorable Mention – The Beth Brown Boettner Award for Outstanding Public Education & Outreach – “Give a Hoot! Donate Your Loot!” Move-Out Campaign (Rice University)** – Diverted over 29,000 pounds of materials from landfills by repurposing student move-out donations for reuse and recycling.
- **Honorable Mention – Outstanding Recycling Organization – Nebraska Recycling Council (Kimberly Carroll Steward, Executive Director)** – Supports over 60 communities by improving recycling infrastructure and reducing contamination across Nebraska.
- **Honorable Mentions – Bill Heenan Emerging Leader Award – Mrinali Kakamare and Nora Gerber** – Mrinali expanded recycling across North Carolina correctional facilities, while Nora grew the Can Fairy program to divert 44,000 pounds of aluminum in Columbus, OH.

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### **Honoring Future Leaders: The Murray J. Fox Scholarship**

The **Murray J. Fox Scholarship** was presented by **Jack DeBell**, Chair of the NRC’s **Campus Council**, which proudly manages the Coalition’s scholarship and higher education programs. The Campus Council forges stronger links between higher education and the sustainable materials management (SMM) industry, fostering the next generation of professionals through training opportunities, career development resources, and national recognition programs. The Council also promotes research, shares information through its website and newsletter, and maintains a growing network of universities committed to advancing sustainability.

“The Council recognizes outstanding higher education programs and emerging leaders with national awards,” said DeBell. “We also support deserving students who have committed to making a difference with their degrees. I encourage everyone to get to know the Campus Council and explore our programs.”

Murray J. Fox was one of the founding fathers and a charter member of the National Recycling Coalition. He served as both Vice President and a member of the Board of Directors, laying the foundation for the national recycling movement and inspiring generations of professionals to carry forward his mission of sustainable materials management. The **Murray J. Fox Scholarship Fund**, created in 1994 through an endowment, continues

his legacy by fostering future leaders. Since its inception, the fund has supported dozens of students, many of whom have gone on to make lasting contributions to the industry. A tribute to Fox's legacy is featured on the NRC Campus Council webpage.

The **2025 Murray J. Fox Scholarship** was awarded to **Megan Chan**, a student in the **Master of the Environment Program at the University of Colorado Boulder**. The selection committee was impressed by Megan's academic excellence, leadership, and commitment to advancing zero waste. In addition to her coursework, she works for the University's Zero Waste Program, demonstrating passion and persistence, often sorting materials long after major campus events. Megan exemplifies the committee's emphasis on supporting students with strong interest and experience in zero waste planning, food recovery, and composting.

On behalf of the NRC, Megan received **\$3,000 toward tuition-related expenses, full admission to this year's National Recycling Congress, and membership to both the NRC and its Emerging Leaders Network.**



"I'd like to thank this year's Scholarship Selection Committee and extend special appreciation to the Fox family," said DeBell. "It has been my privilege to know Murray personally and my honor to steward his endowment. We look forward to announcing the next round of funding this spring."

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### **A Record-Breaking Year for Innovation**

"This year's nominees reflect a sector that's evolving faster than ever," said Gibbs. "From anaerobic digestion to closed-loop packaging, from classroom education to community co-ops—the creativity and dedication we're seeing is setting the stage for a more circular and resilient future."

Peter Adrian concluded, "Every one of these honorees represents the heart of this movement—turning ideas into action, waste into opportunity, and communities into catalysts for change."

Special thanks to our award sponsor, Techwears. Techwears' Design Lead and Chief Executive Upcycler Drew Johnson sponsored and created this year's custom NRC awards, merging art, technology, and sustainability.

For more information on the award winners and program descriptions, visit [www.nrcrecycles.org](http://www.nrcrecycles.org)

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