

2015 mid-valley Green Awards nominees inspire

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On March 7th the Mid-Willamette Valley community will once again recognize sustainable and earth conscious people, organizations and companies at the 2015 Mid-Valley Green Awards. Presented by Capitol Subaru and hosted by the Straub Environmental Center and Marion County Environmental Services, the Green Awards honor all who work towards thoughtful stewardship of the natural resources of our area.

The Awards staff received 42 nominations in 8 divisions this year. A new category, Sustainable Wine Maker or Brewery of the Year, was created, with four entities vying for this prestigious title.

A silent auction and raffle on the night of the event will help support the environmental education provided by the Straub Environmental Center.

“The Green Awards allow community members an opportunity to hear about the awesome things businesses and their own neighbors are doing to be sustainable and environmentally responsible,” says Michelle Cordova, Executive Director of the Straub Environmental Center.

The event will also feature a unique “Trashion” show, where designers “catwalk” all manner of garments and headgear created from repurposed, recycled materials.

“We are super excited about the enthusiasm this event has generated over the last six years,” Cordova says. “As our biggest annual fundraiser, Straub Environmental Center relies on this event for a big portion of our budget. I would like to thank the community in advance for their support!”

Once again, Salem Weekly celebrates all the nominees and highlights a few here to show the exciting diversity of the competition.

6th Annual

Mid-Valley Green Awards

Dinner, silent auction, raffle and Trashion show

Saturday, March 7, 2015

Salem Convention Center

5:00 – 8:30 p.m.



Wolf in South Salem Cycleworks

South Salem Cycleworks,

Michael Wolfe

Nominated for:

2015 Business

Recycler of the Year

2015 Small Sustainable

Business of the Year

2015 EarthWISE

Business of the Year

Michael Wolfe, owner South Salem Cycleworks, spends his days, “selling bikes, working on bikes and promoting bikes,” but green transportation is only the beginning of his efforts.

For twenty-five years the shop has never used a dumpster. “We separate cardboard, plastic and metal, fluorescent light bulbs, the whole thing,” Wolfe says. All materials are collected and sorted and delivered to local recycling agencies. The shop uses organic degreasers and non-aerosol lubricants and encourages Bike Safety Classes for elementary schools, helps provide sheltered bike parking for elementary and middle schools and participated in, and won, the statewide Oregon Commute Challenge.

Wolfe lived in Eugene and worked as a bike mechanic and says, “I hardly ever started up my car when I lived there. When I returned to Salem I tried to keep the same lifestyle... [but] it’s a lot more difficult here; the social environment in Salem isn’t as conducive to providing a bike-friendly environment.”

An effort that especially interests Wolfe is the repurposing South Salem Cycleworks does of old off-road bikes into “urban bikes” that can provide reliable transportation for people who have few other options.

“People ride bikes for two main reasons,” he says. “One is for recreation and the other is that they cannot afford to use anything else. In Salem, public transit isn’t emphasized; there is no bus service on weekends and those who don’t own cars are the ones who need that weekend bus service the most to get to work.”

Typically, financially challenged people who ride bikes use “beaters that they get from Wal-Mart,” Wolfe says. “They’re inexpensive, but they have a lifespan of only 3-6 months of heavy use.”

Cycleworks refurbishes old “off-road” bikes, using some reused parts to create hardy “urban bikes” with features that make them extremely durable. “Many of these people are not just economically challenged, but face mental challenges as well, and if you can get them on a dependable, reliable bike that will last, they will have more money to spend on other things,” Wolfe says. “I like that a lot better than seeing another old trail bike going out to the transfer site to be wasted.”

Wolfe’s three nominations reflect his philosophy that, “Bikes should change the way we live in this world.”



Millie Estrin in her garden

Millie Estrin

Nominated for:

2015 Individual

Recycler of the Year

One of six nominated for Individual Recycler of the Year, Millie Estrin has been involved in the Salem community and Temple Beth Shalom for years. Her efforts led Temple Beth Shalom to receive EarthWISE certification in 2011. An organic gardener and recycler, Estrin is motivated by love of people and the earth.

“I feel a responsibility to generations to come; my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren,” she says. “I want to do my utmost to leave this world in the best possible condition.”

Actions she incorporated into her own life include, “recycling, cutting down on waste and doing away with pesticides.. I garden organically, buy organic products as much as possible and influence other people in my sphere to think about how they’re living.”

In the early 1990s, Estrin noticed that foam cups were being used for beverage refreshments at the Oneg reception after synagogue service. She had been recycling since before moving to Oregon from Chicago in 1978, and felt the use of cups destined for landfill was wrong. Among many actions at Temple Beth Shalom since then, Estrin formed a committee to write a grant to secure bins for synagogue recycling and eliminated all plastic cutlery there.

“Slowly but surely we’ve become more sustainable,” she says. “A few years ago, people started stepping up wanting to join in. Now we have a full committee of all fantastic people, and we have done a lot at synagogue that has improved sustainability.”

Green Awards staff says that Estrin is modest, and doesn’t report all her volunteer time, but that she has logged in at least 266 hours working through community outreach programs to educate people about recycling.

“It seems like a no-brainer that we should care about what we do to the earth,” Estrin says. “There is overwhelming evidence that climate change is due to human interference with nature. It just seemed to me that it was the right thing to do, to make an effort to try to change the way we live.”

Her Jewish heritage plays a big role in her ethics, Estrin says. “The Torah says to care for the world.”



Keith Beckman by BrucePac solar panels

BrucePac Meat Product Designers

2015 Large Sustainable

Business of the Year

2015 EarthWISE

Business of the Year

BrucePac creates value-added meat products by taking in raw frozen meat and custom cooking and seasoning it for soup manufacturers, the food service industry, restaurants, the military and others. In 2014 it recycled more than 60,000 pounds of metal and 1.3 million pounds of cardboard.

But that’s not all, says Keith Beckman, Sustainability Coordinator for BrucePac for the last four years.

Solar power from company’s own panels also produces 100,000 kilowatt of energy per year, about 10% of what BrucePac uses. Wind energy is also incorporated into the mix.

An environmental engineer hired to focus on conservation, Beckman says, “I am here because BrucePac cares about the environment and wants to protect the environment. After all, our products come from the environment. So it’s also in our best interest to produce our products sustainably.”

The company has an entire department dedicated to repairing wooden pallets and is currently designing equipment that will clean dirty plastic enough so it can be recycled, an innovation which would save 50,000 pounds of plastic from landfill a year.

Some of the raw product BrucePac receives from vendors arrives in non-recyclable waxed boxes. "We recently got one supplier to switch to 'green coat' packaging, which enables the boxes to be recycled," Beckman says. "That increased our cardboard recycling by 10% and decreased our garbage output a good amount."

Regular training encourages staff to find energy-conservation and water-saving projects throughout the facility. BrucePac recently started an 'energy bucks' program to reinforce this; when someone brings forward a viable sustainability idea, they are awarded with 'bucks' for any purchase they might make at the company store, including clothing and other goods with the company logo.



Oregon Department of Corrections

Nominated for:

2015 Sustainable

Large Business of the Year

2015 EarthWISE

Business of the Year

The Oregon Department of Corrections is an immense institution, with 14 separate prisons situated throughout the state, a staff of 5,000 and 14,600 adults in custody. Yet this large entity won the Green Awards Business Recycler of the Year award in 2013, and this time around, is nominated in two categories.

Chad Naugle, Sustainability Coordinator for the Oregon Department of Corrections, works out of a 250,000 SF warehouse in Salem, from which all the food, clothing and supplies for more than 20,000 people are procured and shipped.

A fleet of trucks ship the goods out to institutions daily and return full of e-waste and recyclables to be weighed, sorted, recycled and repurposed, providing work experience for adults in custody as well as huge reductions in waste and expense.

“It’s very rewarding to see this,” Naugle says. “What’s been neat to see is the change in culture. We’re bringing these men and women new vocational training and skills centered around sustainability.”

For example, broken furniture returned from other institutions gets repaired and custom-remade at the Salem warehouse by three woodworkers. New furniture, wall paneling and other goods are created and shipped back out, sometimes to fill specific requests, all for free. In 2013, this practice alone saved the Oregon Corrections system \$370,000.

Other sustainability programs used by the Department of Corrections include Roots of Success, a multi-state environmental literacy and job readiness curriculum, a Sustainable Gardening program and beekeeper apprenticeships.

The warehouse is jammed with items that would have been thrown away only a few years ago; bales full of plastic wrap, worn out jeans and old shoes wait on wooden pallets to be recycled or repurposed. When the pallets themselves are broken, they too will be repurposed in a wide variety of ways. In 2014, adults in custody working in the warehouse processed 58 tons of fabric, sending 82,000 pounds to vendor who repurposed or recycled it responsibly – none went to landfill.

“I anticipate that this philosophy will go with the adults in custody when they leave this place,” Naugle says. “These skills will be applied to their lives outside the institution to succeed and enhance the communities they live in. Seeing them get confidence with themselves is very rewarding.”



Joseph Penner and custom-made delivery bike

Steel Bridge Coffee,

Joseph Penner

Nominated for:

2015 Small Sustainable

Business of the Year

Joseph Penner provides Salem and Keizer with primarily certified fair trade and organic coffee beans, home-roasted by solar power and bicycle- delivered the same day.

Steel Bridge Coffee started in November 2011, “on a very small scale,” after Penner had been roasting on his own for about a year, “partly for the novelty and partly because it was the best way to get myself great coffee.”

The coffee comes in reusable mason jars, which customers leave for Penner when he makes new delivery; they are returned to the shop to be washed and sent out again. The use of these jars means that 2,666 12-ounce coffee bags were kept out of landfill in 2014 alone.

Business has grown steadily, even with ever-expanding coffee options in town, Penner says, “because I get a lot of word of mouth. So many customers are passionate about Steel Bridge Coffee and rave about it to their friends.”

Penner even has one customer “who has a little ‘coffee syndicate’ going; she orders more and more, and distributes the coffee to her friends.”

With a web site, blog and Facebook presence, Steel Bridge provides information on how to brew great coffee, how to home-roast beans and gives details about the growing conditions for the different beans it offers. Penner is committed to supporting the environment in every phase of his operation. “Environmental sustainability has been a personal focus of mine ever since I moved to Salem 9 years ago,” he says. “I ditched my car within the first year and have been 100% bicycle commuting for the last 8+ years.”

All Steel Bridge deliveries are made by bikes outfitted with heavy-duty trailers that Penner designed and built himself. Peddling about 3,000 miles in 2014, Penner delivers rain or shine, sleet or snow. He hasn’t missed a single appointment.

“To me,” he says, “the environment seems like the most pressing issue that people of my generation are facing, or will face. To me, trying to do all of the small things towards making a more sustainable future, just makes sense.”

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