

Published September 18th, 2019

Lamorinda well-represented in Sustainable Contra Costa Awards

By Pippa Fisher



Rising Star winner Charlie Keohane - one of the Sustainable Contra Costa Award winners. Photo provided

When it comes to sustainability, and more exactly to the Sustainability Awards, Lamorinda folks are killing it! Of the seven recently announced winners, four have close connections to Lamorinda.

The winners were honored Sept. 17 at the 11th Annual Leadership in Sustainability Awards Gala and Fundraiser in Pleasant Hill. It is a highlight for Sustainable Contra Costa, their version of the Oscars.

This year's winners are:

Michael Cass, an Acalanes High School and Saint Mary's College alumni who worked for the city of Lafayette as a city planner and drafted a plastic bag and Styrofoam ban for the city and implemented the Styrofoam ban in the city of Concord. According to SCOCO, "Michael is the only city planner in the county that successfully brought a community choice energy program to two jurisdictions - Lafayette and Concord - specifically designating MCE as Concord's default electricity provider."

Charlotte "Charlie" Keohane, an Acalanes High School senior, won in the "rising star" category for 18 years and younger for her promotion of a sustainable, plant-based diet to reduce her carbon footprint. A vegan since the age of 10, she maintains an active social media presence sharing vegan recipes. She has a regular feature in the online version of the school newspaper called "Cooking with Charlie."

Springhill Elementary School was recognized for its garden, which is now run by volunteers Jessica Chandler, Heidi Doggett and Cathy Bornfleth, since in the last year there hasn't been room in the budget for a garden teacher. The garden is used to teach many lessons from how hard field laborers work to science, math and art concepts.

Kathy Kramer was awarded for spreading public understanding of sustainability through her Bringing Back the Natives Garden Tour. According to SCOCO, "Founded in 2005, this award-winning event showcases 40 pesticide-free, water-conserving gardens which provide habitat for wildlife, and contain 60% or more native plants. More than 3,000 people have attended the tour every year since its inception." Though Kramer is not a Lamorinda resident, many in the area are familiar with the tour that has showcased many local gardens.

Chris Dundon of the Contra Costa Water District was recognized for his work in the field of water conservation over the past 25 years. Described by SCOCO as inspirational, he has developed numerous innovative water conservation programs that have saved over 20 billion gallons of water.

Cindy Gershen earned the Lifetime Achievement award for her work educating and promoting healthy eating through her Sustainable Hospitality Program focusing on science of food through culinary, hydroponics and nutrition education. She is a chef and teacher at Mt. Diablo High School in Concord, and founder of Sunrise Bistro and Catering restaurant in Walnut Creek.

Richmond Housing Renovation was recognized for addressing housing problems by acquiring abandoned properties, rehabilitating them and selling them to graduates of the First Time Homebuyers Program.

Awards are given to those who demonstrate outstanding commitment, leadership and contribution to practicing and promoting sustainability in the areas of environmental health, social health and well-being, and economic prosperity.

For more information go to <http://sustainablecoco.org/>

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[back](#)

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