

Lamorinda well-represented in Sustainable Contra Costa Awards



Photo provided

Rising Star winner Charlie Keohane – one of the Sustainable Contra Costa Award winners.

By Pippa Fisher

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 con-

servation 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/>

Reducing single-use plastics



Big Stock image

By Garrett Leahy

With school now in full swing, lunches abound with single use plastic bags and containers. While single-use plastic items are convenient, they can take centuries to biodegrade, and or end up in the ocean and break down into small, easily ingested pieces called micro-plastics, which can harm marine life, according to the World Wildlife Fund.

Kimberly Lam, a regional manager at RecycleSmart and a board member of a local environmental nonprofit organization, Sustainable Contra Costa, explained some of the ways that people can lower their plastic footprint. She mentioned the importance of reducing the amount of new plastic that people consume, and finding reusable alternatives. "I always keep a metal reusable straw in my backpack, I make sure to ask for my coffee 'for here in a for here cup', and make sure that I don't get plastic utensils when I get take out," said Lam. "I don't know about you but I bet there are several sets of plastic utensils lying in the back seat of my car."

The reason that reducing plastic consumption and reusing plastics is so important is partly because plastic is difficult and sometimes impossible to recycle, even if they are designated as "recyclable." According to Lam, this is for several reasons. One reason is that plastic can only be recycled if it is free of all organic contamination. That means that any leftover peanut butter in a sandwich bag or any dressing in a plastic salad container cannot be recycled unless it is washed. Otherwise, it goes to a landfill.

In recent years, compostable plastics made from organic materials, such as corn, have been used in businesses and cafeterias, but those plastics are often never composted, even if they are put into green bins. "Often these compostable plastics need to be processed for long periods of time at a high tem-

perature, perhaps something like 120 degrees Fahrenheit for six weeks, or something like that," said Lam. "Many composting facilities can't afford to let them (compostable plastics) sit around for that long, and so they are just thrown away." Even at facilities that can compost those plastics, workers sorting the waste can still confuse those plastic items as standard non-compostable plastic and sort them out into the trash by mistake, according to Lam. Even so, there is some value to using compostable plastics over standard plastics. "Some people value that it's not made from petroleum," said Lam.

Sustainable Contra Costa hosts several "challenges" each year, such as the Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge, which is accessed via Sustainable Contra Costa's website. Through the Cleaner Contra Costa Challenge web page, people can create an online profile which helps them set goals toward more sustainable living and create action plans to meet them. Each of the goals includes drop-down menus with educational information on how meeting goals will have an impact. Some of these goals include installing solar panels, opting for fans instead of air conditioning, and reducing and reusing plastic. According to the website, you should shop for items with less packaging, and use reusable items, such as straws and bags, rather than disposable ones.

Sustainable Contra Costa also hosts workshops throughout the year about things such as how to capture and use rainwater and greywater, the water leftover from bathing and washing clothes, for gardening.

If you want to participate in a workshop, you can sign up for those and other events through Sustainable Contra Costa's online calendar: <http://sustainablecoco.org/calendar/>. If you would like to make a donation to Sustainable Contra Costa, you may also do so through their website: <http://sustainablecoco.org>.

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