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Partnership Make Award Winning Impact at VRA

Reduce single-use plastics, reuse treasure hunt and recycle litter programs are award worthy

Richmond, VA – November 15, 2018: The Virginia Recycling Association honored several exemplary waste reduction and recycling programs at its annual luncheon meeting on November 5 in Charlottesville.

Awards were given in three categories:

- Show Me the Way – how do you explain recycling to your customers?
- Lemonade – how have you made something wonderful from a bad situation?
- Best in Show – how has your program made a difference in your community?

This year's award winners, selected from 14 applications, represented a diverse group of recycling advocates in Virginia from local government to a non-profit organization and an educational institution.

Show Me the Way award winner, Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center in Virginia Beach won for its "In Our Hands" campaign to significantly reduce the use of single-use plastics. As a part of this 18-aquarium partnership campaign to reduce plastic pollution and the harm it causes to waterways and marine life, the Virginia Aquarium has eliminated the provision of plastic bags in its retail operation and is eliminating the use of single use cups, straws and beverage bottles in its food service operation. Notably, the aquarium retail store stocks reusable cups with straws and reusable straws. More information about this movement can be found at www.ourhands.org.

The University of Richmond "Big Yard Sale" was the winner of the VRA's Lemonade Award. Every year, thousands of pounds of furniture, clothing, school supplies, and non-perishable food items are left behind at the end of each spring semester. Rather than send these items to the landfill, for the past 21 years, the University of Richmond Office of Sustainability teams up with the local Sierra Club and Goodwill to collect and sell items left by students at an event called the "Big Yard Sale." Proceeds from the sale are split between the Sierra Club and student sustainability groups at University of Richmond. Any items left at the end of the sale are donated to Goodwill.

This program is no small-time lemonade stand. More than 1,000 people from the community came to shop at the May 2018 sale. While so many thousands of unwanted items could create a tremendous amount of waste each year – more than 12 tons were diverted from the landfill in 2018. The “Big Yard Sale” has its own Facebook page and information about other University of Richmond sustainability efforts can be found on UR’s website, search sustainably.

Like the other winners, the Best in Show award was earned by a program that partners with others to make a big impact. Spotsylvania Environmental Education Development’s (SEED) “Clean Up & Cash In” program is a partnership between Spotsylvania County and Spotsylvania County Schools to help student clubs and teams earn funds to help offset cost of uniforms, fees and supplies needed for activities.

The “Clean Up & Cash In” program requires groups to pick up roadside litter and separate the recyclables. It also provides awareness to students and families about litter prevention, recycling and the impact litter has on the community.

Groups earned \$5.00 per bag of roadside litter/recyclables and at an end of school year Winner’s Recognition event, an additional cash prize was awarded to the top three groups filling the most bags.

The Virginia Recycling Association is proud to spotlight these creative, yet re-creatable recycling and waste reduction programs that Virginia organizations are using to help make our communities more sustainable,” noted Teresa Sweeny, President of the VRA. “On behalf of our board, I also want to commend our other applicants for the work they are doing in this area and thank them for taking the time to share their programs with us.”

Applications for 2019 VRA Awards will be accepted in September 2019. Visit www.vrarecycles.org for details.

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About The Virginia Recycling Association

The Virginia Recycling Association (VRA) provides leadership in sustainable recycling and resource management in Virginia. VRA is the leading resource of recycling information for our members, the general public, the Virginia General Assembly, local government, business, and industry. For more information visit www.vrarecycles.org.