



Pacesetter Environment Award Nomination, Cyndra Dietz

Recently, during an Eco-Cycle presentation to a high school class of 35, one student asked how recycled paper was made. Before describing what happens at the factory, the presenter asked, "How many of you made recycled paper with Eco-Cycle when you were in elementary school?" Every hand in the room shot up.

Students throughout Boulder County have grown up with an unusual degree of environmental literacy thanks to Cyndra Dietz. She has worked as an environmental educator for 32 years, and since 1990 has directed the award-winning Boulder/Broomfield County School Recycling and Environmental Education Program, housed at Eco-Cycle. In that time, she and her staff have presented over 20,000 classroom presentations and field trips (involving 520,000 students and staff), coordinated recycling collections for over 18,000,000 pounds of material and started the first Zero Waste schools program in America. In addition, Cyndra has raised over \$2,000,000.00 in outside funds to bring unique environmental programming to every Boulder and Broomfield County public school. Under her creative and organized leadership, the program has grown and flourished, becoming a national model for recycling, waste reduction and environmental education in schools.

Cyndra's reputation for knowledge of environmental issues and delivering consistently high quality projects has earned her the respect and loyalty of city, county and school district officials. This has insured the program's ongoing funding, support, and therefore success. This success is a unique and valuable asset to our community.

When Cyndra took the reins as program director 21 years ago, Eco-Cycle's School Program had one employee giving 180 recycling education programs per year to students in Boulder Valley School District. Now, with a staff of seven employees, Cyndra coordinates the delivery of over 1,500 presentations annually given in three school districts (Boulder Valley, St. Vrain Valley and Adams 12 in Broomfield) to over 47,000 Kindergarten -12th grade students and staff. Topics have expanded to include composting, Zero Waste, holiday and lunch-time waste reduction, litter prevention, household hazardous waste, forest ecology, rainforest issues, air quality, indoor air pollution and energy conservation.

In addition to her key role in raising a generation of environmentally literate citizens, Cyndra has focused on making the collection of recyclables in Boulder Valley and St. Vrain Valley schools consistent and effective. It has paid off. Over 500 tons of paper, cardboard and containers are collected from the schools each year. This compares to 15 tons in 1988 – a 3,400% increase! As recycling collections have expanded, many schools have been able to cut their trash service by one-third, providing substantial monetary savings to both school districts. Cyndra has worked hard to create a collection system that is user-friendly for both kids and teachers, and respectful of custodian's workloads.

In 2004, Cyndra undertook perhaps the greatest challenge of her career: creating the Green Star Schools program, the only full-service Zero Waste schools program in North America. In an effort to help schools achieve Zero Waste, the collection of compostable items, waste reduction projects and increased classroom recycling were implemented in four pilot elementary schools in Boulder. Although a handful of programs elsewhere in the nation have been successful in collecting food waste from cafeterias for composting, no one had yet imagined a way to collect compostable food and non-recyclable paper waste from entire school buildings. The Green Star Schools were the first in the nation to succeed, finding that the collection of food and paper waste from their kitchens, bathrooms, cafeterias, offices and classrooms reduced their trash by another third. The Green Star Schools program has since grown to include 29 Boulder County elementary and middle schools, with two more slated for 2012, and a waiting list of 18 schools.



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Green Star Schools are able to achieve an unprecedented level of waste reduction. Cyndra has insured that a tremendous amount of support and education is available to these schools to help them succeed. Thanks to Cyndra's skills as a fund-raiser, the Green Star Schools program continues to grow due to the loyal support of several funding sources, insuring that no financial burden is placed on the schools.

Most importantly, being part of a Green Star School makes an impression on its students. High school students coming from Green Star School middle schools are pressuring their administrators to sign up for the waitlist. Cyndra has always listened to students and is currently laying the groundwork for a Green Star Schools high school model, to be piloted next school year.

Cyndra's creativity and expertise have enhanced the environmental education available to teachers in our community in many other ways. To keep teachers excited about environmental issues, she has developed many innovative projects. Some examples include: the Kids Conference for the Earth, an all day event that brought 170 children and parents together to participate in environmental workshops; the Rainforest and Recycling Fundraiser, where 6,000 students learned about the benefits of recycling to the rainforest and saved aluminum cans to raise money to adopt acres of rainforest; America's Forest, Our Own Backyard, in which over 500 students learned about forestry and waste reduction before planting trees; the Green Star Kids project, which motivated students at 51 schools to buy recycled products at back-to-school time; the Waste Wise Conference, held twice at CU to educate secondary students on a variety of environmental issues; the Waste-Free Lunch Contest, in which six schools compete to make the least lunch-time trash; the Locker Leftovers project, in which students reduce waste at the end of the school year by recycling and donating to charity; and the Business Heroes Go For Zero tours of Zero Waste businesses for high school business classes.

In addition, in 2003, she created the Children's Used Book Project, which has since distributed over 90,000 used books collected at the Eco-Cycle Center for Hard-to-Recycle Materials to schools and to underprivileged children served by 30 local charities.

Beyond Boulder County, Cyndra is well known as an environmental education expert. She has held workshops for visiting delegations from Mexico, Romania and Japan. Since 1991, she has trained over 300 teachers in Colorado, Wyoming and Utah at workshops funded by the EPA, Denver Public Schools and rural development councils. In 1995 and 1996, she implemented "Waste Not, Want Not," the first 4-day accredited teacher training institute on solid waste issues. Most recently she has spearheaded a crucial national debate about micro-plastics contamination as an environmental hazard in compost.

The kids who were Kindergartners in 1990 when Cyndra took over the Boulder County School Recycling and Environmental Education Program are now graduating from college. Officials at CU say that they see Eco-Cycle's efforts reflected in the success of programs delivered to their student body. Our community has benefited, and will continue to benefit well into the future, as these young adults become business owners, government leaders and teachers with a sensitivity to environmental issues.

Cyndra is a pillar of the environmental education community in Boulder County, having worked or volunteered for Thorne Ecological Institute, CU's Science Discovery program, Wilderness Restoration Volunteers and the Boulder County



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Nature Association. How many people can claim to have committed over three decades to educating young people about protecting our environment? Cyndra has accomplished an incredible amount during her career. This exceptional contribution to both our community and the environment makes her a deserving recipient of the 2012 Pacesetter Environment Award.