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## **Rhode Islanders Receive Earth Day Honors with Prestigious Regional EPA Environmental Award**

Apr 22, 2009 (Environmental Protection Agency Documents and Publications/ContentWorks via COMTEX) --(Boston, Mass. -- April 21, 2009) - One civilian and four Rhode Island groups will be honored on Earth Day in Boston's Faneuil Hall as EPA presents the 2009 Environmental Merit Awards. Recognizing significant contributions to environmental awareness and problem solving, the Rhode Island awardees included an individual merit award winner, two environmental/ community/ academia/ non-profit organization award winners and one business, Industry and professional organization award winner.

The merit awards, recognizing significant contributions to environmental awareness and problem solving, are a unique way that EPA can recognize individuals and groups that are making significant impacts on environmental quality in distinct ways.

Given out by EPA since 1970, the merit awards honor individuals and groups who have shown particular ingenuity and commitment in their efforts to preserve the region's environment. This year's competition drew 49 nominations from across New England.

The Rhode Island Environmental Merit Award winners were among 31 from across New England. Awards were given in the categories of individual; business (including professional organizations); local, state or federal government; and environmental, community, academia or nonprofit organization. Also, each year EPA may present lifetime achievement awards for individuals. The Environmental Merit Award Winners from Rhode Island are: Individual Environmental Merit Award: Cynthia Gianfrancesco Principal Environmental Scientist in the Office of Waste Management Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Cynthia Gianfrancesco has worked hard to find funding and support for the development and implementation of a successful targeted brownfields assessment program for the state of Rhode Island, establishing a successful means of providing assistance to the communities of the state who have contaminated properties in need of assessment as the first step in plans for site redevelopment and revitalization. Although Cynthia started out by utilizing some portion of the 128(a) Brownfields funding annually allotted to Rhode Island, her success in attracting properties to her program quickly outstripped her funding capacity.

In an effort to better respond to the overwhelming needs of the communities in her state for the past two years, she has applied directly for assessment funding through the very competitive Brownfields annual competition. She received awards of \$200,000 in 2007 and \$400,000 in 2008. The additional funding has allowed her to expand the number of communities she is serving, including Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Warwick, West Warwick, Cranston, and Coventry. Cynthia's success had been both a model and an impetus for other state brownfields programs to build upon their existing capabilities. Cynthia's dedication, ability to think beyond what she is given and her relentless effort has helped make many brownfields projects in Rhode Island to become a reality.

Environmental, Community, Academic & Non-Profit Organization  
 Environmental Merit Award:Project 20/20  
 In Providence, Rhode Island, a Brown University student-run program called Project 20/20 has developed and perfected a replicable model to reduce global warming pollution on a large scale, while helping communities of modest means cope with fluctuating energy costs. Their strategy involves the replacement of incandescent lighting in low-income households with energy-efficient compact fluorescent lamps (CFL's) at no charge to the residents. This simple act generates significant utility bill savings and concomitant greenhouse gas reductions, empowering the family to take steps to further reduce their bills while protecting the environment. Since the spring of 2008, student employees of Project 20/20 replaced 36,242 light bulbs in 2,415 Rhode Island low-income residences, saving the families over \$700,000 on their utility bills and offsetting over 4,000 metric tons of carbon emissions from entering the atmosphere. The success of Project 20/20 has received widespread, national recognition. Their work will continue into the coming year as it begins its first seed expansion at low-income neighborhoods, working for the DC Department of the Environment. Here they will continue their efforts to curb the global climate crisis, while providing valuable green-collar job vocational skills and educational opportunities in the field of energy efficiency.

Environmental, Community, Academic & Non-Profit Organization  
 Environmental Merit Award:Rhode Island Hospitality  
 Association  
 Recognizing the responsibility for all industries to employ sustainable and green practices, Rhode Island's lodging, restaurant and tourism industries are taking a leadership position in employing green and sustainable business practices. Partnering with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), the Rhode Island Hospitality Association developed the Rhode Island Hospitality Green Certification program, charting a roadmap for hospitality and tourism business to employ green business practices with a focus on energy conservation, waste minimization and recycling, and sustainable operating and business practices. Since the program was announced in January 2008, more than 35 hotels, restaurants and convention facilities have attained Green certification, with new companies applying each day.

Local, State or Federal Governmental Environmental Merit Award:State  
 Electronic Challenge Partners -- City of Providence, RI, School

DepartmentRegional Greenhouse Gas Initiative Team -- RI DEMThe state government of Maine; the Department of Environmental Protection in Connecticut; the City of Keene in New Hampshire; and the school department in the city of Providence, Rhode Island, are all being recognized for their involvement in a voluntary program that promotes greener use and disposal of government technology equipment. The challenge is administered by the Northeast Recycling Council. In its first year, the State Electronics Challenge signed on 29 partners, including entire state governments as well as small municipal departments. The four organizations chosen for awards have shown exceptional leadership in the field. The achievements of this group include purchasing greener or 'environmentally preferable' computers, reducing energy use by computers through software and employee education, and managing old electronics through reuse, recycling and other methods that reduce their impact. Altogether, the partners in this program reduced energy by the amount used by 1662 households a year; avoided greenhouse gases equivalent to taking 1,370 cars off the road for a year; and eliminated 152 metric tons of trash, the amount of waste generated by 76 households a year.

More Information:Environmental Merit Awards([www.epa.gov/ne/ra/ema](http://www.epa.gov/ne/ra/ema))  
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