



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

Press Release

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Highlighting sustainable living: MWRD Summit reflects on how to improve water environment and reclaim resources

A virtual forum highlighting the best practices in promoting a healthy water environment, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD)'s Ninth Annual Sustainability Summit united and educated environmental advocates on how to best recover and reuse resources and manage stormwater and improve water quality.



Cog Hill Sustainability Specialist Angelica Carmen (left) and Chicago Eco House President Quilen Blackwell, (above) won awards in 2021 for Biosolids Beneficial Reuse.

The MWRD's Sustainability Summit highlighted emerging programs in both resource recovery and stormwater management by assembling talented guest speakers and honoring similar excellence in demonstrating best practices for sustainable landscaping and biosolids use.

"We appreciate everyone joining us at our Ninth Annual Sustainability Summit," said MWRD President Kari K. Steele. "Thank you to our presenters, congratulations to all of our award winners. Thank you all for your commitment to protecting our communities through long-term environmental stewardship. Because of your hard work in protecting the waterways and the environment, the Chicago region grows more resilient and vibrant every day."

For the second consecutive year, the MWRD held the event virtually, reaching an expanded and interactive audience, despite the challenges of a pandemic. The online audience gained a better understanding of the benefits of using sustainable resources, like the



North Shore Country Club Certified Golf Course Superintendent Dan Dinelli (left) and University of Illinois Assistant Vice-Chancellor and Directory of Sustainability Chicago Cynthia Klein-Banai won awards for Sustainable Landscaping.

MWRD's EQ (Exceptional Quality) Compost, and learned about composting and food scrap collection and sustainability efforts across the nation, the Chicago Park District and in disadvantaged communities in Chicago.

The EQ Compost is a sustainable product that is both beneficial to the environment and free to the public. The MWRD partners with the city of *(continued)*

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Chicago tree trimming program and other suppliers to produce the compost with the biosolids from the wastewater treatment process. By using this exceptional quality product, customers can improve soil structure, supply organic matter and allow plants to more effectively utilize nutrients and soil to retain more water. In addition to improving turf quality as a soil amendment or conditioner for establishing turfgrass and for mixing into custom topsoil blends, the local use of biosolids can also reduce carbon footprints.

MWRD engineers also addressed stormwater management resources, green infrastructure, the MWRD's flood prone property acquisition program and grants and available resources to help combat flooding and improve water quality. Between local and regional stormwater management projects, green infrastructure partnerships and flood prone property acquisitions, the MWRD has invested in more than 200 projects in some phase of design or construction aimed at flood reduction.

Experts shared their success stories, tips, best practices and resources for implementing sustainable practices. Presenters included MWRD Senior Environmental Soil Scientist Dr. Theresa Johnston; University of Washington Professor Dr. Sally Brown, Chicago Park District Assistant Director of Landscape Matt Freer; Stephanie Katsaros, of the Illinois Food Scrap Coalition; Chicago Food Policy Action Council Systems and Strategy Manager Ma'raj Sheikh; MWRD Senior Civil Engineer Andre Haynes; MWRD Senior Civil Engineer Stephen Haucke; MWRD Associate Civil Engineer Lucas Roat; and MWRD Public Affairs Specialist Annie Wright.

In addition to providing an outlet for sharing strategies and resources in promoting the environment, the Summit honored individuals, organizations, municipalities and other agencies for modeling best practices in sustainability. The MWRD recognized projects from across Cook County that speak to the MWRD's mission in renewable resources, flood control and water quality improvements.



North Shore Country Club Superintendent Dan Dinelli was honored by the MWRD for the Glenview course's unique and sustainable design that includes an underground stormwater storage tank that fits into the landscape to support a bunker and capture rainwater and recycle it throughout the course.

Winners of this 2021 Biosolids Beneficial Reuse award were:

- Angelica Carmen, sustainability specialist from Cog Hill Golf and Country Club in Lemont, for leading Cog Hill's sustainability program on the use of EQ compost in raised beds and planting bed soil.
- Quilen Blackwell, president and founder of Chicago Eco House, for his use and promotion of biosolids to grow flowers in vacant lots and other open spaces while also inspiring youth to learn new job skills using composted biosolids.

The MWRD's 2021 Sustainable Landscaping Award, which honors organizations and individuals that work to minimize the impact of stormwater, was presented to two organizations and their representatives, including:

- Dan Dinelli, certified golf course superintendent from the North Shore Country Club in Glenview, for his use of a drainage system to capture and reuse stormwater. He developed an underground water detention tank system to capture and reuse rainwater throughout the golf course, helping conserve water, reduce nutrient runoff and improve water quality.

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- Cynthia Klein-Banai, Assistant Vice-Chancellor and Director of Sustainability, of the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), for use of permeable pavement, a rain garden and native plants at UIC assisting in flood prevention and creating a pollinator habitat.
- Matt Sudman, development writer and grants manager from the Friends of the Chicago River, for the revegetation and replacement of native plants for flood prevention over hundreds of acres, contributing to cleaner water entering the Cal-Sag Channel.
- Christopher Flaherty, president of Green Guerilla, LLC, for his work establishing native plant garden designs and applications including rain gardens, river restoration and lawn-to-prairie work that promotes biodiversity.
- Gina Iliopoulos, from Keeler Gardens, NFP, for her efforts in promoting native plantings and inspiring and educating communities regarding native plantings.
- Angelica Carmen, for her efforts to establish wetland plants and for transforming a waste disposal area into a bioswale at Cog Hill.

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Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

Established in 1889, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois. Learn more at mwrld.org.