

LWV of Indiana County presents environmental awards

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Pictured, from left, are Laurie Lafontaine, committee chair; Ellen Chinn; Tom Miller; Dave Dahlheimer; Susan Dahlheimer; Norma Tarnoff; Silas Schiera, individual award winner; Carolyn Trimarchi; Jessica Jopp; and Kay Snyder.

Submitted photo

The League of Women Voters of Indiana County presented its 10th annual Peggy Clark Grassroots Environmental Leadership Awards at its meeting Thursday.

This award recognizes citizens, groups or businesses who show exemplary leadership and active participation in issues that involve protecting or preserving the environment.

The award was established in honor of a longtime Indiana County grassroots activist and league member Peggy Clark and is awarded annually to both an individual and a group or organization.

This year's individual award was given to Silas Schiera, who started the recycling of plastic film in Indiana County in 2019 as a student at Indiana Area Senior High School and a Life Scout with Boy Scout Troop 1011.

"Bags to Benches" earned Schiera his Eagle Scout rank, Boy Scouts' highest honor, by successfully collecting 500 pounds of plastic film in less than six months to complete the first "Bench Project" in Indiana County.

The plastic is sent to the Trex Company, which makes composite lumber from recycled plastic, and Trex donates a poly-lumber outdoor bench in return. The first bench was installed at Indiana Area Senior High School.

His project inspired multiple organizations in the county to start their own "Bags to Benches." As of spring 2022, seven composite benches have been installed throughout Indiana County.

The group award this year went to Friends of White's Woods. They were formed in 1995 for the primary purpose of preserving White's Woods Nature Center as a natural area for the conservation and recreation requirements of the Project 70 law that provided funding for the acquisition of the property.

Promoting and educating the general public about the value of the relationships between habitat, air and water quality is a key goal as well. FWW has promoted public engagement in environmental concerns by a number of different approaches: Educational programming, collaboration with other environmentally-focused community organizations, public advocacy, support of state-wide conservation organizations, engaging the public in community environmental decision-making, sponsoring important community-wide programming and discussions regarding climate change and carbon sequestration, and highlighting the value of local natural area to local residents and those outside the community.

FWW was selected for the group award because of the impact they made not only in keeping the public informed about the environmental and potential threats to the WW Nature Center, but also for engaging the local population in conservation, preservation and activism. The FWW board is comprised of local residents and citizens who are striving to make the Indiana community a better place to live.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan grassroots citizen organization that believes the freedom to vote is a nonpartisan issue. The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes a candidate or political party and is dedicated to empowering everyone to fully participate in our democracy through advocacy and education.