

Environment and Energy Commission

Village of Oak Park

# Green Awards 2022



# Green Awards – 2022 Winners

1. **Manolo Avalos**
2. **Washington Irving  
Elementary School  
Garden Club**
3. **Alex Skinner**
4. **Jim Babcock**
5. **Don Burk**
6. **David Pope**
7. **Takeout 25**
8. **Anthony Clark**
9. **Gary Arnold**
10. **Sean O'Connor**
11. **Beyond Hunger**
12. **Oak Park and River  
Forest Community  
Foundation**
13. **Housing Forward**
14. **Trustee Susan  
Buchanan**





# Manolo Avalos

- Manolo Avalos is a junior at OPRF High School. He became passionate about environmental work after seeing the rise of natural disasters and the impact they have on communities across the world. He feels strongly about the need to act locally while also pushing for more systemic international changes to help solve the climate crisis.
- Manolo is a member of It's Our Future, a program run by Seven Generations Ahead, which is designed to empower and equip youth to advocate for climate solutions. Through this work, Manolo was selected to be a student observer delegate at COP27, the annual UN Climate Change Summit. He published a One View in the Wednesday Journal and the Trapeze, OPRF's student newspaper, about his experiences.
- Manolo is a student representative on OPRF's Sustainability Committee and currently serves as the president of OPRF's Environmental Club. In previous election cycles, he has helped moderate local candidate forums on sustainability. Manolo was instrumental this year in planning and hosting a film screening of environmental documentary, YOUTH v GOV, attended by 40 youth from Oak Park, Evanston, and Chicago, as well as 20 virtual attendees. He has his own Environmental Education Podcast called Earthwise: Learning To Think Green.
- When he is not at school or being an activist you can find him hanging out with friends and family, catching up on podcasts and rock climbing.



# Washington Irving Elementary School Garden Club

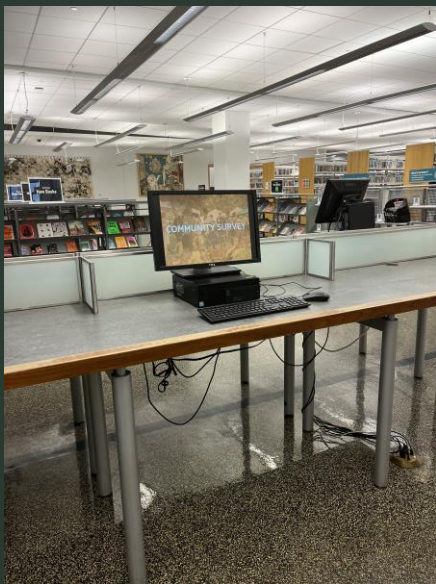


- Many hands and minds have contributed to creating Washington Irving Elementary School's Garden Club since the idea started growing in Denise Frank's mind in 2014 to the program that exists today. Garden Club is an inclusive, safe space in which all are welcome and supported in learning and discovering using organic and sustainable practices in gardening. Teachers, kids, and their families explore reading, art, math, science, physical and emotional health, teamwork, communication, different perspectives, diverse life experiences, and so much more through Garden Club.
- Garden Club is a free, open-to-all, after-school activity in the Fall and Spring seasons. The Garden Club chairs host field trips in the fall for teachers and their classrooms; these tours are accessible to all Irving's students, with a range of activities that meet each student's abilities, from digging in compost to feeling and smelling plants. Garden Club chairs also lead classrooms in planting the Bookworm Garden beds in the Spring. In the Summer, families sign up to water and weed the garden. Irving community members and neighbors are invited to harvest produce and some is donated to Beyond Hunger.
- The Irving Bookworm Garden, located at the south end of the school, serves as the setting for learning. Each bed features a book chosen for content that's related to gardening, sustainability, environmentalism, equity and inclusion, community building, and teaching tolerance. With the help of Irving librarian, Katie Noonan, and the OPPL, the garden bed books are carefully chosen to reflect the lives and experiences of those in Irving's diverse community by featuring a range of protagonists of color, cultures, gender, and abilities. Irving's own library has grown to incorporate all these books.
- Garden Club has planted what arguably might be the largest square footage of space on D97 property dedicated to native plants. Through grants and PTO funding, Irving has its own prairie garden and three butterfly beds of native plants, including two placed on the blacktop by the play equipment that draws wildlife for the kids to enjoy. It is part of the West Cook Wild One's Wildlife Corridor.
- It truly takes a village to produce such an incredible program. A special acknowledgement to Denise Frank, Alix Strunk, Doug Chien, Tina Harle, Leslie Kwilas, Ellyn Gullo, Susan Raphael, Amanda Turnbull, Amy Chinn, Lisa Wister, Tom Bassett-Dilley, Twyla Larnell, Jordan Frank, John Hodge, Susan Mura, and Irving's PTO.



# Alex Skinner

- Alex Skinner is the manager of Adult Services at the Oak Park Public Library. She worked with the Village's Sustainability Coordinator, Marcella Bondie Keenan, to make the Climate Plan Survey available at all library locations, both on paper and digitally.
- Community engagement is a critical part of the planning process and Alex went above and beyond to make sure that Oak Park resident's voices were heard!





# Jim Babcock

- Jim gained his appreciation and love for the natural world growing up in California, hiking and camping along the Pacific Ocean coast and in the Sierra Nevada mountains. His first involvement with the environmental movement was with the Sierra Club when, in Elmhurst, IL, he helped form the local Cool Cities Coalition which was dedicated to reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the municipal level.
- When Jim moved to Oak Park, he co-founded Green Community Connections, now the One Earth Collective (OEC), which presents the annual One Earth Film Festival and the Young Filmmakers Contest both of which have grown to attract a regional and national audience. OEC helps organize ongoing environmental programs that invite all members of the community, including youth, to participate in activities that enhance the well-being of people and the planet.
- Jim is also one of several adult advisors to It's Our Future, the local youth group, and a core member of PlanIt Green, a collaboration of community groups and institutions working on a variety of important environmental issues.
- With other members of the Environmental Justice Team at First United Church of Oak Park, Jim contributed to the formation of the Interfaith Green Network (IGN), a group of 15-20 congregations in the OP/RF area which continues to focus on educating the community and advocating for policies and programs such as community solar, biodiversity of public and private land, and reduction of plastic pollution, among others. Jim was instrumental in getting IGN and its individual congregations to participate in a test of the Village-generated DIY communication campaign which sought to get community-wide feedback on the proposed climate action plan. Now that the plan, Climate Ready Oak Park, has been passed, IGN members are actively working with their congregations and individual members on goals for several of the plan's impact areas.





# Arbor West Neighbors

- Arbor West Neighbors is a nonprofit organization that works to create a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community where all older adults are valued, age with dignity, and enjoy opportunities for growth and engagement.
- The environmental or sustainability work that the organization and members have participated in include the following:
  - Providing input and critical support connecting Oak Park seniors with the development process for Climate Ready Oak Park.
  - Leading a Housing Forum related to Aging in Our Communities and the importance of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU's), energy efficient and socially beneficial cohousing, and home retrofits for energy and cost savings and aging in place changes.
  - Creating a walking group to explore and support local forest preserves.
  - Educational events related to reducing plastic use
  - Organizing Park clean-ups.



# Oak Park Residence Corporation



- The team at Oak Park Residence Corporation (OPRC) worked closely with the Village to help support the community engagement and development of Climate Ready Oak Park.
- OPRC is developing an all electric and solar-powered affordable housing project at 7 Van Buren St. The structure will be the most significant net-zero multi-family apartment building in the upper Midwest region.
- Their ongoing dedication to affordability and sustainability makes OPRC a valuable resource in the community and their actions will set a new standard for future developments in Oak Park.





# Takeout 25



- Takeout 25 is focused on building a thriving and sustainable community. Sustainability is one of the three pillars of the Takeout 25 mission along with economic enablement of local small businesses and addressing food insecurity. This year In pursuit of our sustainability mission they have prioritized the following:
  - **OP Climate Action Plan** – Engaged the local restaurant community to collect inputs to inform our climate action plan by shaping actions that have a material impact on local restaurants and their viability.
  - **Plastic Bench dedication to the OP Main library** - Takeout 25 partnered with the local chapter of Clean Up Give Back to dedicate a plastic bench that was made out of plastic waste (Takeout containers) collected from the community. The OPRF HS students with CUGB collected over 500 lbs of plastic waste which was converted into a bench placed in the lobby of our main library as a lasting symbol of our community’s pandemic resilience.
  - **Art for Chicago Botanic Garden from plastic waste** – Takeout 25 partnered with the local chapter of Clean Up Give Back and a local artist Cody Norman to collect #2 and #5 plastics from the local community and restaurants to be converted to art for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Chicago botanic Garden.
  - **Raising Earth Day awareness** – Working with the local restaurants to carry menu items specific to Earth day and getting the community to buy these items. The sale of these items helped the restaurants and a part of the proceeds went to Seven Generations Ahead to support local sustainability.
  - Takeout 25 recently announced that it plans to make our community **IL’s first Green dining district**. This was announced with support from the local restaurant owners and in partnership with the IL Green Business Program. This encapsulates Takeout 25’s vision for the future of our community and how we plan to support Oak Park’s Climate Action Plan and local sustainability over the coming years





# Anthony Clark



- Unity Fridge is powered by the belief that no one should go hungry. We firmly believe the right to food is a human right.
- Food insecurity is a systemic issue impacting millions of people across the country on a daily basis, not only in urban communities, but suburban as well. Prior to the pandemic, food insecurity was at an all-time high, and during the pandemic, as well as beyond, keeping our community fed is now more important than ever. Our volunteers come from all over Oak Park, working within the community to collaborate with like-minded partners to maintain a community refrigerator in the village.
- Unity Fridges currently operates 5 outdoor refrigerators that provide 24/7 anonymous free access to food & hygiene items for those in need in the Oak Park, Maywood, & Garfield park areas.



## Gary Arnold

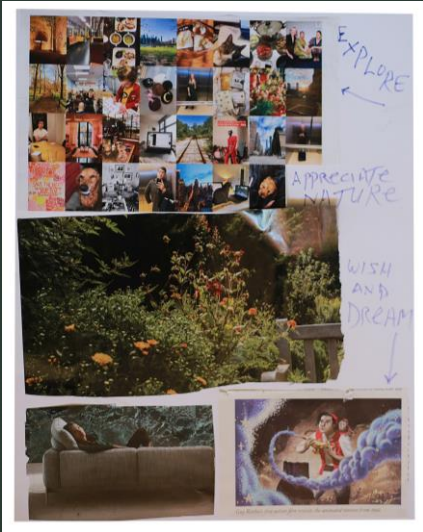


- In his role as Program Director with Progress Center, Arnold recruited members of the Oak Park disability community to participate in a Disability Affinity Group. The affinity group included five disabled Oak Park residents. This group met four times with the consultant team putting together the Oak Park Climate Action Plan. The group submitted input in the context of accessibility and inclusion.
- Arnold also works on implementation of the Action Plan through his role as chair of the Oak Park Disability Action Commission. The commission integrated the Action Plan into the commission's 2023 Work Plan. Arnold represents the commission on the Oak Park COOP, a group of Oak Park Organizations that collaborate on raising awareness about and encouraging action on the Climate Plan.



## Sean O'Connor

- Sean is the Program Manager at NAMI Metro Suburban. He has shown strong commitment to ensuring that the Climate Ready Oak Park plan fully reflects the needs and assets of all people living in Oak Park and that it includes their aspirations of wellbeing in a climate crisis for both physical and mental health.
- Sean and NAMI Metro Suburban worked with Village staff to coordinate valuable community engagement sessions in order to create vision boards for the future of Oak Park and better understand how the impacts of climate change can effect mental health. He continues to support their mission of providing support, education, and advocacy to improve the lives of people with mental illness.





# Beyond Hunger

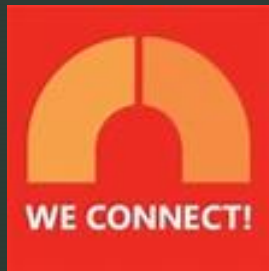


- Beyond Hunger is committed to ensuring that voices of individuals with lived experience with hunger have a seat at the table to develop policies and programs that directly impact their lives. Beyond Hunger staff helped to coordinate the involvement of individuals who have used their programs for the development of the Climate Ready Oak Park.
- Their ongoing sustainability measures include work with Surplus Project and Rescue Program partners to simultaneously address problems of food waste and food insecurity by redistributing surplus food. Beyond Hunger makes every effort to limit landfill waste and are vigilant about recycling and composting items that cannot be reused.

**BEYOND  
HUNGER**



# Oak Park and River Forest Community Foundation



- The Oak Park-River Forest Community Foundation’s mission is focused on uniting community members and mobilizing resources to advance a racially just society and equitable outcomes for residents of West Cook County. In its recently published Community Voices report, the Foundation found that wealth inequality and health care were among the top priorities identified by underrepresented communities in our region. Community members also recognized the importance of green spaces.
- Through its PlanItGreen initiative, the Foundation has provided funding for extensive outreach to BIPOC and low-to-moderate income residents and youth to provide input into the development of the Village of Oak Park’s Climate Plan. Consultant Sydney Jackson reached out to BIPOC organizations, established affinity groups with Village Sustainability Coordinator Marcella Bondie Keenan, and conducted outreach to youth via It’s Our Future and other avenues. Follow up to the outreach component includes a “house party” strategy to engage BIPOC residents and those living in low- to moderate-income apartments to take advantage of energy efficiency opportunities linked to the Climate Plan.
- PlanItGreen has also worked beyond Oak Park and River Forest to support communities in the west Cook County region with initiatives that achieve their goals and desired outcomes around greenhouse gas emissions reductions, equity and sustainability. To date the project has supported the Village of Broadview with its Solar Corridor initiative; the development of an Illinois Solar for All community solar array in Maywood; and analysis of Bethel New Life buildings in Austin for potential solar arrays. In addition, PlanItGreen collaborated on the development of the Cross Community Climate Collaborative (C4) with 15 mayoral commitments designed to drive climate, equity and sustainability outcomes in black, brown and white communities in west suburban Cook County.



# Housing Forward



- Housing Forward should be honored for helping lead the formation of the Oak Park Climate Ready Plan. Five residents from their housing program joined a focus group to provide valuable input on the plan. A decades-old anchor in our community, Housing Forward helps meet many of the basic needs for under-resourced individuals and families. Their perspective on behalf of their clients is and will be essential in the wake of a changing climate. We are grateful for their time and energy.

housing  
FORWARD



## Trustee Susan Buchanan



- As a village trustee, Susan co-founded Oak Park Climate Action Network (OP-CAN) after successfully ushering through recommendations to the village for budget and policy initiatives that resulted in the creation of the village's Climate Action and Resiliency Plan. She sees her current role as assuring that Climate Ready Oak Park is operationalized via policy and budgeting advocacy at the Village Board table, using the expertise and support of OP-CAN.

