



**ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT**      **COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY**  
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**NEWS RELEASE** *for Immediate Release*

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**April 22, 2024, 5 p.m.**

**St Mary's County Recognizes Sustainability Award Winners**

**LEONARDTOWN, MD** – The Commissioners of St. Mary's County and the Commission on the Environment are pleased to announce the 2023 St Mary's County Sustainability Award winners:

**School Category:**

- **Winner: Father Andrew White, S.J. School**
- *Honorable Mention:* Elms Environmental Education Center, Maryland Master Naturalist Program

**Non-profit Category:**

- **Winner: Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D)**
- *Honorable Mention:* St Mary's River Watershed Association

The Sustainability Awards recognize outstanding students, restaurants, businesses, non-profits, and farms in St Mary's County for their environmental stewardship, resource conservation, innovative best practices, and pollution prevention efforts. All nominees for the 2023 calendar year demonstrated impressive commitment to improving local environmental impacts.

The winner of the school category is Father Andrew White, S.J. School (FAW). FAW began a food waste program midway through last school year, in late winter to spring of 2023. Victoria Rutherford manages the school's kitchen, serving up to 200 children and staff each day. When she noticed food being discarded due to absences, she partnered with the school nurse, a volunteer at Summerseat Farm, to devise and implement a plan to reduce food waste.

They collected leftover or spoiled food appropriate for the farm animals to eat, averaging 25lbs of food per week. FAW hopes to further expand this program to engage elementary students in learning about food waste and separating their cafeteria waste on their own.

“The kitchen now throws away very little actual food,” said Rutherford. “Kitchen waste is relegated to packaging.” Composting and keeping food waste out of the landfill waste stream is economical and a priority project of the Commission on the Environment.



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## NEWS RELEASE *for Immediate Release*

The winner in the non-profit category is Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D). In 2023, RC&D launched several educational programs. RC&D's Sunday Eco-School, held at the [Barns at New Market](#) in Mechanicsville, was designed to provide



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free environmental education for all ages. Topics in the first year included the importance of wetlands, the history of agriculture in Southern Maryland, native plants, Maryland trees, and soil health. The lessons were valuable for home-schooled kids who have fewer opportunities for environmental education. RC&D also started a virtual Winter Seminar series, four in total but two taking place in 2023. These well-attended lectures were presented by experts in the field and generated lots of good questions and discussion.

Additionally, RC&D's Program Director for Land Conservation served as an adjunct professor at St. Mary's College during the spring and fall semesters, teaching second- and third-year students about careers in the

environmental and conservation fields. RC&D also applied for and became a Chesapeake Conservation and Climate Corps (CCCC) host site in 2023. This allows RC&D to mentor a young adult to obtain gainful employment in the environmental field. The mentorship officially began in August of 2023 and will continue until August of 2024.

RC&D has also continued to help implement the State of Maryland's Rural Legacy Program, which conserves rural land throughout the state. In 2023, RC&D was awarded \$1,461,697 in Rural Legacy grant funding. Three new conservation easements went to settlement in 2023, and RC&D has continued to monitor the other 27 conservation easements it holds under this program.

In addition to the two winners, the Commission on the Environment named two Honorable Mentions: The Elms Environmental Education Center, MD Master Naturalist Program and St Mary's River Watershed Association. Their efforts in 2023 were also impactful and outstanding!

Selection of the Sustainability Award winners was based on outstanding demonstrated efforts to improve the environment and for initiatives and projects exceeding business norms and requirements. For more information on the Commission on the Environment, please visit [stmaryscountymd.gov/coe](http://stmaryscountymd.gov/coe).

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