



South Africa's 2021 recycling heroes announced

Enterprising individuals and organisations across SA are rethinking the recyclability of packaging, educating and uplifting communities, and creating revenue streams among waste reclaimers and SMMEs to boost the circular economy and the environment.

From Paarl to Fisantekraal and Zebediela to KwaMhlanga, innovative South Africans are turning recyclable waste into revenue streams, uplifting communities and creating jobs.

Among the eco-warriors making a tangible impact on sustainability and the circular economy are 13 individuals and organisations who have been lauded for their environmental efforts by the national polyethylene terephthalate (PET) Extended Producer Responsibility body, PETCO.

Announcing this year's winners of the annual PETCO Awards, chief executive officer Cheri Scholtz said these recycling champions had seen the environmental and economic value of post-consumer PET recycling.

"We are proud to celebrate these extraordinary people and organisations across the country for their contribution. Their success shows that PET plastic waste is not trash," said Scholtz.

The category winners in this year's recycling awards include a company turning traditionally unrecycled material into pallets made from 97% recycled PET (rPET), a reclaimer so determined to start a recycling business that he sold his car, and a Johannesburg resident who forged a unique resident-reclaimer recycling initiative.

2021 PETCO AWARDS CATEGORY WINNERS:

CATEGORY: Environmental Education and Awareness Initiative

WINNER: Giving Them Wings Foundation NPC (Nelson Mandela Bay, Eastern Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Siya Ntsumpa, founder of Giving Them Wings Foundation, on YouTube.

Siya Ntsumpa's Giving Them Wings Foundation helps cultivate an environmental ethos and culture by establishing environmental clubs throughout Nelson Mandela Bay. So far 11 schools and one clinic have embraced the concept of recycling and creating food gardens, with many children starting food gardens and recycling in their own homes and communities, and spreading the environmental message among the wider community.

The grassroots foundation circulates a 1,6-tonne bin among each of its "enviro schools" bi-weekly. At two of the schools alone, 508 445 PET plastic bottles were collected in 2019, while one environmental club has scooped several national ecological competitions. At just 33 years old, Ntsumpa now employs six permanent and five temporary staff.

"Schools are the go-to place to reach the wider communities," said Ntsumpa. "Kids will bring what they do at school back home; they'll talk about it with their parents. So, to do any kind of change, especially in our townships, you start with the kids and you start at the schools."

CATEGORY: Top Woman in Collection and Recycling

WINNER: Loretta Waterboer of LW Recycling and Trade (Fisantekraal, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Waterboer on YouTube.

Loretta Waterboer started LW Recycling and Trade in 2014, operating out of her backyard, where she collected small quantities of any recyclable material she could find, including PET plastic bottles. With no equipment to assist her, she made do with what she could while working full-time. Despite the challenges, her remarkable passion, humility, and determination paid off. Three years later, Garden Cities approached her to do recycling from their site yard and entered into an Enterprise Development Agreement with her.

LW Recycling and Trade is today the only accredited and registered recycling company in Fisantekraal. Waterboer is also the only woman recycler in the Durbanville area.

"My business is unique. In the whole Durbanville area, I'm the only woman recycler," said Waterboer. "I'm proud of it and I'm proud of myself. I know I'm going to go very far."

CATEGORY: Recycling Partnership Gamechanger

JOINT WINNER: African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) and the Bordeaux South Homeowners Association (Johannesburg, Gauteng)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with the project founder, Angela Schaerer, and ARO on YouTube.

While some residents focused on keeping reclaimers off their streets, Bordeaux resident Angela Schaerer reached out to the African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) to see how they

could work together. The ensuing S@S Programme, for which PETCO originally supplied the necessary plastic bags for collection, followed by sturdier bins, is the first resident-reclaimer recycling initiative of its kind in the country.

Once residents forged relationships with the reclaimers, they realised the magnitude of their role in the informal economy. Perceptions shifted, and residents began actively partnering and collaborating with the reclaimers.

The game-changer initiative, which kicked off in July 2019, has ignited a growing recycling culture among Bordeaux residents. For PETCO, residents and reclaimers both have a key role to play in the journey towards a circular economy.

“This partnership with the ARO and the reclaimers in Bordeaux provided a very easy opportunity for people to start recycling,” said Schaerer.

CATEGORY: PET-repreneur

JOINT WINNER: Mandlenkosi Nkosi of Man Recycling (Boksburg, Gauteng)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Nkosi on YouTube.

In 2017, Mandlenkosi Nkosi was unemployed and had just started a family. To earn a living, Nkosi and his wife began collecting recyclable material to sell. The couple operated from an open field, collecting three tonnes of PET plastic bottles a month. These days, the Man Recycling Buy-Back Centre operates from a secure building, collects over 18 tonnes of PET a month and employs 30 community members.

Nkosi said waste collectors were vital in growing the recycling industry. To reach as many reclaimers as possible, he developed a WhatsApp group for anyone needing advice about starting a recycling business from scratch.

“The role of a [reclaimer] is very important. Industries that are big, including the government and communities, must all focus more on the [reclaimers] on the ground,” said Nkosi. “[They are] fundamental in building the recycling industry.”

CATEGORY – PET-repreneur

JOINT WINNER: Matsobane Mawasha of Circular Green (Zebediela, Limpopo)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Mawasha on YouTube.

Matsobane Mawasha started Circular Green with nothing but grit and the determination to succeed. It wasn't easy. He had to sell his car and go into debt to get his enterprise off the ground.

He started as a one-person show, picking up waste on the streets after work every day. Then the idea of upscaling waste collection to benefit more people took root. Although the people of Zebediela were unfamiliar with the concept of recycling, Mawasha was undeterred, setting out to teach people why recycling matters and how to identify recyclable material. His persistence paid off and, in 2019, Circular Green collected almost 61 tonnes of PET plastic bottles, distributing around R122 000 in PET buy-back capital back to the community.

Today Mawasha employs 11 community members and dreams of becoming the most reliable and largest buy-back centre in Limpopo. He also hopes to grow the business to such an extent that he can produce an end-product.

“I love the work that I do. It’s amazing to sleep at night knowing that you’ve changed someone’s life,” said Mawasha.

CATEGORY: Best Community Recycling Initiative

JOINT WINNER: The ReTrade Project (Nelson Mandela Bay, Eastern Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Maria Grewar, founder and director of The ReTrade Project, on YouTube.

The recycling and social empowerment ReTrade Project changes lives and restores dignity to communities in Nelson Mandela Bay. It encourages community members to bring recyclables to a depot in exchange for essential items such as food, toiletries, clothing and blankets. Simultaneously, the local community is becoming more environmentally aware and learning about recycling, what constitutes waste, how to use it, clean it and sort it. This is vital if we are to recover PET plastic bottles and work to create a circular economy.

Started in 2014, The ReTrade Project is run by a volunteer team comprising 80% women and a women-led management board. For founder and director Maria Grewar, the initiative is all about providing a hand up rather than a handout.

“I like to say we’re a social project with a green heart,” said Grewar. The social empowerment initiative “is helping bridge cultural gaps, people who would never normally cross paths are crossing paths together and education is being had in both worlds,” she added.

CATEGORY: Best New End-Use Products

WINNER: Palletplast (Pty) Ltd (Blackheath, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Christopher Smith, director of Palletplast, on YouTube.

Out-of-the-box thinkers Christopher Smith and Steph Le Roux Clarke are repurposing materials that are not traditionally recycled, converting them into pallets made from 97% rPET.

Barrier layer material, darker colour PET and other materials not derived from plastic bottles would previously have gone to landfill. Now they are converted into fully recyclable pallets that are lightweight, stackable, easy to transport, and cost effective. The patented pallet design includes three PET straps which enable the pallet to rack 1 200kg – vital during cold storage in the fruit sector, which exports over four million pallets from the Western Cape alone each year.

“We need to change our way of thinking. We can’t be of the train of thought where we use something once and throw it away,” said Smith.

CATEGORY: Design for Circularity

WINNER: The Mpack Versapak company (Paarl, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with the company on YouTube.

Part of the waste challenge is the linear ‘take-make-dispose’ model of consumption, which means products are manufactured, bought, used briefly, and then thrown away. However, Mpack Versapak’s thermoformed punnet is the first food-approved punnet in South Africa to be formulated completely from 100% post-consumer rPET.

By using a post-consumer formulation of rPET, Mpack Versapak is supporting a more circular economy in South Africa – by ensuring that this material is diverted from landfill to be reused and recycled into new and useful materials, thus maximising its value.

Mpack Versapak’s punnet had to be put through rigorous testing to ensure that it measured up to stringent standards and was safe for consumer use, which included fulfilling many requirements as described in various European Union regulations.

“I think every South African should be mindful when it comes to recycling,” said Dawid Maritz, national sales manager of agricultural products at Mpack Versapak. “My wish is that every South African, even in pre-school, should know ‘What do I do with this waste in my hand and what’s going to happen to it?’ That’s my dream.”

CATEGORY: Media Spotlight

WINNER: Pippa Hudson, Cape Talk Radio (Cape Town, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with Hudson on YouTube.

Cape Talk journalist Pippa Hudson is recognised for her outstanding contribution to environmental awareness and consumer education. Hudson works tirelessly to fundamentally shift understanding among South African consumers of issues pertaining to waste reduction, reuse and recycling. She understands that well-informed consumers can dispose of packaging correctly and use their spending power to choose well-designed packaging. Hudson understands the role of Producer Responsibility Organisations such as PETCO and challenges consumers and retailers alike to be more mindful and find better, more creative ways of protecting the environment.

Over and above its role of ensuring people know the facts about recycling, “media also have a role from an inspirational perspective, encouraging people that they can make a difference. No change is too small,” said Hudson.

CATEGORY: Best Community Recycling Initiative

JOINT WINNERS: Belville Recycling and Trolley Project (Cape Town, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with the winners on YouTube.

PETCO sees the training and mentorship of informal reclaimers as critical to improving working conditions and assisting waste entrepreneurs to grow and sustain their businesses, thereby stimulating economic growth, job creation and development in our country. The Belville Recycling and Trolley Project does this by facilitating access to recyclable waste and therefore a more predictable income, providing valuable economic and social services support, and access to training. This project’s value is that it supports businesses in reducing the amount of waste they send to landfills, recycling more and simultaneously helping the community.

The project is the brainchild of the Voortrekker Road Corridor Improvement District (VRCID) and the Greater Tygerberg Partnership (GTP) in conjunction with social development company MES Cape Town. So far, 19 businesses in the Belville CBD are onboard.

“[Businesses] always used to look at us as [if we were] beggars, standing at the robot begging for money. With the trolley system, they respect us more. They can see that we’re decent people,” said Albert Samuels, a reclaimer involved in the initiative.

CATEGORY: Recycling Partnership Gamechanger

JOINT WINNER: GreenUP (Stellenbosch, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) to watch a short interview with the GreenUP project partners on YouTube.

GreenUP is a successful public-private-people partnership between Distell, the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning, and the City of Cape Town. It

is investing R8.8 million a year to enable reclaimers – called “environmental assistants (EAs)” – to reduce post-consumer waste. PET is regarded as a circular polymer and reclaimers make a valuable contribution in this collection phase.

The 150 EAs receive waste management and financial training and are incorporated into the government’s Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). An app tracks the EAs, the buy-back centres and their prosperity journey. A reward system is also being introduced.

“Recycling is a key enabler. We had to understand the whole value chain... and if we can encourage reuse, collection, recycling, job creation and empowerment of people, it tells a story that the circular economy is the way to go,” said Eric Leong Son, head of sustainability at Distell.

CATEGORY: Local Authority Recycling Innovation

JOINT WINNER: City of Cape Town (Cape Town, Western Cape)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with the City of Cape Town on YouTube.

The City of Cape Town (CoCT) is making inroads into the circular economy through many interventions to minimise waste and reduce the amount that ends up in landfills. They’re speeding up recycling, championing SMMEs and driving economic development and growth. The outcome is cleaner communities and, importantly, job creation. On average, over 24 000 tonnes of dry recyclables a year have been diverted from landfill, including PET.

Their Kraaifontein material recovery facility (MRF) collects, sorts and sells recyclables from between 50 000 and 60 000 households. Coastal Park will soon see its own material recovery facility, while additional facilities are in the pipeline. A clean MRF of this nature allows for improved quality of feedstock – key for a circular approach.

The CoCT has also developed a recycling app to simplify access to waste exchange and promote private recycling services.

“[The project] deals with things such as illegal dumping. That, then, contributes to creating far more liveable communities. But, most importantly, that then feeds into a bigger economic sector that both creates jobs and ensures that waste ends [is recycled as] other items,” said Xanthea Limberg, a City of Cape Town councillor involved in the project.

CATEGORY: Local Authority Recycling Innovation

JOINT WINNER: The Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) (KwaMhlanga, Mpumalanga)

WATCH: Click [here](#) for a short interview with the department on YouTube.

Environmental officer Linah Ndala from DARDLEA works with private companies, government and municipalities in Mpumalanga to divert material from landfill, support job creation and uplift communities. The project attests to the power of partnerships and collaboration.

For Ndala, the starting point is teaching communities about the possibilities of a greener economy, coupled with awareness workshops about recycling – how to sort and turn recycled material into products to earn a living.

An estimated 15 tonnes of PET is collected each month as part of the initiative.

“[Recycling] is helping people to put something on the table for their kids and family. Waste is not trash. Waste can give them food. Waste can give them jobs. You can be an entrepreneur yourself,” said Ndala.

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IMAGES:

For images specific to this press release, please click one of the below links (to Google Drive and WeTransfer). The images are named according to the winners’ blurbs above.

- <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/10Ev0LYhcWDqw2n0V5-atPYnY8f8RonPQ?usp=sharing>
- <https://we.tl/t-locon0dz5Q>

ABOUT PETCO:

PETCO (PET Recycling Company) was established at the end of 2004 as an industry-driven and financed national recycling initiative, based on the concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), the goal being to capitalise on the expected growth in the market for recycled PET and to act as the vehicle through which the PET industry could self-regulate and co-ordinate its recycling activities.

PETCO, as a non-profit company, is not involved in the physical collection or recycling of waste PET in South Africa, choosing to remain outside of the PET recycling value chain. Instead, it acts as a Producer Responsibility Organisation (PRO) that financially supports, on behalf of its members, activities along the waste PET value chain. PETCO members include brand-owners, resin producers, converters (who manufacture bottles from PET resin) and bottlers.

A key component of the PETCO model is the voluntary EPR fee paid by industry (on PET resin purchased locally or imported) and grants from brand owners, retailers and resin producers. PETCO uses the revenue it collects to support recyclers, which enables them to buy bottles consistently and keeps the wheel of the value chain turning.

This support for the recycling value chain is paid out at contracted rates for tonnages, in line with PETCO's annual recycling targets. In turn, recyclers are then able to ensure a consistent demand for post-consumer PET from collectors. Many of these waste PET collectors operate informally, either through collection at kerbside or at landfills.



Issued on behalf of:

The [PET Recycling Company \(PETCO\)](#)

Media contact (office hours):

Leonie Selvan | leonie@goodnewslab.co.za | 083 380 1877

www.goodnewslab.co.za | 084 250 2932 | ***We're here to help**
