PRESS RELEASE

Acterra honors community-level climate action in benefit centering truth, justice, action

Second annual “Promise to Our Planet” online benefit issues climate call to action while recognizing individual and organizational strides

Event website: acterra.org/promise

PALO ALTO—March 26, 2022—On Friday, March 25, the nonprofit Acterra held its virtual spring benefit, “Promise to Our Planet,” to promote climate change action and awareness. The event, which took place from 5 to 7:30 pm, included the presentation of Acterra’s 32nd annual Business Environmental Awards for organizations and the 2nd annual Champions of Promise Awards for individuals, and brought together an audience of local government officials, prominent business professionals, philanthropists, activists, and community leaders.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, public concern about climate change is growing as the region is reckoning with an increasing number of climate change-related threats, including a once-in-a-millennium-scale drought and recent megafires that have incurred huge costs in terms of fire mitigation, residential damage, lost business revenue, and impacts from wildfire smoke. Without downplaying the severity of these risks, Acterra’s “Promise to Our Planet” event aimed to spotlight positive, impactful local actions already underway to combat our climate crisis through the lenses of “Truth. Justice. Action.”

In addressing the evening’s theme, Lauren Weston, Acterra’s Executive Director, commented, “Truth, justice, action sums up what the climate movement deserves in this country. We only stand a chance of making a real difference fighting climate change when all three concepts are guiding us and motivating our work. We’re thrilled to have helped spread this message to more Bay Area communities.”

The global climate change narrative points to a crisis of looming proportions. A February 28 IPCC Working Group II report underscored massive risks to society caused by climate change while the media have reported greater numbers of youth experiencing “existential anxiety” and “eco-anxiety”. By contrast, the local arena represents what many consider a more fertile ground for innovative solutions in the private and public sectors — including actions that can successfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions from buildings and transportation or foster more sustainable and healthy food systems.

One recurring event theme was environmental justice, which threaded through many parts of the evening, beginning with an original spoken-word poem “city slicker” by youth poet Ashia Ajani. In the Business Environmental Awards presentation segment, the work of multiple finalists and award recipients reflected equity and justice, especially Food Shift (Alameda County), for its project overcoming employment discrimination and promoting workforce development in food service, and Clarity/Brightline Defense (San Francisco County), for its community-led project making low-cost, scalable air quality monitoring services more accessible to underserved neighborhoods in San Francisco.

In a similar vein, a keynote speech by historian Jermaine Fowler focused on the intersection of climate activism and a call for justice for marginalized communities. Fowler remarked, “Are we willing to do a full-scale transformation of the country’s energy system? Are we willing to prioritize at the same time the most vulnerable in our society like never before? Because we all have a right to life.”
Environmental justice also lay at the heart of the work of two community activists, Ever Rodriguez and Gabriela Valencia, who shared one of three Champions of Promise Awards. The organization they co-founded, the North Fair Oaks Community Alliance works in unincorporated San Mateo County, prioritizing community wellness and resilience by increasing tree cover and by resourcing community members in areas including home air purification, COVID-19 vaccination clinics to prevent illness, and other urgent issues. In accepting the joint award, Ever Rodriguez said, “We are honored and will continue to work making a difference in North Fair Oaks to reduce vulnerabilities and increase awareness of environmental problems and behaviors that we can change to help our planet be greener and leave a healthier world to new generations.”

A second key event theme was electrification of the economy and transitioning away from fossil fuels. A trifecta of nationally prominent speakers — Leah Stokes, Panama Bartholomy, and Mark Z. Jacobson — alluded to electrification as a high-priority climate solution. According to Stokes, clean electricity should be “the backbone of our economy,” since electrifying most of our sectors using existing technology would allow us to cut carbon emissions by 75%, solving “the lion’s share of the problem.” In January 2022, in conjunction with community partners and volunteers, Acterra hosted an event called “Code Red for Humanity: What Municipalities Can Do,” with suggestions for advocating for electrification at the local level.

Promise to Our Planet attendees were able to attend a virtual small-group session. Session topics spanned a range of topics, such as plant-forward dietary choices, youth climate activism, sustainable banking, and reducing food waste. Speakers are noted in the Event Highlights below. Closing remarks were delivered by Representative Jackie Speier of California’s 14th Congressional District, who discussed legislative initiatives to promote electric vehicle production and restore the San Francisco Bay.

Online donations to support Acterra’s climate education and policy programs will be accepted at acterra.org/donate through March 31, 2022. Acterra’s strategic pillars include Beneficial Electrification (for buildings and transportation); Healthy Plate, Healthy Planet; Youth Education and Advocacy, and Workplace Sustainability.

**Event Highlights**

**Sustainable Food Systems Leadership Award (Business Environmental Awards)**

- **Recipient: Hodo** — Reduces greenhouse gas emissions through plant-based products, low-waste production methods, and education. *(Medium-sized business)*
- **Recipient: ReGrained** — Scalable business-to-business upcycled food chain transforms unwanted waste products into healthy and nutritious ingredients *(Small business)*
- **Finalist: Food Shift – Operation Together.** Combines recovery of surplus produce with a paid culinary training program to address food justice, plant-forward diets, workforce development, and food waste prevention.

**Environmental Innovation Award (Business Environmental Awards)**

- **Clarity Movement / Brightline Defense – Brightline Air Quality Monitoring Program.** Established a community-driven air quality monitoring program to benefit underserved residents in San Francisco.

**Champions of Promise Awards**

- **Katie Rueff**, Vice-President of the Gunn High Green Team who has a leading role in the Cloud Project, Bay Area Youth Lobbying Initiative, and other groups.
- **Gabriela Valencia**, a Nurse Practitioner and co-founder of the North Fair Oaks Community Alliance
- **Ever Rodriguez**, co-founder and president of the North Fair Oaks Community Alliance
- **Elaine Salinger**, co-leader of the San Mateo County chapter of Citizens’ Climate Lobby and an advocate for bicycling, native gardening, and rainwater capture.
Event Speakers

- **Ashia Ajani** – Poet with Youth Speaks and educator with Mycelium Youth Network whose work has appeared in *Sierra Magazine, Frontier Poetry, World Literature Today* and *Them.*, among others.
- **Panama Bartholomy** – Director of the Building Decarbonization Coalition, which advocates for solutions for our pollution-intensive building stock.
- **Monica Chen** – Executive Director of the nonprofit Factory Farming Awareness Coalition which advocates for the eradication of factory farming.
- **Jermaine Fowler** – Historian, author, and producer of *The Humanity Archive*, a podcast exploring the untold stories from history.
- **Dana Gunders** – Executive Director of ReFED, a nonprofit addressing solutions to U.S. food waste.
- **Mark Z. Jacobson** – Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford, co-founder of The Solutions Project, and developer of roadmaps to move states and countries to 100% clean energy.
- **Lauren Ritchie** – Youth climate justice advocate, founder of the Eco Justice project, and writer whose work prioritizes placing historically marginalized communities at the forefront of the climate movement.
- **Congresswoman Jackie Speier** – represents California’s 14th Congressional District and was named as one of “Politico’s 50” most influential people in American politics.
- **Leah Stokes** – Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Santa Barbara, author of *Short Circuiting Policy*, contributor to the anthology *All We Can Save*, and commentator on energy policy.
- **Kat Taylor** – Co-founder and co-chair of the Board of Beneficial State Bank, a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) and certified B Corp whose mission is to bring beneficial banking to low-income communities.

A recording of the event will be announced in the near future and will be available at [acterra.org/promise](http://acterra.org/promise).

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*About Acterra:* Acterra is a San Francisco Bay Area 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Palo Alto that brings people together to create local solutions for a healthy planet. Acterra’s educational programs help people and communities use cleaner power and reduce their carbon footprint through beneficial electrification of homes, businesses, and transportation, and climate-friendly food choices such as plant-forward diets and reduced food waste. For more information, visit acterra.org

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