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**WINNERS OF THE 2026 GOLDEN PINECONE SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS ANNOUNCED**

RENO, NV – A free community celebration honoring Nevada sustainability leaders is set for November 5. The 2026 Golden Pinecone Sustainability Awards will recognize 14 individuals, organizations, projects, and businesses for their contributions to a more sustainable Nevada. Award recipients will be honored Thursday, Nov, 5, from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Reno + Sparks Chamber of Commerce, 4065 S. Virginia Street, Suite 100, Reno.

This year's theme, "Neighbors Helping Neighbors," acknowledges the people and organizations strengthening Nevada, with a hands-on giving component included. Dr. Kyle Dalpe, president of Western Nevada College, will serve as master of ceremonies.

Established in 1989, the Golden Pinecone Sustainability Awards recognize individuals, educators, businesses, and organizations working to make their communities more sustainable and environmentally healthy. The awards celebrate these contributions while bringing the community together to recognize progress and inspire continued action.

Community members are invited to attend and celebrate alongside the honorees. Admission is free, but **space is limited** so advance registration is encouraged.

**2026 Award Recipients**

**Individual Volunteer** — Brian Thornton, Nevada Climate Team
**Educational Program** — Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful
**Educator** — Aaron Grossman, Hunsberger Elementary School
**Green Dining Establishment** — Buenos Grill
**Nonprofit Organization** — ImpactNV
**Sustainability Milestones Northern Nevada** — Washoe County Climate Action Plan
**Sustainability Milestones Southern Nevada** — UNLV Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine
**Green Project of the Year** — The Nevada Museum of Art
**Sustainable Supply Chain** — Sol-Up
**Youth Leadership** — Brian Price, UNR Student

**Towards Zero Waste** — The Katie Grace Foundation
**Tier 1 Green Business Leader** — Sierra Pink Automotive
**Tier 2 Green Business Champion** — Professional Dog Mom LLC
**Tier 3 Innovator** — Gear Hut

The 2026 awards celebration is organized by Western Nevada College, greenUP! and the Reno Sparks Chamber of Commerce.

History:
The Golden Pinecone Ball was started in 1989 by Tod Bedrosian, Bob Fulkerson, Glenn Miller and Bob Loux to bring the environmental community together as friends and initially to get the community excited about stopping the dump of nuclear waste. The pinecone awards were handmade out of plywood, an ironic twist on formal award ceremonies to honor environmental achievements of the past year.

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## About the Honorees

**Individual Volunteer — Brian Thornton, Nevada Climate Team**
Brian Thornton's volunteer leadership brings people together to advance climate education and collaboration across Nevada. As leader of the Nevada Climate Team, he connects a diverse network of climate and sustainability leaders to share information, support one another, and engage the public through Nevada Climate Forums. When state support for the initiative ended, Brian sustained the effort, preserving a valuable space for open, honest dialogue about climate and energy issues. Drawing on his background in mechanical engineering, energy efficiency, and sustainable buildings, Brian also volunteers with Citizens' Climate Lobby to build support for effective, efficient, and equitable climate solutions. His integrity, dedication, and respect for diverse perspectives exemplify the spirit of the Golden Pinecone Individual - Volunteer Award.

**Educational Program — Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful**
Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful empowers residents, businesses, and community groups to turn sustainability education into everyday action. Through Kimberly Rios's engaging "Trash Talks," hands-on learning, and bilingual resources, KTMB makes waste prevention and environmental stewardship accessible to diverse audiences. Its educational programs equip community members with practical tools for recycling, composting, pollution prevention, and protecting a healthy watershed. Kimberly partnered with the City of Reno to develop a waste reduction guide used for special events that was piloted at five major events. This helped Reno Earth Day divert 62% of its waste from the landfill through reuse, recycling, and composting. KTMB's practical, inclusive approach helps people turn environmental awareness into lasting habits that protect the Truckee Meadows.

**Educator — Aaron Grossman, Hunsberger Elementary School**
Aaron Grossman brings sustainability to life through hands-on learning that connects his fifth-grade students with their community. This year, he guided Hunsberger Elementary School through green business certification, inviting experts from the Washoe County School District, greenUP!, and Western Nevada College to support his students' research into local sustainability solutions and deepen their understanding of environmental stewardship. His leadership helped benchmark existing environmental practices at both Hunsberger and the school district while providing students an opportunity to participate in the certification process. By involving students, Aaron connected classroom learning with environmental stewardship in their own school community.

**Youth Leadership — Brian Price**
Brian Price turned his commitment to sustainability into hands-on support for Northern Nevada's automotive businesses. A University of Nevada, Reno student studying mechanical engineering and renewable energy, Brian joined greenUP! through the UNR Pack STEM summer internship program as a Green Business Advisor for Auto Shops. He conducted outreach to 54 shops, completed 14 site visits with follow-up reports, and educated businesses on pollution prevention practices. His work helped one auto shop

achieve green certification, and he created an onboarding guide to support future interns. By exceeding expectations and leaving resources for those who follow, Brian demonstrated initiative, thoughtful leadership, and a dedication to building a more sustainable automotive industry.

**Nonprofit Organization — ImpactNV**
ImpactNV advances environmental, social, and economic sustainability across Nevada through strategic partnerships, education, and community-driven action. The organization has brought together community members, businesses, and policymakers to address interconnected challenges - from climate resilience and water conservation to social equity and economic opportunity. Its tree-planting initiative has planted more than 13,000 trees toward a goal of 100,000, expanding shade and helping address extreme heat in Las Vegas. ImpactNV also engages residents in air-quality efforts and builds partnerships that connect local priorities with statewide solutions. By pairing measurable environmental improvements with a commitment to Nevada's most vulnerable communities, ImpactNV is helping build a healthier, more equitable, and resilient state.

**Green Dining Establishment — Buenos Grill**
Buenos Grill combines fresh, Baja-style Mexican cuisine with a commitment to sustainability. Serving Reno since 1999, the restaurant sources ingredients from local purveyors, uses sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic takeout containers, and embraces a reduce, reuse, and recycle philosophy. Its vegan menu options and annual participation in the Vegan Chef Challenge reflect a dedication to creative plant-based dining, earning it Best Plant Based Innovation in 2026. Buenos Grill has completed both Green Dining and Green Business certification and, since achieving certification in 2023, has saved more than 10,000 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions. Buenos Grill demonstrates how a neighborhood restaurant can make environmental responsibility part of everyday dining.

**Towards Zero Waste — Katie Grace Foundation**
Katie Grace Foundation turns surplus goods into community resources, putting reuse at the heart of its service to Northern Nevada. Under Kimberly Weingartner's leadership, the Foundation diverts more than 750,000 pounds of usable goods from local landfills each year. Through Katie's magical warehouse, it collects, sorts, and redistributes surplus and overstock items - including clothing, furniture, food, hygiene products, and household essentials - to nonprofits, schools, and community partners that help them reach people in need. Its partnerships with businesses and local recyclers extend the value of materials that might otherwise be discarded. By connecting waste prevention with community care, Katie Grace Foundation demonstrates how keeping useful goods in circulation can protect the environment while meeting everyday needs.

**Sustainable Supply Chain — Sol-Up**
Sol-Up brings sustainability and accountability to the delivery of clean energy solutions. Founded in Nevada in 2009, the engineering-led company integrates product selection, system design, permitting, installation, and ongoing service to support dependable,

long-term performance. Under COO Steve Hamile's leadership, Sol-Up has expanded beyond rooftop solar to offer battery storage, smart-energy technology, and whole-home efficiency solutions. With more than 15,000 residential and commercial rooftop solar systems installed, the company helps customers reduce reliance on fossil-fuel-generated electricity. By prioritizing durable technologies, transparency, and oversight throughout the customer and product lifecycle, Sol-Up connects responsible supply-chain practices with Nevada's transition to cleaner, more resilient energy.

**Tier 1 Green Business Leader — Sierra Pink Automotive**
Sierra Pink Automotive is the first Green Certified auto repair shop in Washoe County. This woman-owned shop demonstrates that auto repair and environmental responsibility can go hand in hand. Sierra Pink recycles their scrap metal and used batteries, opts for safer chemicals whenever possible, and upgraded their interior and exterior lighting to LEDs. They've invested in secondary containment, reusable water bottles, green certified cleaning supplies, and a smart thermostat. They are continuously looking for new ways they can reduce pollution and save energy.

**Tier 2 Green Business Champion — Professional Dog Mom LLC**
This Green Business Champion is a woman-owned, certified, licensed, bonded and insured Dog Care Service Business. Tonda Benge, founder and owner, has gone above and beyond greening her operations. She runs a TerraCycle recycling program (for free), in which she collects plastic dog food packaging from her clients, the Nevada Humane Society, and interested parties, and ships this (otherwise unrecyclable) waste to be shredded and melted down to plastic pellets again. For every pound of pet food plastic packaging Professional Dog Mom ships to TerraCycle, Professional Dog Mom donate $1 to the Nevada Humane Society. Tonda ships approximately 8 boxes of compacted material every 2-3 months, and each box costs her $250-300.

**Tier 3 Innovator — Gear Hut**
Gear Hut not only addresses the need for an outdoor gear consignment store in the Reno area, but they've also implemented some waste-reduction measures at their Midtown location. For instance, all customer receipts are emailed, bags are not offered in-store, they utilize a reusable tagging system, and all new employees turn clothes they already own into their uniforms by sewing on a Gear Hut patch. As a Tier 3 Green Business, Gear Hut is very active in the community. They participate in KTMB's Adopt-A-Spot program and organize community clean-ups, and they've worked with their building landlord to secure recycling options for not only themselves, but their entire business complex.

Gear Hut has an "unconsignable" bin in their store that aims to keep items that might have been disposed of out of landfills. People who bring items in can place these unsellable items in a free bin that anyone can pick up.

**Sustainability Milestones Northern Nevada — Washoe County Climate Action Plan**

Washoe County's Climate Action Plan marks an important milestone in embedding sustainability across county operations. Adopted March 11, 2025, the plan gives staff and departments a shared framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from buildings, fleets, and supply chains, supporting the County's goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. County operations reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 12% between 2021 and 2025, reflecting progress that the plan seeks to build upon. With support from county leadership and collaboration across departments, Washoe County is making environmental responsibility part of everyday public service and translating long-term climate goals into measurable action.

**Sustainability Milestones Southern Nevada — UNLV Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine**

UNLV's Kirk Kerkorian School of Medicine demonstrates that sustainability continues long after construction is complete. Through ongoing performance monitoring, building-system adjustments, and operational improvements, its 135,000-square-foot Medical Education Building advanced from LEED Silver in 2024 to LEED Platinum in 2026. UNLV and the Nevada Health & Bioscience Corporation, working with GRN Vision and McKinstry, have made environmental responsibility a central part of facility management. Compared with its 2023 baseline, the building uses approximately 20% less electricity, 50% less natural gas, and 15% less potable water - generating about $84,714 in annual utility savings. These achievements show how continuous improvement can conserve resources, reduce costs, and support a high-performing learning environment for Nevada's future physicians.

**Green Project of the Year — The Nevada Museum of Art**

The Nevada Museum of Art connects artistic expression with environmental responsibility, integrating sustainability into its operations, exhibitions, and institutional culture. Its Sustainability Action Plan has guided improvements including reduced employee travel, reuse of exhibition materials, energy-saving occupancy sensors, and smart irrigation controls. Chief Curator Apsara DiQuinzio, who founded and leads the Museum's Green Team, has helped embed environmentally responsible practices into museum policy and its recent expansion. Her exhibition *Into the Time Horizon* brings environmental art into public conversation, inviting audiences to consider their relationship with the natural world. By pairing practical operational changes with creative exploration, the Museum demonstrates how cultural institutions can both practice environmental stewardship and inspire it in others.