**SPEECH FOR DISTINGUISHED CITIZENS AWARD**

Thank you so much for that introduction.

* It is a huge honor to be recognized by the District 39 Education Foundation. You’ve probably noticed that I am much less famous than previous honorees -- so I really appreciate your showing up tonight!
* This year, the Foundation is recognizing a volunteer, and in doing so, they are also honoring the efforts of so many of you who also volunteer and make Wilmette a great place.
* Yesterday, I couldn’t decide whether to volunteer in the Outdoor Classroom or stay at my desk to work on this speech. As usual, time with kids in the garden won out. I could not resist the pull.
* When I arrived at Highcrest, there were more than 50 students in the garden and a whirlwind of activity . . .
* baby squirrels in our tool shed, vegetable seedlings to tend, prairie plants to cut down, compost to turn and the usual tasks of spring cleanup.
* As I picked up some trash, a tiny scrap of paper caught my eye -- a fortune from a fortune cookie – not something we normally find in the garden!
* I picked it up and read it . . . “You will soon be honored by someone you respect.” I am not making this up – here it is! (show the slip of paper)
* Anyway, I took it as cosmic sign that I was just where I was supposed to be at that moment – in a garden with kids!

Volunteering in our community allows me to combine what I love with what I think is truly important. Yes, I work hard at it, but I get back more energy than I give.

And my energy is constantly replenished by the children and adults I

* . . . work with in the school gardens and the biking community, exchange students and their host families, and the hundreds of fellow volunteers who make up Go Green Wilmette.
* Everything I do in Wilmette is a team effort.

In fact, much of my volunteer work involves recruiting others to volunteer, as many of you know first hand.

* My husband jokingly warns people NEVER to give me their email address – because if they do, there’s a pretty good chance I will ask them to volunteer for something –
* Oh that reminds me, I’m looking for four awesome families to host exchange students next year and that volunteer shift is only 10 1/2 months long! Sorry, I couldn’t resist!

When it comes to the importance of volunteering, I know I am preaching to the choir.

* Raise your hand if you volunteer in our schools or our community.
* That’s impressive. Our volunteer efforts make Wilmette and the world a better place.
* Many of you here tonight work with school and community volunteers and we all should acknowledge and thank you for that . . .
* . . . our District 39 teachers, staff and administrators, the Village, Park District, and Library staff, and our business community.

* Your willingness to work with volunteers makes our success possible.

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So, as many of you know, I am pretty passionate about protecting the planet.

* I have always been a nature-lover and environmentally aware, but one day I had an epiphany that compelled me to take on environmental advocacy work.
* I imagined a future grandchild of mine asking me what I had done when the science was clear time was running out to solve the environmental challenges facing the planet.
* In that instant, I knew I wanted to be able to tell my grandchild I understood the gravity and urgency of the problem and did my best to help find solutions before it was too late.

As I look out at all of you, I see so many of Wilmette’s community and education leaders gathered in one place, at one time.

* You are among the most influential people in our community. You guide our Village and teach our children.
* I also see residents who care and pay attention.

That’s why I can’t pass up this opportunity to share some ideas with you that I think are really important . . .

I want to talk about the fate of our planet and how we in Wilmette can and should step up and do our part to address the most pressing issues facing the world today.

* We are past debating whether or not the Earth is in serious trouble.
* I think it’s safe to say, we all want clean air, clean water, renewable energy, safe food and a healthy planet.
* So, it is imperative that we invest time, effort and resources in solutions now.
* And we need “all hands on deck.” As philosopher and futurist Marshall McLuhan said, ‘There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all crew.”
* Though, to tell you the truth, there seem to be a lot of people lounging in the deck chairs. . . .

We are the privileged.

* We live in one of the most educated, prosperous communities in the country.
* But affluent American suburbs like ours have the largest environmental footprint of any kind of community in the world.
* Given our advantages, shouldn’t it be our responsibility, even our duty, to work together to do everything we can to leave a planet that will sustain life as we know it for future generations?
* I certainly think it’s our duty, and I know we can all do more.
* So where do we start?

Smart solutions start with “Environmental Literacy.” What is “Environmental Literacy?”

* It is made up of four components:
  1. Understanding Earth systems and the impact we have on them
  2. Accepting responsibility for the environmental impact of our actions
  3. Developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills to find solutions
  4. Taking action to maintain, restore or improve the health of those systems
* “Environmentally literate" people have the knowledge, sensitivity, tools, and commitment to make the environment a priority.

I’d like to suggest that we work together in our Village to become more “environmentally literate” - - - because environmental literacy leads to behavior changes and solutions.

* I am living proof of this. Here is one example:
* Not too long ago, I thought that the water we use in Wilmette was treated and returned to Lake Michigan. So, I was not very mindful of my water use. Then I learned all the water we use here ends up in the Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico.
* I was floored. We are draining our lake and not replenishing it! And the truth is, you can drain a lake until it’s dry. It’s happened to the Aral Sea in the former Soviet Union. This new knowledge made me change my water use habits from that day forward.
* Go Green Wilmette’s mission is all about promoting Environmental Literacy in our community.
* We’ve been sharing knowledge, accepting responsibility, finding solutions, and taking action since 2006, providing nearly weekly opportunities for our residents to learn more and do more.
* We have a terrific website with tips on how to live more sustainably and a newsletter that goes out to more than 1,300 hundred households.
* But for Wilmette to become more environmentally literate, it will take a focused, concerted and coordinated effort across our Village involving our government, residents, schools, park district, library and business community.
* Much is already being done here in Wilmette and I want to be sure to give full credit for those efforts . . . but we need to do more.

We need to adjust our habits and invest in new approaches.

Environmental Literacy guides us to make the right decisions.

Our Village government has already established many green initiatives.

* We’re working on responsible storm water solutions by holding public meetings and considering new ideas.
* We’re reducing energy use with new, efficient lighting in street lamps and public buildings.
* We’ve established an Environmental and Energy Commission.
* The Village supports the activities of Go Green Wilmette, co-sponsoring our annual event, Going Green Matters.
* And these are just some of the many things the Village is doing to be more sustainable.
* We can all be really proud of those efforts.

But there is a lot more we can do if we really focus on the environmental impact of all our policies and practices.

Here are some additional things we could do in the Village:

* Let’s make Wilmette a better place to bike by adding more bike lanes and bike racks.
* Let’s work actively with our businesses to increase their recycling rates.
* Let’s reduce flooding by using permeable pavement for our alleys, streets and parking lots and “just say no” to variances requesting additional impervious surfaces.
* Let’s be an example to our residents and students by installing solar panels on our public buildings and schools, and let’s streamline the solar permitting process.
* Let’s use our Environmental and Energy Commission more effectively.
* Let’s establish a Village-wide sustainability working group
* And for huge positive impact with minimal to no cost to the Village, . . . let’s rethink our electrical aggregation decision and support clean energy.
* Finally, to coordinate environmental initiatives village-wide, . . . let’s hire or designate a Sustainability Coordinator for the Village like they have in Evanston, Highland Park, Oak Park and many other communities.
* Go Green Wilmette is eager and ready to support the Village in these efforts.

The Library has done much to increase Environmental Literacy in Wilmette . . .

* with their well-publicized green renovation, permeable parking lot and prominently-placed recycling bins.
* The library also hosts monthly programs to help residents learn more about environmental topics.
* These projects show real commitment on the part of the library board and staff.

The Park District helps us spend time in nature and that increases Environmental Literacy. For example,

* They provide us with beautiful parks and our incredible lakefront.
* They helped save Mallinckrodt, allowing for the re-use of its historic building and providing us with yet another beautiful park.
* They have planted and tend thousands of trees, shrubs and native plants, providing habitat for birds and other animals, . . . and learning opportunities for all of us.

But there are many more opportunities the Park District could pursue.

* Let’s put solar thermal panels on the roof of the Community Center to heat water for the Fitness Club’s showers. This will actually save Wilmette taxpayers money.
* Let’s do a thorough environmental review of all policies and practices across the Park District. I bet we could find an alternative to using Styrofoam in the concession stands.
* Let’s include year-round nature-based programming for children and adults and add more to our summer camps.
* Let’s create an interpretive nature trail at Gillson Park and let’s let the Lakeview Center double as a nature center with information and activities tied to the park and lakeshore.
* Let’s designate a part-time naturalist to plan and coordinate these activities.
* And let’s make these efforts more central to the Park District’s mission.

OK, have I left anybody out? Oh yes, the School District!

* As educational priorities have evolved, District 39 has responded to new challenges and put smart and innovative solutions in place . . .
* . . . like expanding resource centers, providing curriculum differentiation and integrating technology into the classroom and beyond.
* And in every case, the district recognized the need for professional staff to assist our teachers in making use of these new resources.
* We, as taxpayers and Foundation donors, have supported these initiatives.

For example:

* There are now 12 staff in the district managing our resources centers.
* We have 8 staff who serve as curriculum differentiation support teachers.
* And we have 19 technology support staff.
* We have clearly invested in our priorities.

I believe the next educational priority for our schools should be preparing our students to save the planet.

* They need to be “environmentally literate.”

District 39 has already started to address this.

* We have invested in new Science Labs at the Junior High.
* We have amazing Outdoor Classrooms at every school in our District. Children gain Environmental Literacy whenever they step foot in them.
* We’ve invested in a new Science curriculum.
* It includes environmental studies units like “Land and Water Interaction” for 4th graders, “Impact Earth: Environmental Issues” for 5th graders and for the 8th graders, an “Energy Transfer” unit that emphasizes energy alternatives.
* The new Science curriculum did not originally integrate our Outdoor Classrooms into the lesson plans but efforts have been made since to include the gardens as part of the curriculum.
* The District is trying to integrate environmental education, Outdoor Classrooms and nature-based learning into our childrens’ school days
* and some teachers are making better use of the school gardens.
* But our teachers find it very hard to incorporate our school gardens into their day, even if there is curriculum provided for that purpose . . . because of the many demands on their time and their lack of experience with outdoor learning.
* And so, our Outdoor Classrooms are often under-used. I know for a fact some of our middle school students have never been out in the garden during class time.
* There are many green projects, programs and events happening in our schools.
* But many of them, especially our Outdoor Classrooms, seem to be overly-dependent on volunteer initiative and PTO funding, . . . and so those efforts are not consistent across the District or even from year to year.
* Some students benefit and some do not.

As with our Village, a more concerted and coordinated effort is needed to make District 39 more “environmentally literate.”

What sort of steps could we take?

* Let’s start by adding “Environmental Literacy” to our District’s goals.
* Let’s do more to prioritize and coordinate sustainability efforts district-wide to save money, reduce waste, and teach our students by example.
* Let’s reinvigorate the “Green Teams” that were established several years ago at each school and coordinate their efforts.
* Let’s do more to provide our teachers with the training they need to increase their own environmental literacy and share that knowledge with students.

And finally, we’ve invested in 39 professional staff members to support resource centers, curriculum differentiation and technology.

* + - * It does not seen unreasonable to have one professional staff position to coordinate Environmental Literacy and sustainability efforts in our District --- that’s one person to assist 275 teachers and more than 3,600 students in six schools.
* Our teachers are already doing so much for our students.
* We cannot expect them to also figure out how to fully integrate environmental education, nature-based learning and Outdoor Classrooms into their teaching day . . .
* . . . without assistance and coordination from a professional educator.
* That would be like providing them with resource centers without librarians or technology without Technology Integration Specialists and tech support.

If we invest in Environmental Literacy in our school district:

* It will help us reach two of our important District goals: “opening minds to a *global perspective”* and “nourishing a sense of *social responsibility.”*
* Will prepare our students for the green jobs of tomorrow.
* Will make our children more confident and more optimistic about their future.
* And finally, will allow us to meet District 39’s primary goal of educating 21st Century Learners.
* Because, we cannot claim to be educating 21st Century Learners if we do not include “Environmentally Literacy,” -- preparing our children to innovate, problem-solve and adapt to the life-altering environmental conditions they face.

In conclusion, I will state the obvious. We all want to leave behind a sustainable and healthy planet for our children.

* Let us help accomplish that by cultivating “Environmental Literacy” here in Wilmette.
* Let us take small steps . . . and bold ones . . . now to do our part.

* I know all these changes won't happen overnight.
* But I am a gardener . . . I . . . like . . .to . . . plant . . . seeds . . .

Thank you