

Midwest Environmental Advocates: Announces Recipients of 2021 Bill Iwen Environmental Justice Award

Posted on Thursday, Oct 7, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Madison, WI—Today, Midwest Environmental Advocates announced that Brenda Coley of Milwaukee Water Commons, Richard Diaz of COLE (Coalition on Lead Emergency) and Tom Kilian of Citizens for a Clean Wausau have been selected to receive the 2021 Bill Iwen Environmental Justice Award.

[The Bill Iwen Environmental Justice Award](#) was established in 2019 by [Midwest Environmental Advocates](#), a nonprofit environmental law center, to recognize and honor those who are working to advance environmental justice in Wisconsin. This year's award recipients will be honored at a virtual event on October 26th at 7 p.m.

“We are pleased to honor these outstanding environmental justice leaders,” said MEA Executive Director Tony Wilkin Gibart. “They are leading the way toward a more just and equitable future when communities of color and low-income communities will no longer be disproportionately burdened by environmental hazards or denied a voice in important decisions that impact their health and wellbeing.”

Richard Diaz is a long-time community organizer whose work has made Milwaukee a more resilient and equitable community. He is a co-founder of [COLE \(Coalition on Lead Emergency\)](#), an organization dedicated to bringing attention to the disproportionate harm that lead poisoning causes for Black and low-income families in Milwaukee. In his work with COLE, Diaz advocates for solutions to the lead crisis that address racial and economic justice, as well as environmental justice. Recently, he led COLE to draft an ambitious proposal, developed collectively by COLE's member organizations, that would invest a historic level of resources available

through the American Rescue Plan Act to address these issues holistically. Diaz also works as Midwest Regional Field Organizer of [BlueGreen Alliance](#), where he engages partners and allies in solving environmental challenges in ways that create and maintain quality jobs and build a clean, thriving, and equitable economy.

Brenda Coley has served in various positions in the non-profit and academic sectors and brings a long-standing commitment to social justice and community organizing. She currently serves as co-executive director of [Milwaukee Water Commons](#), where she works to catalyze Milwaukee as a place where we all have a stake in the health of our waters and we all share in their stewardship and benefits. Coley's leadership and vision are exemplified in the formation of the Milwaukee Environmental Justice Round Table, a group of about 40 People of Color, Indigenous people and their white allies who advocate for clean energy, climate resilience and clean drinking water as a human right. Coley has also played a leading role on the Milwaukee Water Equity Task Force, focusing on pathways to a more equitable water future and inclusive workforce in Milwaukee.

Tom Kilian is co-founder of [Citizens for a Clean Wausau](#), an environmental watchdog group whose volunteers monitor the activities and impacts of significant current and past industrial polluters. Tom has worked tirelessly with members of Citizens for a Clean Wausau to uncover the extent of industrial contamination on Wausau's southwest side and to raise awareness of the way that the racially-diverse, working-class neighborhoods on the southwest side have disproportionately borne the impacts of industrial population. Kilian's experience advocating for the people of his community inspired him to run for public office, and in 2020 he won election to the Wausau City Council. As a member of the City Council, Kilian continues to advocate for environmental testing and remediation of toxic contamination and an end to industrial expansion in residential neighborhoods. He has played a key role in educating the Wausau community about the principles of environmental justice, including the need for greater transparency in government decision-making and more opportunities for meaningful public engagement.

More information about the October 26th event can be found [here](#).