

**ECO-BASH**

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2010

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RYAN ROBINSON**

# GREEN AWARDS

They aren't outsiders, they're *insiders*, with ideas so big that they couldn't help but shake up the system. With your nominations in hand, we found our 2010 class of honorees—five people making changes that reverberate within the Chicago school system, the restaurant world, the streets of South Chicago, the conservation community, and the farm-to-table movement

**HEAR OUR HONOREES**

IN THEIR OWN WORDS! FIND A COMPANION DOCUMENTARY BY SUREE TOWFIGHNIA/PRAIRIE DUST FILMS AT CHICAGOMAG.COM.

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**"CITIES ARE NOT USUALLY THOUGHT OF AS A NATURE PRESERVATION AREA. BUT OPENLANDS IS INTERESTED IN ALL DIMENSIONS OF GREEN SPACE."**

-JERRY ADELMANN >>

THE GUARDIAN

## JERRY ADELMANN

**REPLACE HIS RIMLESS GLASSES WITH A** pince-nez, add a bristling mustache, and Jerry Adelman, the vigorous 60-year-old president and CEO of Openlands, would bear more than a passing resemblance to another exceptional conservationist: Theodore Roosevelt. But unlike TR, the Openlands chief hasn't had the benefit of presidential fiat to make his green dreams a reality. Instead, by forging partnerships among activists, politicians, business-people, and ordinary citizens, Adelman has managed to save large swaths of the local landscape for future generations. "Cities are not usually thought of as a nature preservation area," he says. "But Openlands is interested in all the dimensions of green space: urban gardens, prairies, ball fields."

Even in a 30-year career rich in ecological accomplishments, 2009 stands out as a banner year for Adelman. Last fall his organization introduced its Openlands Lakeshore Preserve: 77 acres of woodlands, bluffs, and ravines situated on the Lake Michigan shoreline in the southern part of Fort Sheridan. Formerly owned by the U.S. Navy, the property might have become a gated community had Openlands not taken possession. The government didn't charge for the land, but the organization's ongoing capital campaign has raised more than 75 percent of a planned \$12 million to ensure the site's viability in perpetuity.

A native of Lockport, Adelman realized in the late 1970s that the land southwest of Chicago, perceived by many as a blighted rust belt, actually held great potential. He was especially drawn to the region along the old Illinois & Michigan Canal, a 19th-century relic that had once provided an invaluable link between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. "Envisioning [as he puts it today] a future grounded in the past," Adelman not only created a thriving modern-day canal corridor—which connected 49 communities along 120 miles of waterways—but he also invented a whole new kind of national park. Today, the National Park Service recognizes nearly 50 national heritage areas—and Adelman's canal corridor was the first.

His partner in the canal project was a Chicago-based land-conservation group known then as the Open Lands Project. After overseeing the canal corridor for several years, Adelman assumed leadership of Openlands in 1988. "I love this region, and I love what I do," he says. "There is always something new and exciting to do."

Or as Teddy Roosevelt told a Chicago audience 111 years ago: "Far better it is to dare mighty things."

—GEOFFREY JOHNSON



"I WAS REALLY FEELING A TREMENDOUS SENSE OF URGENCY IN PREPARING OUR CURRENT GENERATION."

THE NURTURER

## SARAH ELIZABETH IPPEL

**SARAH ELIZABETH IPPEL UNLOCKS A SMALL WOODEN DOOR AND PULLS** out two warm, fresh eggs. "Thank you, girls," she coos at the chickens, some of the permanent residents at the Academy for Global Citizenship, a charter school on the Southwest Side near Midway Airport. The eggs likely will go into the next morning's student breakfast, and, with that, a zero gets added into the spreadsheet that tracks "food miles"—the distance ingredients travel to get to the school.

If it sounds unusual, it is. No other Chicago public elementary school raises chickens. And few can claim to serve an all-organic breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack made fresh on the premises every day—sometimes with new eggs or, during growing season, with vegetables from an outdoor container garden. "Everything is made from scratch," says Ippel, the academy's founder and executive director. "All of our vegetables are fresh. Nothing comes out of a can."

The unique foodservice arrangement in the midst of the Chicago Public Schools bureaucracy goes a long way to distinguish the two-year-old Academy for Global Citizenship from its peers. So do the worm-filled composting bins in every classroom; the large wind turbine that sits by the front door; and the daily 4 p.m. yoga practice that is mandatory for the entire 150-student population of kindergarten through second grade. But Ippel knows that she can't unleash unorthodox practices in the traditional public-school setting and expect them to catch on if the academy isn't a success. So she's extending the academic day and year (her students get 36 percent more instruction time annually than the average CPS student) and working toward authorization as an International Baccalaureate school (there are only three public IB primary programs in Chicago). "If we are going to make the case that organic food and yoga and environmental education are imperative throughout the system, the test scores have to be off the charts," she says. The early outlook is good. In 2008-2009, the school's first year of operation, the students on average progressed 1.85 years of literacy development in ten months, as measured by the STEP (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress) assessment administered by the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute.

A native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ippel was only 23 when, in 2005, she submitted her first proposal for a globally focused, "green" charter school to the Chicago Board of Education. "I was really feeling a tremendous sense of urgency in preparing our current generation," she says. It took two more proposals, many door-to-door visits in the Archer Heights/Garfield Ridge neighborhood where the school is based, and much private fundraising to get approval in 2007. "I received an incredible amount of support from people who said [they] believe that this will shift our educational system," says Ippel, who describes her funding today as a mix of public money (from CPS), corporate sponsorships, grants, and individual donations. The extra money she raises helps pay for the organic food program and plans for the new school that she hopes to see built by 2011. (As executive director, Ippel is responsible for strategic planning and fundraising; the school has a principal, Anne Gillespie, who oversees academic instruction.)

When Ippel describes the planned new school, with its net-zero-energy building and an urban farm, her eyes light up with possibility. Already, the academy feels cramped in the 12,000-square-foot former barrel factory it calls home. "We have learned to love our little piece of cement," she says. "But it's time to work our way out."

—CASSIE WALKER



“PEOPLE GOT TIRED OF THE NAMELESS, FACELESS GROCERY STORE WHERE THE ONLY CONVERSATION WAS ‘PAPER OR PLASTIC?’”

THE NETWORKER

## TERRA BROCKMAN

**WHEN SOME PEOPLE THINK ABOUT FARMING,** they imagine homesteaders on a family plot wielding *American Gothic* pitchforks and forging their way against hostile nature. Terra Brockman, who works on her brother Henry’s sustainable farm not far from Bloomington, Illinois, sees some of that austere romance in farm life, but she also brings the picture down to earth, so to speak. “There’s beauty and there’s reward, but there is a lot of sleeplessness and exhaustion and kneeling in the dirt,” she says.

Brockman, 51, is the founder of The Land Connection, an Evanston-based nonprofit that preserves farmland, trains farmers, and supports local food. She established the organization in 2001, after a for-sale sign near the Brockmans’ downstate property signaled the possible end of a family farm. Through The Land Connection, Brockman successfully raised the money to buy the neighbor’s farm and install an eco-friendly farmer on the property. Since then, her organization has helped preserve more than 1,000 acres. Preserving farmland remains one of the main missions of the nonprofit, which is funded by a combination of grants, fundraisers, and individual donations. Farmer training is another mission. Since 2005, The Land Connection has run Central Illinois Farm Beginnings, a one-year program that teaches methods of sustainable farming. Nearly 80 percent of the program’s 70 graduates are currently farming.

Brockman herself informally connects farmers with chefs who want local food. For example, Brockman’s network connected Paul Kahan (from Blackbird) and Dean Zanella (then of 312 Chicago) with Organic Pastures and Wettstein Organic Farm, two sustainable farms near Henry Brockman’s homestead that produce suckling pigs.

As The Land Connection has expanded, Brockman has been able to specialize her role. Her book chronicling one year of farm life, *The Seasons on Henry’s Farm*, came out in 2009. Although other commitments take her away frequently, she still tries to pitch in at Henry’s farm on Tuesdays and Fridays for harvesting.

Local food has gained momentum—in a way organic never has—in the past few years, Brockman says. “People got tired of the nameless, faceless grocery store where the only conversation was ‘Paper or plastic?’” she says. What’s more, local food tastes better because it doesn’t spend as much time in delivery. Finally, Brockman says, local food builds community.

All of that feels miles away from vast environmental problems like greenhouse gases or the toxification of the Gulf of Mexico, the large-scale issues that cause people to throw up their hands and say, “What can I do?”

“What can you do? You can have a really great dinner tonight,” Brockman says.

—GRAHAM MEYER



THE CONSOLIDATOR

## ANGELA HURLOCK

**FACED WITH A PLUMMETING EMPLOYMENT RATE AND A SURGE IN HOME** foreclosures during his first month in office, President Obama pinpointed the disaster with emblematic candor: “It’s like the American dream in reverse.” The American dream has long been in reverse in South Chicago, a working-class neighborhood just ten miles from downtown but light years from its property values. This was an area supported by steel, Angela Hurlock explains, and when that industry declined in the late 1970s, South Chicago never recovered. But even when Hurlock recites her region’s depressed history, there are traces of glee in her voice. She sees opportunity in a boarded-up building or an empty lot. She still believes in the dream.

Hurlock, 40, is the executive director of Claretian Associates, a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community (and sustainable housing) in South Chicago. The housing comes in a variety of flavors—low-rent apartments and senior facilities—and many of its 130 units include more than a dozen green features, but Claretian’s greenest gems are the ten single-family homes it has built since Hurlock came aboard in 2004. Solar panels pepper roofs, vinyl windows stop energy leaks, and recycled carpets come from plastic bottles. “We wanted to build homes that were friendly to the body—and not just a safe place to live, but an affordable one,” Hurlock says.

Building affordable housing with federal and private aid is Claretian’s strength, but low-

income families still struggle to make the purchase. Solar panels might cut utility bills down the road, but first you need to get on that road. Claretian connects families with government subsidies (up to \$60,000 in some cases) and layers those funds with money from groups such as ComEd and the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. Even with all the help, however, the economic downturn has taken a big bite out of demand: 27 lots remain vacant. That doesn't deter Hurlock, an Oak Park native and an architect, who owns one of the green houses with her husband. For her, Claretian is about rebuilding lives. "What we have here is not just for the selective few," she says. "We service 2,500 families a year, and people look to us to help them, not just with housing but with everything."

The reach of Claretian's other services—from finding summer jobs for at-risk teens to helping residents start block clubs to coaching people about money management—focuses on the direct needs of the community. "I think one of the greatest things we've done is help families to dream beyond their six blocks," Hurlock says. And a supportive neighborhood, one worth returning to and investing in, helps make those American dreams a reality.

—NORA O'DONNELL

"ONE OF THE GREATEST THINGS WE'VE DONE IS HELP FAMILIES TO DREAM BEYOND THEIR SIX BLOCKS."

—ANGELA HURLOCK



"IF I CAN DO THINGS IN MY COMPANY TO REPRESENT WHAT I THINK IS RIGHT AND GOOD, THEN THAT BUSINESS IS GOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE."

THE INCREMENTALIST

## DAN MCGOWAN

**THERE IS NO REASON WHY BIG BOWL, THE CHICAGO-**based chain of eight Chinese-Thai restaurants, would seem an obvious candidate to go green. On the other hand, why not? Big Bowl's president, Dan McGowan, saw an opportunity when he was charged with reinvigorating the brand in 2004, the year Lettuce Entertain You bought back the franchise from a large restaurant corporation. The 43-year-old McGowan, who credits the birth of his daughter with igniting his passion for the environment, says he knew he wanted Big Bowl to become natural, local, and sustainable—and that transformation would begin with the food.

It started with coffee. One day, the daughter of a regular customer explained to McGowan how the practice of fair trade helped poorer nations compete their way out of poverty—coffee being but one example of in-demand goods that can be bought responsibly. "At Big Bowl, we sell more tea than coffee, but we do sell 100 pounds a week," says McGowan, who switched to fair-trade coffee right away. "It led to more conversations with my partners, who said, 'OK, now what can we really do?'"

McGowan next tackled the stir-fry bar, which accounts for up to 20 percent of all dishes sold at Big Bowl. Going to all-organic vegetables would be prohibitively expensive or logistically impractical. But buying tomatoes, peppers, pea pods, onions, herbs, corn, and other produce from local farmers during the harvest months? That would work. Then McGowan traded so-called commodity proteins for heirloom pork, wild organic Scottish salmon, and natural beef and chicken. In some instances, he had to coax along middleman distributors to carry these niche products just for him.

But McGowan didn't stop there. The company turned its attention to bottled water (\$25,000 worth of annual sales eliminated in favor of triple-filtered taps); plastic carryout containers (replaced by recycled paper); chemicals in the kitchen (now nontoxic and aquatic friendly); and staff uniforms (a durable, lightweight polyester made from recycled plastic bottles).

McGowan estimates that these changes—mostly the added expense of better-quality raw ingredients—cost at least \$300,000 annually, on top of several one-time investments early in the process. He'd like to believe that customers notice, but getting credit isn't why Big Bowl went green. "We set out to do it because I want my daughter to have the right lesson," McGowan says. "If I can do things in my company to represent what I think is right and good, then that business is going to make a difference. And if other businesses do a couple of things—not a lot—then little by little, we can make changes."

—JENNIFER TANAKA