

Michele Nestor

Nestor Resources, Inc.
Published October, 2023

Featured Member—Jessica James Stutzman

This is the first in a series of articles about Keystone SWANA members. We're a diverse group of professionals with unique backgrounds and life experiences. Every one of you has a story to tell and I am here to help you share it.

I selected Jessica James Stutzman for my first interview. A Magna Cum Laude graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, Jessie has a BA in Environmental Studies and a Certificate in GIS. Once the Municipal Recycling Coordinator, she's currently the Director of Community Relations and Sustainability for Millcreek Township in Erie County. Millcreek is a growing suburban community with 23,110 households and 54,073 residents. Jessie oversees the recycling, composting, internal/external communications, cable access television programming, and senior programming branches of the township with a department staff of 3-full time and 4-part time employees.



Jessica was my first pick because I knew she is no stranger to the media. While she's not dealing with the Millfair Compost Site or intervening with the township's residential waste and recycling collection contractor, Jessie is Millcreek's greatest promoter. She's the co-host of the Millcreek Government Channel, is the lead in Millcreek's new branding campaign, and provides content to the local Millcreek Magazine.

Following are parts of our conversation.

What advice would you give to somebody who is considering a similar position in county or local government?

"Working in county or local government is a career focused on people, but more importantly, these people are your neighbors, friends, and family. Policies at the local and county level directly impact how families live their lives at their homes.

I grew up in Millcreek Township, attending all the local public schools. I moved away for college, but came back to Millcreek to raise my own family here. I have completely immersed myself and my family in this community again. We frequent the local parks, businesses, and festivals with Millcreek pride.

My best advice is to be polite and an empathetic listener. Learn how to respectfully handle complaints, but not take professional complaints personally. It is also very important to me that I strive every day to lift-up those who work around me. A positive work environment is motivating and reenergizing."

What is your crowning or most innovative achievement thus far?

"Growth for our department internally and stability for the community that we serve! We have weathered many storms in recycling and composting industry in the last decade, but our department is stronger than ever. So much so that our name was changed to the Department of Community Relations & Sustainability in 2023.

The Millfair Compost Center has increased their site visits by 25% and their revenue by 55% over the last decade while diverting 19,000 yards of brush and leaves from the local landfill and also distributing over 7,000 yards of material back into the community annually. The system we have here at the Millfair Compost Center really closes the loop on sustainability! "

I met you in the early days of your career when you were with Environment Erie when your major companion was your lifelong fur baby Kona. Since then, you've become a wife to Sean Stutzman, a mother to Lola.

Does having a family influence your views about recycling/waste management?

"As a single woman, it was easy to not produce a lot of trash. I composted and recycled the majority of what I produced back then. I only needed to throw away one 33-gal bag of trash once a month. It was very easy to practice what I preached without feeling overwhelmed.

As a married woman with a husband, child, and dog, I realize now that broken toys and pet waste are inevitable. I have a better understanding for the families in our community who are incredibly busy with school and sports practices but still do their best to be environmentally friendly every day."



Is recycling/reuse/waste management something you've been able to incorporate into your household?

"Absolutely! We furnished our entire home with flea market finds instead of buying new. I put a paint brush in my daughter's hands when she was 2-years old and had her help me with the DIY fixes. I've taught my daughter and my husband about the Dos and Don'ts of recycling and proper composting. I include Lola in a lot of our township's communication efforts on composting and recycling. She is also my test subject for all my classroom lesson plans. If Lola isn't excited or doesn't understand what I'm covering, I go back to the drawing board and start over. "



What is Lola's reaction or understanding of this environmental stewardship?

Lola's favorite bedtime stories that I read to her are about trash and recycling. Her favorites are "The Day the Trash Came Out to Play" by David M. Beadle and "Compost Stew: An A to Z Recipe for the Earth" by Mary McKenna Siddals. Her favorite movie was Disney's Wall-E. These were and still are great teaching tools for me.

Lola participates in my community litter cleanups and gets really upset by litter blowing around in parking lots. She points out every piece to me.

How long have you been a member of SWANA? Do you attend any SWANA/Keystone SWANA events/training?

I joined SWANA in 2015. I've attended the following courses, Recycling Systems Course (New Orleans, LA), Integrated Solid Waste Management (virtual), and Managing Composting Programs (virtual)

I also hosted the Keystone Chapter Mini Tech Session at the Millfair Compost Center in 2021

Are there any takeaways from these events that you've been able to put practical use in your job?

"We've incorporated new language into our Municipal Waste and Recycling codes and also into the 5-year waste hauler contract based on what I learned at the Recycling Systems Course in New Orleans.

Did they impact the overall operation or performance of your program(s)? How?

"With stricter regulations come fines or liens for nonpayment for our mandatory trash and recycle service. Also, a new billing agreement with Erie Water Works helps cut down on the confusion of who to pay the bill to on the resident's end. The Township can now ensure that every neighborhood in Millcreek is properly disposing their trash and recycling every week."

As a young professional, how could Keystone SWANA be of more value to you?

"SWANA is extremely valuable to me. As a professional and a mom who has a hard time breaking away to travel, I value virtual learning now more than ever. With that being said, I appreciate getting together with peers and colleagues monthly or quarterly to network, brainstorm, and support each other in the work that we do. "

After losing Kona, I know that you now have a new fur baby, Ziggy, so that Lola can grow up with the same companionship that you experienced.

Thank you for all of your time. However, there is one last question I must ask. How did Ziggy get her name?

"We adopted Ziggy Zu, a now 9-month old white German Shepherd, from the ANNA Shelter. She was dumped on the side of the road along with her 4 brothers. Lola picked the name Ziggy (we read a lot of dog names off to her and that one just stuck!)"

