

CURRENTS

Erika Strassburger, Pittsburgh City Councilperson and Vice Chair of PWSA’s Board, Wins Prestigious US Water Prize

► In mid-November, Pittsburgh City Councilperson and Vice Chair of the PWSA Board of Directors **Erika Strassburger** was recognized as the winner of a prestigious US Water Prize – the **Outstanding Public Official award**.

This accolade, awarded to her on behalf of the US Water Alliance, is presented each year to water trailblazers who are forging new paths in the water sector and redefining what’s possible in water management and sustainability.

As national water and climate challenges continue to put a strain on our communities, the urgency for innovative solutions grows. Water issues are often a bellwether for other climate-related impacts that disproportionately affect historically underserved communities and communities of color. Today, an estimated two million people in the United States face significant challenges in accessing safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities.

Councilperson Strassburger is perfectly suited to receive this kind of award considering the

broad range of public health and clean water initiatives for which she’s fought.

From bringing stormwater projects to life, to banning plastic bags – which clog our waterways and stormwater grates – to advocating for the removal of lead lines, Councilperson Strassburger’s leadership directly benefits the approximately 500,000 consumers PWSA serves. Her actions and advocacy have, without a doubt, contributed to improved drinking water quality and safety for current and future generations of Pittsburghers.

“Thank you so much to the US Water Alliance for recognizing our hard work to improve environmental standards and water quality in Pittsburgh,” said Councilperson Strassburger the night she accepted her award. “It is an honor to be in Tucson with the other One Water prize winners and to learn about their incredible work. I look forward to bringing fresh ideas back to Pittsburgh to make our water future even better.”

The 2023 US Water Prize winners were selected from



Councilperson and PWSA Board Vice Chair Erika Strassburger with her award from the US Water Alliance for outstanding public service and dedication to One Water solutions. Photographed from left to right: PWSA CEO Will Pickering, Construction Communications Project Manager Mora McLaughlin, Pittsburgh City Councilperson Erika Strassburger, and PWSA Director of Finance Ed Barca.

a group of more than 75 extraordinary candidates. The award ceremony was held on November 14 in Tucson, Arizona, coinciding with the Alliance’s One Water Summit. In addition to Councilperson Strassburger, the US Water

Alliance honored seven additional US Water Prize winners at the November Summit. Discover more about the 2023 US Water Prize laureates and previous winners on the US Water Alliance’s [website](#). ♦

Want to learn more? Check out this short video the US Water Alliance created to honor Pittsburgh City Councilperson Erika Strassburger on her achievement.

Donate to the Hardship Grant Program & Help Those in Need



Our PGH2O Cares team, the group of outreach and education professionals who work with our most vulnerable customers to bolster enrollment in our Customer Assistance Programs.

► The holiday season is often a time to celebrate what we're grateful for and to lend a hand to our neighbors in need. From showering, to watering your plants, to staying hydrated – right down to the molecular level, where it enables the

chemical reactions that occur in living cells – water is an essential life ingredient.

Water is so essential that nobody should have to choose between paying their water bill and other expenses. That's why, this holiday season, we encourage

you to [donate to the Hardship Grant Program](#).

Since 2018, the Hardship Grant Program has helped more than 1,350 Pittsburgh households maintain essential water

services. It was established to provide income-eligible customers with annual cash assistance in the form of a credit on their PWSA bill. We've currently distributed more than \$350,000 through the program and award an average household grant of \$250.

Grants are dispersed to families with a gross household income that is at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level. This means that a family of four making \$45,000 would qualify. Households can apply for a grant up to \$300 every 12 months.

Help support your neighbors today by making a tax-deductible contribution to the Hardship Grant Program. To

donate, visit dollarenergy.org/donations/pwsa. Before you submit your donation, please be sure that Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority is entered in the box titled "Put My Donation Towards." This will ensure it is directed to our Hardship Grant Program. 100% of your donation goes directly to PWSA customers in need.

PWSA administers a variety of other [Customer Assistance Programs](#) to income-qualified residential customers, including the Bill Discount Program and Winter Shut Off Moratorium. For more information or to apply, visit www.pgh2o.com/cap.

[Donate](#) to our Hardship Grant Program today! ♦

TEAM PGH2O

Employee Spotlight: Deana Whipp

► Meet **Deana Whipp, Public Affairs Administrative Assistant** and one of the newest faces at PWSA. Hailing from the outskirts of D.C., Deana came to the region in 2016 to attend the University of Pittsburgh, graduating with a bachelor's degree in environmental studies and, just recently, a master's degree in public administration from their Graduate School of Public & International Affairs (GSPIA). Deana's focus lies in urban sustainability, and she has a keen interest in stormwater management, environmental policy, and the cultivation of resilient communities.

Tell us more about your role. I help support the Public Affairs team by preparing monthly

Board Meetings, processing departmental purchase orders, updating the PWSA website, and monitoring media reports. Additionally, I provide support to PWSA customers by answering online inquiries through our social media channels.

What made you decide to join PWSA? I admire the strides PWSA continues to make in providing customers with safe and reliable water services. I was ecstatic to join the Public Affairs team and put my passion for water governance to work at an organization with like-minded values.

What made you decide to pursue a career in your field? My environmental background helped fuel my interest in

water governance, specifically stormwater management and their related policies. I always imagined working within the public sector, but it wasn't until my experience at the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce as a Government Affairs intern that I realized I enjoyed working in public relations.

What do you enjoy doing outside of work? I love cooking for friends – my guinea pigs when experimenting with new recipes! I also love attending concerts at Stage AE and Mr. Smalls.

What are your favorite challenges to tackle? For me, being able to educate the public and build connections



and trust with them is the most rewarding, even if it can be challenging at times.

What's an interesting fact we don't know about you? I love metal music. An album I've had on repeat lately is *The Fear of Fear* by Spiritbox! ♦

Chief Executive Officer Briefing by Will Pickering

Empowering diverse vendors with visibility & engagement



bolster the local economy, improving the economic vitality of our region and keeping dollars in our communities. These partnerships are a win-win for both PWSA and our contractors. On the one hand, building a large network of diverse suppliers helps us build capacity. For contractors, these partnerships are a way for them to gain experience working on government contracts, thereby growing their capacity in that space.

In 2022, we further bolstered the program, implementing and holding office hours for diverse businesses interested in working with us, creating a [Supplier Diversity Program annual report](#), hosting two outreach events, and completing project audits for diversity goals.

This all culminated in 2023, where we again improved upon our initial accomplishments. We increased the number of outreach events, created targeted procurement announcements sent directly to

vendors, and began recognizing our outstanding vendors through the [RAVE profile series](#).

For our largest outreach event, held in November, we partnered with Southwestern Pennsylvania Engineering Outreach to host a two-hour informational session on one of our most popular contracts – the On-Call Engineering Consultant Services.

In all, 83 attendees from 58 individual firms – 27 of which were small or diverse businesses – joined PWSA, learning directly from our procurement and engineering departments about expectations of the upcoming 2024 contract. A panel of current on-call prime contractors and subcontractors answered attendee questions around a variety of topics and suggested ways contractor teams can work well together.

In the upcoming years, we'll continue to focus on growing our Supplier Diversity Program. With more outreach events planned, we'll build upon successful events – like our Meet the Team event, where diverse businesses can network with our project managers.

Diverse businesses interested in contracting with PWSA are encouraged to [schedule office hours](#) with our Senior Manager of Performance and Program Administrator, Emily Pontarelli. To stay up-to-date on events and other upcoming Supplier Diversity efforts, please create [an account with our procurement platform](#). ♦

▶ PWSA is committed to providing meaningful contracting opportunities to a broad range of diverse vendors through our Supplier Diversity Program. In the past few years, we've accomplished a number of goals set forth as part of that program, helping PWSA attract and establish partnerships with talented small businesses and those owned by veterans, women, minorities, the LGBT community, and the disabled.

Supplier diversity is a topic of critical importance for our organization, and one that is supported fully by our Board of Directors. Partnering with diverse businesses helps



A very full house at our November On-Call Engineering Consultant Services outreach event.

PGH₂OWATER
WISE

Are your yard and home ready for winter?



Cold weather can create all sorts of issues on your property and in our sewer system. Follow these helpful tips to winterize your yard and home this season.

- **Drain, remove, and store garden hoses.** Close inside valves that connect the water supply to your outside hose spigot and fully drain that spigot.
- **Clean out roof gutters.** Remove leaves and other debris so that the gutters can drain properly when ice and snow melts.
- **Rake up leaves.** Fallen leaves can smother your lawn or wash into storm drains. Compost leaves at home or bring them to a [Pittsburgh yard waste drop-off center](#).
- **If you have a rain garden, add a layer of mulch and rake any leaves.** If you have a rain barrel, drain and store it.
- **Clean up completed home improvement projects.** Dispose of extra paints, stains, automotive fluids, and old appliances properly. Unsure of what to do with hard-to-dispose-of items? Visit the [DEP's Recycling and Waste Reduction webpage](#).

Customer Assistance Programs

Our Customer Assistance Programs are designed to provide financial relief for income-qualified residential customers who are having difficulty paying their PGH2O bill. These programs are managed by our **PGH2O Cares team**, a group of education and outreach professionals dedicated to working directly with our most vulnerable customers to bolster enrollment in our Customer Assistance Programs and identify ways to reduce water usage.



For more information about our programs, including the **Winter Shut Off Moratorium, Bill Discount, Flexible Payment Plans, Hardship Grant, and Lead Line Reimbursements**, please visit our [Customer Assistance Program](#) page or contact the PGH2O Cares team at 412-255-2457 or cares@pgh2o.com.

Additional Assistance Programs

Additional assistance programs are offered separately from PWSA's own Customer Assistance Programs. Please see below for a listing of available programs.

The **Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) Clean Water Assistance Fund** is available to eligible residential customers. It is administered by Dollar Energy Fund. To learn more and apply for assistance, visit the [Clean Water Assistance Fund](#) page.

Neighbors Helping Neighbors

If you can, consider donating to our [Hardship Grant Program](#) (www.pgh2o.com/give).

Enroll in eBilling

Convenient and easy to use, our [online billing and payment portal](#) (www.pgh2o.com/ebilling) ensures timely delivery of bills and payments.

Track Water Use

Visit our [Customer Advantage Portal](#) to track water use in real time and receive alerts when there's a spike in water use.

Do We Have Your Number?

Did you know that we call customers during water emergencies and outages?

It is important to verify that we have the best number to reach you. You can even add multiple numbers for your account, so your entire household is informed about our work.

TO UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO:

Call PWSA Customer Service:
412.255.2423 (Press 5)

Visit our [Update Contact Information](#) portal.

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