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Contact: Spectra Myers [smyers@ashoka.org](mailto:smyers@ashoka.org)

**For immediate release**

## GLOBAL ORGANIZATION CITES RECYCLING INNOVATION *Ashoka recognizes work of Mitch Hedlund, Recycle Across America™*

(Minneapolis, MN) – “Understanding that ‘knowledge and determination to solve problems’ is where progress will come from” has earned the founder of Recycle Across America™, Mitch Hedlund election to Ashoka’s global fellowship of leading social entrepreneurs in more than sixty countries.

With the goal of expediting environmental and economic progress, Recycle Across America has developed standardized labels for recycling bins to eliminate public confusion at the bin; confusion which has been a major contributor to low capture rates and costly contamination in the recycling stream for decades. (Note: a standardized label has been created for nearly every sorting need.)

Hedlund says, “Most of us have been *that* person at the public recycling bin, actually having to look in the bin to see if we should discard our recyclables in it. If the public has to spend time trying to figure out what to do, they’ll often treat the recycling bin like a trash can. Unfortunately this isn’t a hypothetical -- the alarming percentage of contaminants such as, dirty diapers, food and other non-recyclables entering the recycling stream is proving this issue everyday.”

Since the launch of Recycle Across America in 2010, notable organizations are beginning to use the standardized labels, such as, NBCUniversal, Walt Disney Motion Pictures, Hallmark, AOL, Johns Hopkins University, Procter & Gamble, Arlington County (VA), SanDisk, to name a few.

Shannon Schaefer-Bart, Sustainable Production Manager of NBCUniversal says, “*Having a standardized labeling system across North America will eliminate confusion and improve our recycling rates across film and TV production operations. Recycle Across America is offering wonderful, workable solutions.*”

Additionally, companies are also donating money to help pay for free standardized labels to be used in public schools. For instance in honor of 2012 Earth Day, Kiehl’s Since 1851 (NY purveyor of fine quality skin and hair care), has engaged four socially responsible celebrities in their “Recycle & Be Rewarded” campaign and is donating \$100,000 to Recycle Across America to offer 150,000 standardized labels to 1,000 public K-12 schools.

When a school district that has 15 buildings switched to consistent labels throughout all of their buildings, it resulted in capture rate increases of 47% with significant decreases in contamination. One can imagine what can happen to recycling rates when students and the general public begin seeing a consistent labeling system throughout society. Increasing their capture rate helped the district save considerable amounts of money in solid waste expenses.

Despite hundreds of millions of dollars spent on campaigns promoting recycling, according to the EPA (Nov 2011), U.S. recycling rates have barely improved in 15 years. Currently less than 10% of businesses in the U.S. recycle and less than 35% of U.S. households recycle. At times, what is collected is so highly contaminated it ends up in the



1700 North Moore Street | Suite 2000 | Arlington, VA 22209 USA | (703) 527-8300 Phone | (703) 527-8383 Fax | [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org) | [www.changemakers.net](http://www.changemakers.net)

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landfill or is used to fill empty ballasts of cargo ships returning to China. Hedlund says, “Clearly there needs to be a change in the way things are done if we want to see progress.”

From the inception of recycling, every business, school and organization that has wanted to create an effective recycling program has had to try to figure out how to label the recycling bins throughout their buildings themselves. As a result, there are millions of inconsistent and ineffective labels on recycling bins throughout North America. And it’s not just the public that is confused - cleaning crews have to contend with different looking recycling labels on bins in every tenant space, on every floor, in every building. And if the cleaning crew doesn’t read English, the labels are even more confusing. This often results in recycling bins being emptied into trash carts.

Chris Norgren, Central Division President of Marsden Holdings, LLC explains, “*The Marsden culture is comprised of a cleaning staff that speaks over 78 languages. With the national standardized labels, we now have a clear and consistent labeling tool to train our staff and communicate the recycling needs of our clients.*”

Hedlund uses safety as an analogy, “Stop signs are standardized because safety is important. \*If studies indicate that increasing recycling rates to 75% would be the CO2 equivalent of removing 50 million cars from U.S. roads each year and will lead to 1.5 million new jobs, then shouldn’t the labels on bins be consistent and comprehensive for the public, especially when it’s the public that is relied on to recycle properly?”

“Unfortunately, the confusion at the bin sends a subliminal message to society that recycling isn’t very important. But this also means that there’s a wonderful opportunity to change the message.” She continues, “Last summer we met with some of the major haulers and they conveyed they would like to help deliver the solution to their accounts. It will be promising when society begins to see the industry take a leadership role in this effort.”

It is because of this innovative approach to improving the efficacy and impact of recycling, and her allied initiatives (Eco-Profiles®) aimed at removing confusion and fostering transparency in the green industry, that Mitch Hedlund has been elected as an Ashoka Fellow. A global organization, Ashoka supports those who share qualities traditionally associated with leading business entrepreneurs – vision, innovation, determination and long-term commitment – but are committed to systemic *social* change in their fields. Ashoka Fellows are recognized for their innovative solutions to some of society’s most pressing social and environmental problems.

Ashoka Fellows work in every area of human need, including learning/youth development, the environment, health, human rights, economic development and civic participation. Selection criteria include the social impact of the idea, demonstrated creativity in problem solving, the newness of the idea, and the entrepreneurial quality of the founder.

**Recycle Across America** was founded in 2010 to develop and implement society-wide standardized labels for recycling bins. Recycle Across America is an Environmental Advancement Foundation 501(c)(3) non-profit initiative delivering society-wide solutions to expedite environmental and economic progress.

**Ashoka: Innovators for the Public** is a global association of the world’s leading social entrepreneurs— individuals with innovative, large scale ideas for addressing social problems. They address every area of human need – from human rights to the environment, from full economic citizenship to empowering young people. Since its founding in 1980, Ashoka has enabled more than 2,500 leading social entrepreneurs in over 60 countries. Ashoka’s modest investments in early-stage entrepreneurs consistently yield extraordinary returns. Its inclusion and recognition of later-stage social entrepreneurs are catalytic to the community. Working in partnership with Ashoka Fellows, Ashoka builds communities of innovators who work collectively to transform society and design new ways for citizen-led solutions to become more productive, entrepreneurial and globally integrated. Ashoka does not accept government funding; business entrepreneurs, corporations, individuals, foundations and volunteer chapters finance Ashoka’s work.

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\* [http://docs.nrdc.org/globalwarming/files/glo\\_11111401a.pdf](http://docs.nrdc.org/globalwarming/files/glo_11111401a.pdf)