

## Cottonwood Wins 2015 Sustainable Economic Growth City of the Decade Award

The city of Cottonwood won the inaugural VerdeXchange and the Arizona Commerce Authority 2015 sustainable Economic Growth City of the Decade Award on Friday in Tempe. Mayor Diane Joens, City Manager Doug Bartosh and Economic Development Director Casey Rooney accepted the award. "Sixteen other Arizona cities and towns were also considered for this award including large, urban cities and small, rural communities similar to Cottonwood."

Cottonwood was a finalist with Tempe and Casa Grande, who won third and second place, respectively. Arizona Commerce Authority's Senior Vice President of Economic/Rural Development Keith Watkins presented the award.

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton spoke at the international business symposium hosted by Consul General of Mexico in Phoenix, Roberto Rodriguez Hernandez. Tempe Mayor Mark Mitchell spoke on Thursday evening after being introduced by Maryanne Weiss, CEO of VerdeXchange Arizona.



Many attendees are actively involved in the United States, Western States, and global green economy marketplace.

Among international participants were representatives from Angola, Congo, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Canada, United Arab Emirates, Swiss Confederation, Romania, Netherlands and South Africa.

Cottonwood won the inaugural award when Mayor Joens answered questions about what was important about the city, its proposed future and sustainability. She answered questions about innovative ideas for infrastructure and dealing with flexible and alternative transportation. Another question was how Cottonwood would become more walkable, and plans to ensure an open business environment and job growth. Mayor Joens answered a question about the most important plan that Cottonwood had for its future.

Mayor Joens said, "We will be happy to share information about our new reclamation plant project. It's going to be 100 percent solar and remove pharmaceuticals from the reclaimed stream. It will water our parks, an old stand of Cottonwood trees that are suffering due to a change in the course of the river, and we are also planning to inject extra water to benefit the Verde River. It will also have a learning center to help children learn about the process."

"We added a \$300,000 solar system to our new, beautiful Recreation Center," Mayor Joens added. "With a grant from Arizona Commerce Authority, we built a \$90,000 solar project at our airport."

"We have reclaimed water available 24/7 for Verde Valley projects and development. We do not allow the use of potable water in construction," Mayor Joens shared.

“We’ve done dozens of upgrades to the water system, bringing water loss from leaky pipes from about 45 percent down to 11 percent. We have a huge conservation program which has been very successful, allowing us to pump more than 20 percent less out of the aquifer than was pumped when the water companies were privately owned.”

“When we build or reconstruct a street, we add purple pipe for the future use of reclaimed water,” she continued. “Reclaimed water is used for landscaping in two subdivisions that are close to our wastewater plant. We encourage it if it fits.”

Mayor Joens said, “As far as walkable communities, that is the direction in which we are headed, but it certainly takes many years to get there. We recently had a local architect Rennie Radoccia build LEED certified offices with residences above the offices. We now encourage that with new businesses. The Jerona project in Cottonwood is another example of that. Our Old Town area is a prime example for a walkable community.”

“We are known throughout the state as a successful transit city,” she continued, “even though our population is very small at about 11,800 to 12,000. About 35,000 people outside the city count on us for services, shopping, hospital, doctors, library, ball fields, recreation, etc. Our city has a transit system, Cottonwood Area Transit. We collaborate with Sedona on the Verde Lynks system. We also provide collaborative services outside the city to Clarkdale and Yavapai County’s Verde Village.”

“As far as an open business climate, we excel, I believe,” the mayor shared. “We created the Business Assistance Center in partnership with the Northern Area Council of Governments and Yavapai College. We provide services such as a copy machine, Wi-Fi, meeting room space, computers, classes, and also will rent new business office space for about six months. It’s an excellent business incubator. We also had extensive growth in our Old Town Cottonwood area during the downturn in the economy.”

Other plusses for this small town are the city’s largest employer, Verde Valley Medical Center, and the Verde Valley wine industry. A partnership with Yavapai College to use reclaimed water for the Southwest Wine Center’s vineyards was also a big project this past year. This saved pulling potable water from the aquifer to water the vineyards.

VerdeXchange is a think tank that produces an annual green technology and policy event to connect the green dots between the environmental private and public sectors. Leaders meet to learn, share and support sustainable economic growth while networking with regional and global decision-makers. Approximately 20 countries and 10 states were represented at the VXAZ2015 conference which afforded opportunities for educational forums and seminars about sustainability.

Mayor Joens said, “It was a great honor to be involved with VerdeXchange and the Arizona Commerce Authority. I would like to thank the Cottonwood City Council for its support, our city manager and staff, our businesses, and the citizens of Cottonwood and the Verde Valley. It takes all of us to bring this kind of success to our community.”

A video was produced of Mayor Joens explaining Cottonwood’s successes and will be available for viewing on Wednesday at [www.vxaz.com](http://www.vxaz.com). Videos of the symposium and classes will also be available.

“I would especially like to thank VerdeXchange CEO Maryanne Weiss who organized the symposium as well as Keith Watkins of the ACA,” said Mayor Joens. “It was great to meet with other mayors to learn and share ideas and successes concerning sustainability in our communities and state.”