



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful's Young Ambassadors of Pennsylvania Program Graduates the Class of 2026

(May 27, 2026) Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful celebrated the Young Ambassadors program class of 2026 during a virtual graduation ceremony. The program graduated Ambassadors who committed to nine months of service, while representing and upholding the mission and values of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful. Commencement speakers included Larry Shifflet, Executive Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and Phoebe Coles, Chair, Keep PA Beautiful Board.

2026 Young Ambassador Graduates include:

- Laila King, 12th grade, Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School, Allegheny County
- Vidhi Patel, 12th grade, Bensalem High School, Bucks County
- Nitasha Sharma, 12th grade, Bensalem High School, Bucks County
- Lily Crowley, 12th grade, Knoch High School, Butler County
- Lily Greenwood, 12th grade, Bayard Rustin High School, Chester County
- Ryan McLoughlin, 11th grade, Octorara Area Jr./Sr. High School, Chester County
- Connor Thompson, 12th grade, DuBois Area Senior High School, Clearfield County
- Leah Heisler, 10th grade, Cedar Cliff High School, Cumberland County
- Twisha Vanamala, 11th grade, Cumberland Valley High School, Cumberland County
- Evangelia Eliades, 12th grade, Penn Wood High School, Delaware County
- Mariya Hoja, 10th grade, Fairview High School, Erie County
- Chloe Smith, 10th grade, Fairview High School, Erie County
- Logan Thompson, 10th grade, Fairview High School, Erie County

- Laurel Lindey, 11th grade, Brownsville Area High School, Fayette County
- Quinn Coulter, 10th grade, Waynesboro Area Senior High School, Franklin County
- Arun Ghanta, 10th grade, Spring-Ford High School, Montgomery County
- Max LaBarbera, 12th grade, Spring-Ford Senior High School, Montgomery County
- Gabby Moor, 10th grade, Abington Senior High School, Montgomery County
- Willie Waerig, 12th grade, Plymouth Whitemarsh High School, Montgomery County
- Madeline White, 12th grade, Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School, Montgomery County
- Nathaniel Carso, 11th grade, Delaware Valley High School, Pike County
- Colin McGinley, 11th grade, Pottsville Area High School, Schuylkill County
- Maddie Skinkis, 11th grade, California Area High School, Washington County
- Ryana Zhelezov, 11th grade, Dallastown Area High School, York County

The nine-month long program offered students opportunities for training and networking with industry leaders and partnering organizations including Pennsylvania Department of Transportation; Office Environmental Justice Coordinator, PA Department of Environmental Protection; Office of Sustainability, Juniata College; Keep America Beautiful; PA Environmental Council(Keep Northeastern PA Beautiful); House Communications & Technology Committee, Majority Chairman Joe Ciresi; Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania and Maryland; Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania funded by the NiSource Charitable Foundation; Dow, Keep Texas Beautiful, Keep Virginia Beautiful, and PalmettoPride on topics related to the impacts of litter, litter prevention, waste management and recycling, civic engagement and related public policy, volunteer management and social media marketing. In addition, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful partnered with Columbia Gas of Pennsylvania funded by the NiSource Charitable Foundation and Dow to provide job shadowing opportunities to four Ambassadors.

Young Ambassadors were required to conduct a community assessment and coordinate a litter cleanup and an educational program. In addition to building a sense of community among program participants, the Young Ambassadors also gained presentation and leadership skills, problem-solving experience and learned the value of partnerships and networking.

Ambassadors reflect on the program's significance:

- "I learned that lots of people in my community are willing to lend a hand and make a difference in making our communities more sustainable and beautiful. All they needed was the opportunity to do so." Nathaniel Carso, Delaware Valley High School, Pike County
- "When all of those who signed for the cleanup came to the lobby, I felt proud seeing the small community that I had formed. All of these people from different clubs and

homerooms came together for the same reason, and it was nice to know that I was one of the people behind it!" Ryana Zhelezov, Dallastown Area High School, York County

- "I connected with a local Girl Scout Brownie troop to run an environmental education event where the girls earned their 'Eco Friend' badges by learning about Leave No Trace principles, sustainable campfire practices, and ways to be kind to others while outdoors!" Madeline White, Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School, Philadelphia County
- "The job shadow provided me an opportunity to observe the daily routine of an Environmental Coordinator and gain insight to the role they play within the larger corporation's efforts to ensure the operations at the worksites are consistent with industry and government guidelines. What I found interesting was they were able to collaborate with their peers nationwide to discuss and resolve challenges." Leah Heisler, Cedar Cliff High School, Cumberland County
- "I was contacted by a reporter of our local newspaper, we made a date to meet up and I had an interview with her that lead to a front page article about myself and being a KPB Youth Ambassador. This lead to me being contacted by a few other people in our community to learn more about KPB and my involvement with it." Quinn Coulter, Waynesboro Area Senior High School, Franklin County

"I am incredibly impressed by the dedication of our Young Ambassadors to preserving and improving Pennsylvania's environmental future," said Larry Shifflet, Executive Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

In addition, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful awarded two merit-based scholarships to a 2026 Ambassador program graduate planning to enroll in a continuing education program and one Ambassador program alum, planning to enroll or currently enrolled in a continuing education program. Candidates must have demonstrated a strong commitment to environmental, social, and economic sustainability through their academic pursuits and community impact.

Awardees:

Current Young Ambassador: Nathaniel Carso, 11th grade, Delaware Valley High School, Pike County.

2025 Young Ambassador Graduate: Sonya Patel, currently attending the University of California, San Diego.

"We deeply value our Ambassadors and the energy, innovation, and commitment they bring to their communities," said Shannon Reiter, Executive Director of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful. "Nathaniel and Sonya exemplify the very best of this program, and we couldn't be prouder of their achievements. The dedication of each graduating student sets an example for future Ambassadors, and I look forward to seeing the meaningful differences they continue to make both locally and beyond. I'm also sincerely grateful to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation for their ongoing support. This partnership is helping to equip students with the tools to inspire lasting change across Pennsylvania."

The program was recommended in the commonwealth's Litter Action Plan announced by the Governor's Office in November 2021 and is funded by PA Department of Transportation. Students were chosen through a competitive application process.

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful will be accepting applications for the 2026-2027 school year through June 10, 2026. Visit keepbeautiful.org for information.



Top: Volunteers gather to support Ambassador Ryana Zhelezov, for the Dallastown Area High School cleanup.

Left: Ambassador, Connor Thompson, addresses the students at Wasson Elementary School.

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About Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful's vision is a clean and beautiful Pennsylvania. Since 1990, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful has supported hundreds of thousands of volunteers across the state in their community improvement efforts. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful's core programming focuses on litter and illegal dump prevention, cleanup, community greening, and proper waste handling and sustainable practices. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful works with many partnering organizations on the state and grassroots level to accomplish our goal of a clean and beautiful Pennsylvania. Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful is the state affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, Inc., the nation's largest volunteer-based community action and education organization. To learn more about Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, visit www.keepbeautiful.org.