



Wanting to make a difference, Castro lands at Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority

BY BEN CONLEY

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MORGANTOWN – You never really know where the twists and turns of life will lead you.

Take Lynn Castro, for example.

With a background in public health education, Castro always wanted to invest her time improving the lives of others through knowledge and understanding.

What she did not envision is that she would one day do that as director of the Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority.

Castro was in her 50s in May 2019 when a medical emergency changed her circumstances, ultimately leading her to apply for a temporary, part-time bookkeeper position with MCSWA.

“Basically, I needed a part-time job where I could sit down. I went to the interview and honestly didn’t even really think about it being the solid waste authority. I just thought it’ll be QuickBooks and I’ll be sitting. It’s something I can manage while I’m recovering,” Castro said.

What she didn’t realize at the time is that the part-time office manager conducting the interview was otherwise retired and ultimately waiting to hand the reins of the organization off to the right person.

Needless to say, “I showed up and we hit it off,” Castro explained.

“Once I sat down in the job, I started to realize there was all this stuff that I could do to help the board. I just kept at it, and more opportunities presented themselves the longer I was there,” she said.

It wasn’t long until Castro was the part-time office manager. Then she became the part-time director (similar job, different title). As of July, funding allowed the MCSWA Board of Directors to offer Castro full-time hours.

“No,” Castro says immediately when asked if she would have ever envisioned running a solid waste authority. “Now, of course, I love it because there’s so much to do to help not only the board and the solid waste authority, but help the residents in the county learn about all these different things they can do to help the environment, keep our area healthy and reduce the amount of waste going into the landfill.”

Solid waste authorities were formally established as public agencies in every West Virginia County on Jan.

1, 1989, for the purpose of developing comprehensive programs for solid waste collection and recycling.

The size and activity of solid waste authorities vary based largely on revenue.

At one point in time, the Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority serviced and collected its own recycling drop sites around the county. It even built and staffed a brand new sorting station in the Morgantown Industrial Park for a brief time.

That all changed in January 2015 when the board voted to cease recycling operations indefinitely after a confluence of factors brought about the rapid financial demise of the authority.

Today, Castro works alongside the board as a one-woman operation.

“In the time I’ve been there, essentially we haven’t been in a position to try to hire anybody else because there just isn’t the funding,” she said. “When they had the recycle center, that was a revenue-generated system. By the time I arrived, we didn’t have that, and we were just using the resources we get from landfill assessment fees.”

Castro said she strives to make the most of the resources available by focusing on outreach and events, all for the purpose of education.

Different topics, same goal.

“Sometimes I think, ‘I can’t believe this is what I’m telling people about, latex paint, toxic waste, light bulbs. The health education piece, I knew I’d always do that or teach or educate, but environmental sustainability is just not what I expected,’” she said. “But I’ve always wanted a job where I was making a difference. When you go into health education and public education, you’re essentially wanting to make a difference, however that is – teaching students or residents, or colleagues in training. In this job, I’m constantly in awe of all that I’m learning and how much residents want to learn. They’re very interested and they really want to make a difference by cutting back on what they send to the landfill.”

While recycling remains a priority, Castro said she’s made an effort to expand the authority’s educational effort to include projects and information sessions on topics like composting, waste reduction and water source protection.



Submitted photo

Lynn Castro

“We’re a resource. We try to build partnerships with other organizations. Pretty soon, West Virginia Women Work is creating a shed for our compost demonstration site. But that’s kind of what solid waste authorities do, which is a lot, honestly. Each one is a little bit different, but they’re constantly trying to educate the public and reach the public, and do as much as they can to promote recycling and keeping stuff out of the landfill. I’m a one-woman show, but that’s not just me. There are a lot of solid waste authorities with just one person. Some don’t have anybody. They just have their board. And so we’re all doing the best we can with the resources we have.”



Submitted photo

Lynn Castro never envisioned her path would lead her to being the director of the Monongalia County Solid Waste Authority.



Photo courtesy of WVU Public Health

Lynn Castro, left, works at Monongalia County’s first electronic recycling event with Shaelee Nelson.



Submitted photo by Eve Faulkes

Lynn Castro distributes Mon County SWA yearly calendars at an event at the Repair Cafe in 2024.