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Kutztown's Karen Feridun receives national Community Sentinel Community Choice Award

The co-founder of the Better Path Coalition and No False Climate Solutions PA was honored Thursday in New Orleans.

KUTZTOWN, Pa. — Karen Feridun of Kutztown was honored Thursday night in New Orleans with the 2026 Community Sentinel Community Choice Award. The Community Sentinel Award for Environmental Stewardship is a national award, presented since 2015 by FracTracker Alliance and Halt the Harm Network, that honors frontline community leaders in the environmental justice movement who are standing up to extractive industry.

Feridun is a Pennsylvania-based activist and co-founder of two statewide coalitions, the Better Path Coalition and No False Climate Solutions PA. Her work in the anti-fracking movement began in 2010 when she founded Berks Gas Truth, and she went on to co-found Pennsylvanians Against Fracking and serve on the national steering committees of Americans Against Fracking and the Stop the Frack Attack Network.

In 2022 and 2023, she was the lead organizer of the Pennsylvania Climate Convergence in the state capital.

"I'm only here tonight because of the thousands of people I've encountered over the last nearly 17 years now," Feridun said, accepting the award by video. "They have taught me, inspired me, supported me. I am the sum of all of those encounters."

Feridun said a 2013 workshop gave her a mantra: "interesting targets and creative actions." That year her group took a resolution for a moratorium on fracking to the Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee. "What we didn't anticipate was that we would actually win," she said. The vote was 59 to 41 percent in favor. Since then she and her allies have gone to a legislative hearing dressed as mythical characters with the message, "We're myths, climate change isn't."

Gillian Graber, executive director of Protect PT, who introduced her, said she met Feridun after a pipeline exploded in her community in 2016. "I was just in awe about how many people she could get to rally to support our community," Graber said. "Karen does this all on a shoestring budget with a group of volunteers."

Her work spans local, regional, national and international levels, and she has written and spoken on these issues in The Huffington Post, Daily Kos and The Hill, and at a COP21 side event, the DNC platform committee meeting in Orlando, the National Geographic Society and New York's Society for Ethical Culture.

Feridun was one of five people honored this year. The others are:

- Loice Malvo of Lake Charles, Louisiana, founder of Fisherville Environmental Action Now
- Zulene Mayfield of Chester, Pennsylvania, chairperson of Chester Residents Concerned for Quality Living
- Eboni Neal Cochran of Louisville, Kentucky, co-director of Rubbertown Emergency ACTion (REACT)
- Qiyam Ansari of Pennsylvania's Mon Valley, executive director of Valley Clean Air Now (Emerging Leader Award)

This was the first time the Sentinel Awards have been held in the Gulf South. The region has long borne the brunt of pollution and toxic industry. It is also home to leaders who have done the seemingly impossible, defeating some of the largest corporations in the world to protect the health and well-being of their communities.

"The Sentinel Awards are a time to celebrate and lift each other up," said Shannon Smith, executive director of FracTracker Alliance. "Our communities face many challenges in the face of powerful, polluting industries. The Sentinel Awards remind us that when we confront these challenges together, we are all stronger."

The ceremony included music by New Orleans musician Bruce "Sunpie" Barnes and a keynote by Jo Banner of The Descendants Project in Louisiana's St. John the Baptist Parish.

About the awards: Established in 2015, the Community Sentinel Award for Environmental Stewardship honors those who work to stop the harms of the fossil fuel industry on their communities and their environment. The 2026 program is at fractracker.org/sentinels-program.

About FracTracker Alliance: FracTracker Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that maps, analyzes, and communicates the risks of oil, gas, and petrochemical development. To learn more, visit fractracker.org or connect with us @FracTracker.

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