

Local Climate Champion Earns Accolades

By Linda Brown

Congressman Mike Thompson has named Christina Benz, a longtime Napa resident and environmental advocate, California District 4's "2026 Climate Crisis Champion" for Napa County.

"Climate change is the biggest long-term challenge we face today," said Thompson, who has represented Napa in the US House of Representatives since 1999, and has been a vocal proponent of effective climate action. "If we were to get everything right, but mess up on the climate issue, it will all be for naught."

The award was fittingly bestowed during a ceremony on April 26th, the end of Earth Week activities throughout the Bay Area. Thompson officially recognized a local climate hero in each of the counties he represents in Congress.

Benz, a graduate of UC Berkeley in Chemistry and UC Davis in Enology, enjoyed a successful career as a winemaker and winery production manager in Napa and Sonoma counties, where she earned a reputation as a stickler for detail, integrity, and quality. Since retiring, she has worked locally on behalf of environmental and climate stewardship.

"She's amazing!" said Thompson. "As co-founder of Napa Climate NOW!, she's not only raising the issue for the community, but also demonstrating how to address it. For example, she's helped organize regional climate summits and helped draft the climate element of the City of Napa General Plan. She regularly writes the climate column for the newspaper, and is always there to help elected officials and others. Chris exemplifies what it means for a community member to be engaged in one of the most important issues of our time."

"I feel incredibly honored to have been selected for this award," said Benz. "Congressman Thompson has been outspoken about global warming, and actively focuses on measures to combat the climate crisis nationally and locally. This award is a great way to bring recognition to the issue and to the work being done here on the ground."

A lifelong member of the Sierra Club, Benz stepped up her involvement by joining the Napa Sierra Club Executive Committee in 2013, which provided a deep education into the wide array of environmental issues in the county. Two years later, she co-founded Napa Climate NOW!, a grassroots non-profit advocating for smart climate solutions based on the latest climate science, and the Napa County representative of 350 Bay Area.

"Napa Climate NOW! was formed by Sierra Club members who wanted to focus locally and regionally on the climate crisis," she explained. "What's fascinating is that there are so many

approaches already available to reduce global warming. My great joy is the people I work with to find solutions.”

Leaning into her wine industry experience, Benz also joined the board of Napa Green, the sustainability certifier for Napa wineries and vineyards.

“Napa Green has a very strong certification program that is making a true difference,” she said.

Benz is a member of the Napa County League of Women Voters’ Climate Change Committee. The committee offers a public presentation each April on an environmental theme. This year’s theme was “Protecting Napa’s Future Water Supply.”

Most recently, Benz joined the board of Feeding It Forward, a local non-profit that collects and redistributes perishable foods that would otherwise go into the landfill, thereby reducing waste, reducing methane emissions, and helping people in need.

Benz is a regular contributor to this column in the Napa Register, sharing information about climate and environment solutions throughout Napa County.

“I like to write about local people and projects that are making a difference –and we have so many!” she exclaimed.

Through Napa Climate NOW!, Benz is focused on educating and collaborating with local elected officials and staff. For instance, in March, she worked alongside Napa City Councilmember, Beth Painter, and others to organize the fourth annual Napa Climate Summit, “Resilient Napa,” at Napa Valley College. In 2022, she participated in drafting a Climate Change and Sustainability Element for the City of Napa’s 2040 General Plan, along with with a small group that included Napa City Councilmember, Bernie Narvaez.

“It’s rewarding to work with elected officials who understand the importance of stabilizing and restoring the climate,” said Benz.

Looking ahead, Benz says the next big opportunity lies in actions that reduce emissions of climate “super pollutants,” such as methane and black carbon.

She is optimistic. “Napa County is already doing major work on this via solid waste efforts and wildfire mitigation,” she said. “When the Regional Climate Action and Adaptation Plan is adopted, we will have the opportunity to prioritize the most effective emissions reduction measures.”

Benz encourages residents concerned about climate to get involved.

“There are countless ways to plug in,” she said. “Climate touches everything – health, housing, air quality, transportation, and food security. You can volunteer with a group or act on your own. Your voice matters.”

Linda Brown is a local climate activist and co-founder of Napa Climate NOW! She is also co-founder of SCS Global Services, an internationally recognized third-party certification organization, and Global Heat Reduction, an initiative aimed at helping decision makers in the private and public sectors achieve the greatest climate benefit for each dollar spent.

Photo credit: Linda Brown

Photo caption: Christina Benz receives Climate Champion award from Congressman Mike Thompson

