

WEConnect International Announced Winners of its Rise to the Challenge Awards at its Signature Matchmaking Event 2021

Virtual ceremony celebrated bold achievements by women-owned businesses that maximize the power of STEM in global value chains

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, June 22, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- WEConnect International announced the winners of its Rise to the Challenge Global [Awards](#) as part of its International Day 2021. The ceremony took place during the annual signature matchmaking event designed to bring its certified and registered [women-owned businesses](#) together with the largest global buyers in the world, as it has been doing for more than 10 years.



Joanne Howarth, CEO Planet Protector Packaging

The Rise to the Challenge Awards ceremony focused on innovative women-owned businesses in STEM that overcame barriers to accessing global value chains. WEConnect International recognized one global award winner and eight sector award winners.

The top prize went to Planet Protector Packaging's Woolpack, a high performing, sustainable thermal packaging solution. Woolpack, an eco-friendly packaging alternative to polystyrene, is made from 100% sheep waste wool and is manufactured in Australia and New Zealand. As the winner, the company receives US\$5,000 and will be featured in a WEConnect International advertising campaign.

"We are thrilled that our global winner is a model for sustainable solutions that everybody can rally behind," said Elizabeth A. Vazquez, CEO & Co-Founder of WEConnect International. "Planet Protector Packaging and its CEO Joanne Howarth represent the type of leadership that inspires our member buyers and women-owned business, and we are proud to have her as a certified

51% woman-owned, -managed and -controlled business in our WEConnect International network and community.”

“We are honored to receive this award from WEConnect International,” said Joanne Howarth, CEO of Planet Protector Packaging. “Our vision is to eliminate polystyrene from supply chains and be a leader in sustainable thermal packaging that does not harm the planet. It is gratifying that global industry sees value in the products we supply to some of the largest global brands in the world.”

The winners of the eight sector awards are:

- Forest Fairies Sweet Company (South Africa) received the Agriculture Award for its innovative sugar-free gourmet sweets and chocolate. Award sponsored by Cargill.
- Lonadek Global Services (Nigeria) received the Engineering Award for its innovative tech learning solutions to empower women in STEM. Award sponsored by Logitech.
- Urbane Luxury Services (Canada) received the Facilities Management Award for its efforts to promote sustainability and social impact within its cleaning company. Award sponsored by Marriott International.
- Chimera Technologies (Singapore) received the Information Technology Award for its persistent efforts to deliver IT solutions across multiple continents while delivering a great customer experience. Award sponsored by J.P. Morgan Chase.
- F.P. Aromatics (Singapore) received the Manufacturing Award for creating plant-based personal and home care products; specifically a product launched for the brand Ollie, for which they used 100% recycled custom-made plastic bottles. Award sponsored by ExxonMobil.
- Jones Healthcare Group (Canada) received the Supply Chain Healthcare Award for resetting its business during the pandemic so that none of its clients were left without the packaging they needed. Award sponsored by Johnson & Johnson.
- Planet Protector Packaging (Australia) received the Sustainable Business and Energy Award for its direct customer solution and the ability to scale across different applications, markets and industries. Award sponsored by Unilever.
- PM Relocations (India) received the Transportation and Logistics Award for its work helping NGOs, corporations and medical companies move equipment to meet their needs during the pandemic. Award sponsored by UPS.

“Our sector finalists showed true determination in their individual stories of overcoming challenges to accessing markets,” said Vazquez. “They are an impressive and inspiring group, showing the world how capable women-owned business in the STEM fields can be incredibly creative and successful. We are excited to have featured them this year at WEConnect International Day 2021.”

The awards competition attracted 84 entries from women-owned businesses in 20 countries involved in STEM. The winners were selected by a panel of judges representing some of the largest global corporate buyers worldwide, who also served as event sponsors. Each entry was assessed based on the quality of its story of overcoming a challenge to market access through

providing STEM-related products or services, as well as the quality of the 2.5-minute video they submitted. Only companies that reported growth in revenue or number of employees between 2017-2019 and are registered or certified with WEConnect International were considered.

In addition to the awards ceremony, more than 19,000 networking activities took place among the 400 attendees, designed to match suppliers with buyers from all over the world in this one-of-a-kind 17-hour global virtual event.

Sponsors include ExxonMobil, Logitech, UPS, JP Morgan Chase, Johnson & Johnson, Cargill, Marriott, Unilever, Kellogg's and IBM.

About WEConnect International

WEConnect International is a member-led, global non-profit that brings motivated, large corporate, multilateral and government buyers together with women-owned suppliers around the world. It works with over 125 multinational buyers, with over \$1 trillion in combined annual purchasing power, that have committed to sourcing more products and services from women-owned businesses based in over 125 countries. WEConnect International identifies, educates, registers and certifies women's business enterprises based outside of the U.S. that are at least 51% owned, managed and controlled by one or more women. For more information, visit: www.WEConnectInternational.org.

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<https://weconnectinternational.org/en/corporate-membership/membership-opportunities>.

For details on Registering Your Women-Owned Business or becoming a certified Women Business Enterprise, please contact Melanie Oliver at registration@weconnectinternational.org.

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