

**40 Under 40 Submission**  
**Ashleigh Garnes - Meridian Waste - Blue Ridge, Virginia**  
**<https://www.waste360.com/waste360-40-under-40/waste360-2023-40-under-40-nominations-now-open>**

**Submitted by:** *Mary O'Brien, CMO*

**Title/Position:** General Manager  
Age as of 10/14/22 37 years old

**Describe your Relationship to the Candidate:**

As the Chief Marketing Officer overseeing contracts, government affairs, and marketing, I work closely with Meridian Waste - Blue Ridge & Shenandoah Valley General Manager Ashleigh Garnes on a variety of ongoing projects. I've known her from her first week of employment with our newly acquired facility in Blacksburg through the latest acquisition in Harrisonburg, Va. We work together on government contract opportunities and retention, local legislation, community relations initiatives, expansion opportunities, customer inquiries, and employee retention and recognition programs.

**How long has this person been active in the waste and recycling industry?**

Ashleigh Garnes has been in the environmental services industry for 4.5 years after being recruited by Meridian Waste for her leadership in the community, sales experience, comprehensive business and personal network, and impressive energy and commitment to quality work.

**Describe the candidate's special achievements.**

Under Ashleigh's leadership, Meridian Waste has become the primary environmental services provider for Virginia Tech. Throughout their partnership, Ashleigh has become a board member of the Climate Action Commitment Team, comprised of university officials, students, and the community. This team has increased the recycling of old corrugated cardboard (OCC), Single Stream recycling, and Compost to 43% increased from 29% in 2020. This collaboration with Virginia Tech stakeholders has allowed her to take the lead with new opportunities, events, and as a voice in the new construction of buildings to ensure the Meridian Waste Team executes the objectives and remains diligent in achieving the common goal. Ashleigh takes the initiative to speak or meet with the university on a near-weekly basis to plan and implement strategic and solution-driven processes while overcoming obstacles on a college campus.

During the 2021-2022 school year, Meridian Waste has recycled more than 1,000-tons of goods and that number continues to grow despite the hardship of re-educating new, incoming students and visitors to campus while eliminating redundancies and exceeding expectations of the University.

**Why should students and professionals look up to this person?**

Ashleigh is a woman making waves in a predominantly male-dominated industry. From the start, she took a beginner's approach to learn the business from the ground up to understand - and

respect - each employee and their role in positively impacting the success of the company and the customers they serve.

Ashleigh says that being authentic to who you are and what you can deliver instills confidence in your leadership abilities with your team and customers. She's committed to corporate responsibility through creating campaigns such as the "Fill the 40" campaign, encouraging the community to help Meridian Waste fill a 40-yard roll-off container with non-perishable foods to help restock the shelves of the local food bank. The Fill the 40 campaign is an "Ashleigh original" idea running in the Fall of 2020, and 2021 and has been duplicated in multiple markets throughout the company's six-state footprint.

Students specifically can learn from her career path choices, progression, and recognition through hard work and commitment, and personal love of motivating and encouraging peers to excel with what they're given. Ashleigh is never one to walk away from hard work or a challenge - instead, she embraces them! Before Meridian Waste, she was highly successful within an industry that most students would do unspeakable things to break into - the sports, fashion, and entertainment industries. She engaged with famous athletes, business tycoons, boosters, and coaches with egos and stories as big as a football field. Behind-the-scenes tours, parties, and access were a way of life. However, she was fearless to take a chance in a new industry that isn't glamorous but is undoubtedly essential to society and the community where she lives and raises her four-year-old son. And she has found even greater success and personal happiness taking the "garbage" road less traveled!

Professionals can learn from her moxie. Ashleigh works hard to care for employees, customers, and the community through excellent customer service and ingenuity. She leads by example. Ashleigh has actively participated in waste collection routes emptying carts and getting her hands dirty. She is constantly learning how to evolve in situations and resolve tricky issues. Some of the toughest challenges she has faced are to think on your feet every day and be willing to do things differently to get the job done - while maintaining a positive attitude. Ashleigh believes that the attitude she starts the day with sets the tone for her fellow staff and employees to help problem-solve and work as a team.

**List any previous industry or company accolades this person has achieved.**

IMG College Accolades

- 2019 Keynote Speaker at Hokie Women Rise, an initiative to build community and foster personal growth among Virginia Tech female student-athletes.
- Surpassed sales goal by 20% and brought an average of \$110,000 of new accounts to the property year over year.
- Received the Outstanding MVP Sales Award in the Atlantic Coast Conference
- Nominated to be one of four finalists to receive the "Rookie of the Year" Award out of 32 first-year employees for exemplary leadership and work ethic.

**How will this person you're nominating positively impact our industry now and/or in the future?**

Ashleigh Garnes is an innovator and a leader who happens to be a woman working in waste. She has risen to every challenge and obstacle she and her team has faced while remaining professional and

serving her community. She will continue to rise through the ranks of the company when opportunities for expansion present themselves. Ashleigh exceeds sales goals, expands service areas, and additionally maintains 5-star Google Business Reviews for the facilities she manages. She positively impacts her customers, inspires her team, and works hard to continually educate the community on responsibly disposing of waste. She's a woman to watch and will inspire generations to come about the importance of recycling right!