

# SUSTAINABILITY HEROES

## November 2019



### Sustainable Jersey Regional Hubs

Atlantic-Cape May Hub, Sustainable Bergen County Hub, Mercer County Sustainability Coalition, Monmouth County Hub, Ocean County Sustainability Hub, Sustainable Essex Alliance, Tri-County Sustainability Alliance and the Union County Hub

### Sustainable Jersey Celebrates a Decade of Impact

To celebrate Sustainable Jersey's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we are spotlighting the people, organizations, businesses and agencies that have been a part of our evolution. The Sustainable Jersey Regional Hubs have strengthened Sustainable Jersey and the sustainability movement across New Jersey.



The first Sustainable Jersey Regional Hubs were launched in 2013. The hubs are independent; they organize and align themselves to the sustainability goals of their region. Active hubs range from multi-municipal green team collaboratives, to county planning departments taking the lead on convening their own municipalities, to grassroots leaders with the desire to see a more regional collaboration within their area. Sustainable Jersey provides financial support, technical assistance, guidance and networking opportunities for the hubs.

Currently there are eight Sustainable Jersey Regional Hubs: Atlantic-Cape May Hub, Sustainable Bergen County Hub, Mercer County Sustainability Coalition, Monmouth County Hub, Ocean County Sustainability Hub, Sustainable Essex Alliance, Tri-County Sustainability Alliance (Camden-Burlington-Gloucester) and the Union County Hub. Some of the hubs are supported by county agencies including Atlantic County Utilities Authority, Mercer County Planning Department and Monmouth County Division of Planning. In general, the regional hubs provide peer to peer mentoring, events and trainings and opportunities to collaborate and network with other sustainability-minded people. The Sustainable Jersey Regional Hub network has already catalyzed some incredible projects, with many communities taking innovative local action to address pressing sustainability challenges. It is a great honor to support municipalities that are collaborating on sustainability projects. The regional hubs have had a significant impact by advancing New Jersey's sustainability goals and are directly benefiting the community. The hubs are coordinated by New Jersey's sustainability leaders; we profile five of the active hubs here.



## Atlantic-Cape May Hub

The [Atlantic-Cape May Hub](#) supports green team communities in Atlantic and Cape May counties. The group hosts quarterly events which have covered a wide range of topics relevant to local green teams including water and energy resources, the science of climate change, resiliency, resources for schools, public engagement, communication and most recently, a three-part series focused on the “Problem with Plastics.” The Hub provides mentoring to budding and struggling green teams and has established an eight-town watershed association. [Ralph J. Cooper](#), Atlantic-Cape May Hub Co-chair and a member of the Upper Township Green Team, explains, “The regional hub provides a way to learn new things and see what other green teams are doing. Most importantly, participating in events keeps me rejuvenated. It is nice to spend time with like-minded people.”

After coordinating through the Atlantic-Cape May Hub, eight towns on the Atlantic County side of the Mullica River have come together to build local awareness and appreciation of the Mullica River with a goal to protect the region. Steve Fiedler from [Go Green Galloway](#) has led this collaboration, called Friends Along the Mullica, which includes: Absecon, Atlantic City, Brigantine, Egg Harbor City, Galloway, Hammonton, Mullica Township and Port Republic. Using a Sustainable Jersey grant awarded to the Atlantic-Cape May Hub, the towns are presenting educational opportunities regarding interaction with the Mullica River, its tributaries and associated water features. These towns share common challenges from climate change, wetlands loss, stormwater issues, invasive plants, wildlife management and habitat, litter, illegal dumping, damage from off-road vehicles and more.



The Atlantic-Cape May Hub hosts regular educational events; over 100 people attended a recent climate change presentation at the Ocean City Free Public Library. Amy Menzel, the Atlantic-Cape May Hub co-chair and Hammonton Green Committee member said, “So many green teams are working to address similar challenges. The Hub offers a way to share resources, to connect and support each other’s work and to amplify our impact.”

## Sustainable Bergen County Hub

The Sustainable Bergen County Hub holds monthly meetings and maintains an impressive resource-sharing effort between the participating towns. When the hub participants first discussed the projects that they wanted to work on, several green teams jumped at the chance to tackle the issue of single-use plastics. This discussion took place over two years ago when the attention across the state was focused on plastic bag reduction. Green team and environmental commission members, municipal staff and concerned citizens from Leonia, Oakland, Ridgefield Park, Wyckoff, Fair Lawn, Glen Rock, Oradell and Ridgewood concentrated their efforts on reducing Styrofoam in their region. The hub members agreed that Styrofoam is a pervasive problem with significant health and environmental implications and it is an issue that does not get enough attention. The hub set out to change that dynamic. Over two years later, their list of forward-thinking actions and accomplishments is impressive. In order to increase public awareness of the negative impacts of Styrofoam, the group developed a curriculum called "The Science of Styrofoam" and hosted 12 trainings for the students in schools across the county. They understood that local businesses could help pave the way for Styrofoam reduction and urged them to go Styrofoam free. The towns developed a certificate and a "Bergen Styrofoam Free" decal for participating businesses to display. To date, this group has conducted nine collection drives, keeping over 3,000 pounds of expanded polystyrene, or "EPS" used for packaging, out of the landfills. Most recently, the hub members successfully urged the Bergen County Freeholders to pass a ban on XPS (or extruded polystyrene) food containers from all county property.



## Mercer County Sustainability Coalition

The [Mercer County Sustainability Coalition](#) is an alliance of the green teams and sustainability organizations of Mercer County. Formed in 2013, the Coalition works to promote a regional and collaborative approach to sustainability initiatives. Joann Held, a member of the Hopewell Valley Green Team and the lead hub facilitator said, “From our air and water quality, to transportation, to trash and recycling, these issues are common to all of the municipalities within a region.” The group includes green teams and sustainability organizations in Ewing, Hightstown, Hopewell Valley, Lawrence and Princeton Townships, Trenton, West Windsor and the Mercer County Planning Department.

Mercer County  
Sustainability  
Coalition



Members of the Coalition have collaborated on the Mercer Green Fest which is a successful joint county-wide annual green fair. The group is currently implementing a county-wide small business energy efficiency outreach project and a county-wide recycling education and compliance program. The annual Farm to Table Fun(d)raiser raises over \$10,000 each year for the hub with a wine tasting and five course meal prepared by local chefs, hosted at Terhune Orchards in Lawrence. Read the first Annual Report published by the Mercer County Sustainability Coalition: [2016, a Year of Momentum for the Member Communities of the Mercer County Sustainability Coalition](#).



As co-chair of the [Ewing Green Team](#) and a member the Mercer County Sustainability Coalition, [Joanne MULLOWNEY](#) was a central figure in the formation of the hub and helped create and support the Mercer County Sustainability Coalition website, Twitter (@SustainableMer) and [Facebook](#). MULLOWNEY said, “The Ewing Green Team sees numerous advantages from our participation in the Mercer County Sustainability Coalition. It makes sense to promote sustainability and tackle issues together since environmental issues know no regional boundaries. By uniting, coalition members can become greater than the sum of our individual parts.”

## Monmouth County Hub

The Monmouth County Hub works closely with the Monmouth County Planning Department which provides guidance and resources to help the hub address issue areas such as waste and recycling, environment and sustainability, geographic information systems (GIS), community development and transportation. The hub coordinated a summer film series to educate the county about alternatives to single-use plastics and the importance of open space preservation. The hub is developing a county-wide Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign to coincide with the Grown in Monmouth initiative. The group is also focused on ways to work together on renewable energy aggregation, watershed awareness and single-use plastics reduction. [Adrienne Spota](#) is a founding member of the Marlboro Township Green Team and the chair of the Monmouth County Hub. Spota said, “Participation in the hub meetings helped us gain insight into the work of other Monmouth County green teams. It inspired me to work harder. I usually walk away from a hub meeting with really good ideas of things to do in Marlboro and contacts to help get it done.”



## Ocean County Sustainability Hub

With a front-row seat to the harmful effects caused by extreme weather events and plastic pollution on New Jersey beaches, thirteen coastal towns have come together to form [the Ocean County Sustainability Hub](#): Barnegat, Beach Haven, Brick, Island Heights, Lacey, Long Beach, Mantoloking, Point Pleasant Beach, Seaside Park, Stafford, Toms River, Tuckerton and Waretown. One of the local leaders who was instrumental in getting this regional hub off the ground is Tanara Hall, a member of [Sustainable Island Heights](#). Hall explained, “The Ocean County Sustainability Hub wants to improve communication between municipalities and organizations in order to give green teams the tools and steps to implement programs and projects to help Ocean County achieve sustainability.” Currently 24 of the 33 Ocean County towns are registered with Sustainable Jersey, but only eight municipalities have achieved Sustainable Jersey certification. Hall added, “The Sustainable Jersey certified towns can help the rest of our towns get on board to apply for certification and work together on different projects. We can share materials and experiences between communities to make Ocean County develop in a more sustainable way. By working together, we have found that there are organizations that will provide free educational materials, workshops and guidance, while other organizations can provide meeting space for events and the green teams can provide volunteers or coordinate with other groups like the Boy Scouts. Collaboration is key to moving forward.”



## Sustainable Essex Alliance

The Essex County Hub, one of the first Sustainable Jersey regional hubs, is an alliance of green team, environmental commission, sustainability and municipal leaders from Essex County. In the beginning, the hub focused on sustainability networking events to attract members and find out what issues were most important to the participants. In the first year, the hub held four workshops that attracted over 400 participants to learn about sustainability topics while providing a vehicle to connect the green teams in Essex County. Now branded as [Sustainable Essex Alliance](#), this hub is working on important projects that resulted from these early workshops. Past facilitators of this hub were Kristy Ranieri of the [Maplewood Green Team](#) and [Steven Neale](#) of [Sustainable Verona](#); the current co-chairs are [Tracey Woods](#) of the Maplewood Green Team and Carolee Bol of the [Glen Ridge Green Team](#).



The Sustainable Essex Alliance leadership held a workshop and then a series of meetings to discuss forming an energy aggregation program. As a result, Maplewood, Glen Ridge, Montclair, South Orange and Verona came together to form the Sustainable Essex Alliance Energy Procurement Cooperative, a joint purchasing initiative that will use the municipalities’ bulk purchasing power to procure the electric power supply. Under this contract, residents of these towns, currently in PSE&G territory, will pay a 10 percent lower rate for the electricity supply in their utility bills, with the supply containing nearly double the renewable energy content (about 41 percent in total) currently offered by PSE&G. The Community Energy Aggregation is a state program that allows a municipality to purchase the electrical supply on behalf of its residents, at prices lower than the average utility price. Carolee Bol, a member of Go Green Glen Ridge and the co-chair of Sustainable Essex Alliance, explained, “Our goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by bringing cleaner, cheaper local energy to our residents. We’re doing this by leveraging group purchasing power and implementing an energy aggregation program. I’m proud of what our collaboration has been able to accomplish—you can do a lot together—and we hope other communities will consider energy aggregation as a viable way to make a pretty big impact quickly.”

The Sustainable Essex Alliance continues to organize educational events. This year, Sustainable Essex Alliance coordinated a free electric auto show to help raise awareness of the environmental benefits of electric vehicles. Car dealers and local owners

of electric vehicles were present to share their electric vehicle experience with interested residents in Essex County. Walter Clarke, a trustee for the Township of South Orange Village and participant in Sustainable Essex Alliance, explained, “Most of the challenges our municipalities face neither exist in, nor can be solved in isolation. Reaching out to share services, ideas and resources is critical to every municipalities’ future and I am especially proud of our green team’s work with Sustainable Essex Alliance, as it exemplifies how collaboration results in shared success.”

### **Tri-County Sustainability Alliance (Camden-Burlington-Gloucester)**

The [Tri-County Sustainability Alliance](#) (TriCSA) is the Sustainable Jersey Hub for Burlington, Camden and Gloucester Counties. TriCSA provides local green teams support for sustainability actions and programs to educate residents. The group arranges social and educational events like Sustainability Sips and Sustainable South Jersey Meet Up. Their event, “Put Plastic in Its Place,” part of the Building a Sustainable Future Series, attracted over forty people. Event updates are located on the [TriCSA Facebook page](#). [Edward Cohen](#) serves on the Mount Laurel Green Team, which he is a founding member of, and is the chair of TriCSA. He said, “Green team members and sustainability activists should find a regional hub, group or mentor and get out there and work with other like-minded people.”

