



December 2015 Sustainability Hero Steven Neale Chair, Sustainable Verona

Steven Neale is part of a new generation of environmental leaders in New Jersey. He is passionate about sustainability in his community and is using his social media and communications skills to make an impact. With an emphasis on collaboration, inclusion and going green, Steve is working to provide better access to public information while finding new ways to engage his town in decision making.

In addition to being the Media Services Manager for the Township of Verona, Steve is the head of Verona's Green Team and the Chair of Sustainable Verona. In his first year of leadership, Steve guided his green team to achieve Sustainable Jersey certification for Verona Township in 2014. His team created several new and innovative projects. You can read the [Verona Township Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#) to explore the projects the green team completed to achieve certification.



This year Steve moved from his role as a member of the steering committee to the Chair of the Sustainable Jersey Essex County Hub. The Essex County Hub is a coalition of green teams, environmental commissions and sustainability-minded individuals that hold regular workshops and meetings to collaborate and learn from each other. Steve also serves on the Sustainable Jersey Public Information and Engagement Task Force. In 2015 he completed the Certified Public Manager Program through Rutgers University and the 2015 Environmental Leadership Fellowship Program.

Frank Sapienza, a former Verona Mayor, council member and an original member and advocate for the Verona Green Team said, "We were happy when Steve took on the added responsibility to lead Verona to get Sustainable Jersey certification. He was a true quarterback for our team, moving us forward and keeping us on track with his communication and organizational skills. He's an all-around good guy that has been an asset to our team as our leader as we work to make Verona a more sustainable community."



Errol Mazursky, the executive director of the Environmental Leadership Program added, "Steve has an exceptional gift for not only understanding the technical aspects of sustainability but for communicating them in a way that is engaging to a broad range of constituents from community members and local decision makers to academic and seasoned professionals. It is through these gifts and his humble approachability that Steve be able to significantly move the needle on sustainability in New Jersey and throughout the region."

Verona Township Family Roots

Located in the valley between the First and Second Watchung Mountains, Verona Township has a population of about 13,332. Verona is a primarily residential community, but it also has commercial areas and factories. Steve's ties to Verona run deep. In 1901, Steve's Great Grandfather built the house that his family continues to live in today.

Steve's Grandfather Anson Fischer was involved in local politics as a council member and served on the Planning Board. Steve's mother and father raised their three sons with a strong sense of community. It worked because Steve and his two brothers continue to call Verona home. Steve's mother works for Verona Township and his father serves as a volunteer firefighter.

After graduating from the Verona Public Schools, Steve got a BA in Communication and Media Studies from Penn State University. He returned home and began working for the Township of Verona. He said he has gained a lot of experience by working in different departments; he was first employed by the Buildings and Grounds Department.

Adventure Program Manager

Steve's interest in the environment and sustainability stems from his love of the outdoors. For the past six years, he has served as the Adventure Program Manager for the Township of Verona. His mission for the program is for participants to create new friendships and acquire teamwork abilities through various adventure activities like the ropes course. Self-confidence and problem-solving skills are achieved through the various courses and adventure activities. He works with schools, at-risk youth, colleges and even corporate groups.



Focus on Community Outreach

Sustainable Verona has its own [webpage](#) on the official Township of Verona website as well as active [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages. "We feel we have a very strong visible online presence and are looking to host film screenings and presenters in the future as well," Steve said. These outlets provide information on the green team programs, local organizations and resources and areas like garbage and recycling, waste reduction, buy fresh buy local, educational materials, course offerings and videos. The group also provides information in the Township of Verona e-Newsletter. The green team posts event fliers at Verona Town Hall, Verona Community Center and the buildings that get the most pedestrian traffic. The group places display ads on the VeronaTV bulletin. Steve does regular interviews with the local newspaper and sends media releases about the program as well. In addition to social media discussions, Steve uses a Sustainable Verona email address to take any questions from the public.

New Technologies to Increase Engagement and Transparency

With a background in communications and media, Steve has focused his efforts on introducing new technologies and ways to reach people on-line. He attended the recent [Sustainable Jersey Government ConNext](#) conference which reinforced the direction Verona Township is moving toward. He remarked "Our big focus now is how to use new technologies to increase engagement, transparency and open data. This will help with collaborative problem solving and work towards joint decision making, ultimately creating a more sustainable future for our community."

Verona is using [Remyndr](#) to communicate the curbside recycling collection schedule to residents that download the free App. Notifications tell residents the pickup type and what to include and what to avoid. If things change, everyone is alerted, or just those on the affected route. The result is a cleaner recycling stream, a reduced waste stream and fewer items sitting on streets or blowing around neighborhoods. Steve commented, "We knew the platform would be easy to use but it has exceeded expectations. Remyndr managed the entire town set up and now the service just runs. I check our dashboard once a week to track new users, which takes two minutes."

Verona is using [Spatial Data Logic](#) to provide a Digital Tax Map and GIS and management services. Steve is also currently working with [Vidoovy](#) to create a Community Video Map. The Townships of Montclair, West Orange, and Bloomfield, are also using this platform to keep people shopping and living local so that downtown shopping districts can continue to thrive.

"We have taken steps to make our programs visible and to make online resources our priority in order to get the word out about sustainability in Verona and New Jersey. The creation of Sustainable Verona was the first step," Steve noted. Sustainable Verona is made up of several municipal employees, including the recycling coordinator, the head

of the Department of Public Works and the Mayor. It includes residents who are involved with businesses in town including, a funeral home which runs on solar, a green architect, energy consultants, the head of the Verona Environmental Commission and members of the Shade Tree Commission. Steve said, "My advice to other green teams is to lock in a core group of people that have the ties and personal commitment to sustainability; a group that will work hard collaboratively to achieve certification and to make a difference."

Township of Verona Green Fair

This year Verona held its first green fair to raise awareness about environmental issues, innovative sustainable ideas and to show the steps people and the community can take to sustain their quality of life over the long term.

Steve reported that the event was a big success due to the partners involved including: the Verona Junior Woman's Club, Verona Municipal Alliance Committee, Moms of Verona/Caldwell NJ, Township of Verona's Department of Public Works, Verona Library, PAWS, Hilltop Conservancy, Verona Police, Verona Health Department, Verona Recreation Department, Verona Ropes Course, Ivy Rain Barrels & Composters and the Purple Dragon Co-Op.



Verona Volunteer Night

The Township of Verona and Sustainable Verona hosted an open house and networking event on December 1 called Volunteer Night to highlight the local volunteer organizations and spotlight how Verona residents can get involved and give back to the community. Over 35 different organizations participated including environmental groups, sports, community and educational groups. "Of all the great reasons to live in Verona, our remarkable volunteer organizations are at the top of the list. This event celebrated the organizations we have and hopefully inspired community members to get involved," Steve noted.

Volunteer Firefighter, Color and Honor Guide, and Wedding Bells

Steve has served as a firefighter with the Verona Volunteer Fire Department since 2008 and as a Member of the Verona Color and Honor Guard for three years. The Verona Fire Department is one of the largest fully volunteer fire departments in Essex County, staffed by over 60 firefighters. The Verona Color and Honor Guard is often asked to do a presentation of the flags at ceremonial events. Steve has presented the flags before many sporting events including the Jets-Steelers game at MetLife Stadium and at a Giant's game. He just recently was part of the group that presented the flag at the New Jersey Devil's game.



In his free time, Steve enjoys being outdoors; he loves hiking, snowboarding, landscape photography and being in the mountains. He credits a month-long solo-backpacking trip through eight different European countries as a trip that helped focus his life goals after college.

Steve is engaged to be married to Ashley Eagan, and as fate would have it, Ashley was also born and raised in Verona. Steve said that Ashley supports his sustainability work in town, but he suspects she thinks he goes a bit overboard when he pulls papers out of trash cans to recycle and picks up litter wherever they go.

Steve Neale is the type of leader we need now. The combination of his determination and emphasis on inclusion coupled with the opportunities offered by social networks form a great alliance that will build a more sustainable New Jersey.