

# MARCH 2016 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



**DIANE M. LANDIS**  
Executive Director, Sustainable Princeton

Diane Landis is the energetic executive director of [Sustainable Princeton](#). Described by those who know her as eternally positive, quick to laugh, warm hearted and supportive, Diane led her town to achieve silver-level Sustainable Jersey certification and the Sustainable Jersey Leadership Award in 2014. From the solar panels on her roof to the cloth napkins on her table, Diane is modeling sustainable behavior and is ready to help her fellow community members find ways they too can make changes.

**Change a habit, change the world:** Sustainable Princeton arose out of a partnership between the Princeton Environmental Commission, the New Jersey Sustainable State Institute and in consultation with the residents of Princeton. It is a 501(c) (3) organization that works to reduce energy from fossil fuels and waste to landfills. Diane emphasized “the successes of Sustainable Princeton are due to my work partnership with Sustainable Princeton’s Energy Director Christine Symington, the volunteers and a very active [Board](#).” The organization’s motto is ‘Change a Habit, Change the World.’



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**Sustainable Jersey silver-certified:** Princeton was an early adopter in the Sustainable Jersey program. The municipality demonstrates commitment and leadership through its innovative waste and energy reduction programs, the collaboration with local organizations and neighboring towns and by providing inspiration, mentoring support and leadership to advance sustainability. In 2014, Princeton achieved Sustainable Jersey silver-level certification. Princeton’s completed certification actions include the following: Wildlife Interaction Plan, Community Gardens, Farmers’ Market, Green Development Check-List, Complete Streets Program, Buy-Local Campaign, Sustainable Land Use Pledge, Natural Resources Inventory, Open Space Plan, Tree Protection Ordinance, Tree Hazard Inventory and more. Read about all of the actions that Princeton completed: [Princeton Certification Report](#).

**Sustainable Princeton’s EnergySmart Homes and Buildings:** In 2014, Sustainable Princeton received a \$10,000 grant from Princeton University to help the municipality conduct the EnergySmart Homes campaign focused on energy efficiency in the commercial built environment. Diane reported that the campaign resulted in more than 150 homes performing a home energy audit and more than 30 homes making energy efficiency upgrades, realizing an average 25 percent energy reduction. The Sustainable Jersey Small Grants program funded the next phase of the program, the EnergySmart Buildings campaign with a \$35,000 grant. Seven commercial properties conducted energy audits and took advantage of state rebates to make recommended improvements, and six additional properties conducted audits. Three real time energy monitors called WattVision were installed in a nonprofit, a local business and a municipal building to monitor energy usage daily.



### **Sustainable Princeton's Neighborhood Ambassador Program:**

Diane is excited about the Neighborhood Ambassador program that launched in February with 15 Ambassadors. The Ambassadors work with neighbors “down the street and online” to engage more people in sustainable activities and programs in Princeton. Diane said, “The purpose of the Ambassador program is to build trust and engage people where they live or with their community. We have learned that changing behavior is all about building trust and relationships, which is why this program is so important to our continued success.”



**Sustainable Princeton's Great Ideas Series:** Sustainable Princeton hosts a discussion series that has become very popular in Princeton called the Great Ideas Series. Sustainable Princeton's staff and volunteers help to organize the Great Ideas Series that feature local experts as panelists and lively Q&As. Diane noted, “Local and regional residents come brimming with ideas about energy and water usage, waste reduction at schools and businesses, recycling, bicycling, gardens and more.” The next event is scheduled for noon on March 16 at the Princeton Public Library. The topic is ‘Overcoming Barriers to Green Building in Princeton-Solutionaries Wanted.’ It will feature local LEED Accredited Architects, contractors, planners and real estate agents for a solution based interactive workshop to figure out how to increase the number of healthy, green buildings in Princeton.

**Princeton Curbside Organic Program:** Princeton piloted the first food waste program in New Jersey in 2011, and now offers it as service to all of its 7,200 households. With [Princeton's Curbside Organic Program](#), residents pay \$65 a year for weekly collection of all food scraps, soiled paper and yard trimmings. They receive a 32-gallon cart, kitchen collector and a supply of BPI-certified compostable bags to line the kitchen collector. The program now has 1,100 participating households.



**Advice for green teams getting starting:** “My advice for green teams is to take risks, put your programs and ideas out there and engage the community as much as possible. We need collective impact to make real change. A single entity cannot do this alone. Our strategy has been to collaborate with everyone, provide simple steps to energy and waste reduction, offer lots of entry points for people to get involved and to remember that this is critically important work but it should also be fun,” Diane said. She also likes to base the work of Sustainable Princeton on behavioral change strategies. Diane said that her go-to book is [Fostering Sustainable Behavior](#) by Doug McKenzie-Mohr. It presents community-based social marketing as an effective tool for encouraging positive social change. Diane said these ideas are the basis of Sustainable Princeton's motto, “Change a Habit, Change the World.”

**Before Sustainable Princeton:** Diane has worked in the nonprofit field for more than 25 years at the national, state and local levels. She began her career in journalism at the Washington Post Newspaper, where she slung mail and eventually worked her way up to the financial news desk writing a small weekly column about Associations. Diane said, “I worked hard and eventually I walked up to the editor of the financial news section and told him I wanted to work for him. He hired me and it led to my writing a weekly column.”

In the nonprofit world, Diane worked at United Way of America in public relations. She learned a lot from the United Way business culture which she describes as, “data driven, making decisions after measuring results.” She tries to use the data

driven model in her current work. Diane worked on two big initiatives at the United Way of America. The first was a national diversity initiative called Project Blueprint that sought to diversify United Way boards across the country. She also worked with the Young America Cares program. Diane said, “These were important years for me, I learned what it takes to collaborate and move programs forward to achieve results that really benefited the community.”

Diane also worked as a project manager for an AmeriCorps program called Urban Schools Service Corps. The program operated in twelve urban areas in New Jersey. She had oversight over the 200 corps members, Diane said, “I spent a lot of time driving to Camden, Newark and places in-between. It was challenging work, but it was rewarding to build teams. I really liked working with the Urban Corps members.”

**Princeton School Gardens Cooperative:** Diane is the co-founder and served as the project coordinator for the [Princeton School Gardens Cooperative](#) from 2006 through 2011. When Diane had children she realized that the food served in the school cafeteria was not what she wanted for her children. She joined forces with Karla Cook, Fran McManus and Dorothy Mullen to develop the Princeton School Gardens Cooperative, a grass-roots initiative that created and supports edible gardens at six Princeton public schools linking the produce and food education to the classroom and the cafeteria. Diane said, “In the beginning, we planted seeds into the dark of night, just to get it up and running. The rewards were amazing and live on today. Seeing the apple tree in the Littlebrook Elementary School courtyard and watching students eat fresh peas right off the vine is great.”



**Education that led her to her current position:** Diane has been fighting for causes since she was the Student Council President at Orchard Park High School. Diane received her Bachelor of Arts with a major in Government from St. Lawrence University located in Canton, New York, not too far from Ottawa, Canada.

**How her childhood influenced her:** Diane was the youngest child in a family of four girls. Her family moved frequently due to her father’s manufacturing job with the Container Corporation of America. Diane’s father, Wilson A. Landis, is a World War II pilot who earned a purple heart for his service. Her sisters were 6, 10 and 13 years older than she, and as the girls grew up in the 1960’s, Diane watched as they were active in social causes. Diane’s family settled in Buffalo, New York where her father set up his own small manufacturing business. Diane remembers walking the manufacturing floor with him. She said, “I was impressed by how my father related on a personal level to all of his staff.” Diane’s mother, June W. Landis, is very personable and an active volunteer.

**What you may not know about Diane:** Diane is married to Bobby Hackett who is the president of the Bonner Foundation and they have three children, who seem to be following in their parent’s footsteps. Their son, Landis, is a freshman at Colorado College, where he is involved in a work study program with the [Colorado Springs Food Rescue](#). The organization eliminates food waste by redistributing food to those who need it. The organization’s volunteers take food from various businesses and then deliver it to homeless shelters and more. The best part is that the food is picked up and delivered by bicycle. Their daughter, Nancy, is taking a gap year after high school graduation and will start work on a community farm called the [Cooperative 518 Community Farm](#) in Princeton. Anna, their youngest child, is a sophomore in high school.

When she is not running Sustainable Princeton or finishing her novel (yes, she is writing a novel!), Diane likes to travel, read, garden and dance. Diane enjoys yoga and is a Registered Yoga Instructor; she has taught yoga at the Institute for Advanced Study and elsewhere. Also, she is a member of a singing group called the “Mama-pellas.”