



## March 2014 Sustainability Hero Rayna Laiosa, Chair, Hawthorne Environmental Commission/Green Team

What do an environmental policy expert, a retired nurse, a car salesman, a print shop employee and a stay-at-home mom have in common? They are the perfect ingredients for Hawthorne Borough's diverse, high-performing volunteer green team of course.

Hawthorne Borough, home to approximately 18,000 residents, is the first Passaic County town to achieve the silver-certification level from Sustainable Jersey. Their energetic Environmental Commission/Green Team leader is Rayna Laiosa.

Rayna served as the first Environmental Secretary on the Hawthorne Environmental Committee twenty-six years ago when she was a student at Hawthorne High School. She was encouraged to participate by a teacher who influenced her focus on sustainability issues. After high school, Rayna went to Stockton State College where she studied environmental science and she then received a Master's degree in Engineering at the Stevens Institute of Technology. After school, she returned to Hawthorne Borough to raise her family. She re-joined the Environmental Committee in 1996 and was elected chair in 2006 for the Environmental Commission.



In addition to her volunteer work, she is the proud mother of a five year old daughter and has a job in environmental policy and planning for a major utility. Rayna is able to use her professional skills when she advises the Planning and Zoning Board about the impacts of development proposals on issues such as flooding and runoff, open space needs, water and air quality, plant and animal habitat and waste disposal.

### **Sustainable Jersey Certification Program**

In 2009 when the Sustainable Jersey program began, Rayna welcomed the structure and resources that Sustainable Jersey provided. With the program's framework, she was able to elevate the level of the work that the community was doing. Rayna said the green team started small and focused on achieving the bronze level of certification in 2011. Eventually the green team grew and after achieving the first milestone, the group actively sought the silver-level certification. The green team built on the strong foundation that the Environmental Commission provided and the mayor and administration were also very supportive.

Rayna said that the long-term goals she started with have transformed into short-term goals. She is pleased that, thanks to the hard work of the group, everything is moving beyond what she could have ever imagined possible. Rayna is known for her ability to keeping the Environmental Commission/Green Team moving forward. She said that the outcomes of the Sustainable Jersey program are all positive for Hawthorne. The borough saves approximately \$21,000 per year and has received to date \$126,000 in energy efficiency grants.

## Borough of Hawthorne Certification Report

The Borough of Hawthorne completed four of the seven Sustainable Jersey priority actions, including conducting energy audits for all municipally owned buildings, creating a municipal carbon footprint, updating the Environmental Resource Inventory and passing a resolution that pledges support of sustainable land use practices. The borough completed actions in ten sustainable action categories: Community Partnership and Outreach, Energy Efficiency, Greenhouse Gas, Health and Wellness, Land Use and Transportation, Local Economies, Food, Natural Resources, Sustainability Planning and Waste Management. Hawthorne received a total of 375 points. Some of the sustainable actions that the community of Hawthorne achieved are Hawthorne's Green Map, Annual Farmer's Market, Green Fair, Cel-Earth-Bration, Green Business Recognition, Buy Local Campaigns, such as "Where's Waldo, A Taste of Hawthorne Restaurants, and Hop the Shop," a Green Lecture Series, Rain Garden at the Hawthorne Library, Hawthorne's Recycling Program and Anti-Idling Education. See the full [Hawthorne Borough Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#) for all of the details.

## Keep it Simple and Find Passionate People

Rayna's approach is to keep the tasks and the concepts simple, which she says will help keep the enthusiasm strong. She does a presentation on Hawthorne's sustainability vision that includes a visual of the three rings of sustainability—environment, society and economy. She categorizes the Sustainable Jersey actions that the town is doing with the three rings to show where the action plans align and the importance of working together. She tries to relate sustainability to individual concerns for health and wellbeing. The upcoming Cel-Earth-Bration event will focus on "A Greener Path to a Healthier You." Rayna greatly appreciates her green team members that volunteer their time and get projects done. When she recruits for new members she is less concerned with finding special skills and puts great value on finding people that want to make a difference in the community and are passionate.

## Cel-Earth-Bration and the Trashion Fashion Show

Rayna is very proud of the annual [Cel-Earth-Bration](#) event that is scheduled for April 26, 2014 (this year is the twenty-second year of the event). Partnering with the Hawthorne school system, Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools, Borough Council and Mayor, Department of Public Works and Hawthorne Shade Tree Commission, this event helps build enthusiasm and community participation.

The day is designed to heighten awareness of environmental issues for children in the Hawthorne schools, as well as for parents and the general public. Each school in the district has teachers participating and assisting. Students of all grade levels are encouraged to participate by using their imaginations to



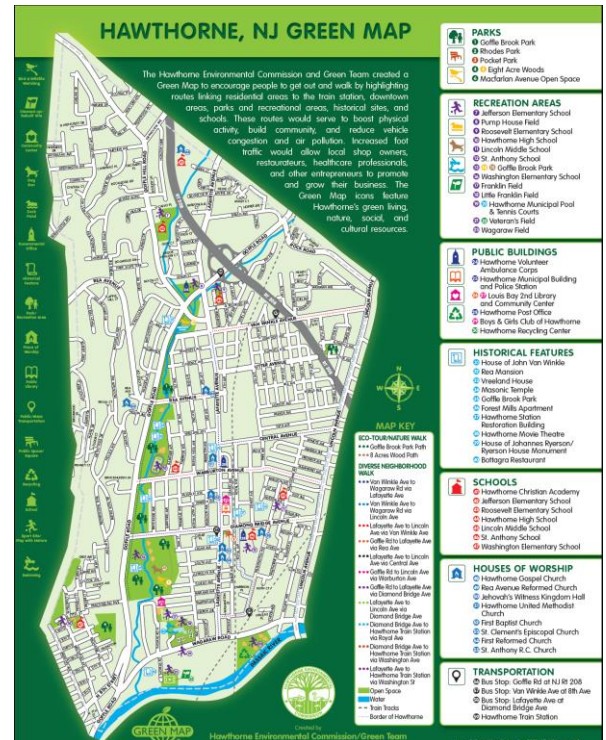
complete projects, which they enter into a “Green Theme” competition. Awards for the best projects are awarded at the conclusion of the program. The green theme for 2012 was ‘Building a Green Future’, and for 2013 was ‘Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.’ Publicity is sent to local papers, letters of invitation are given to teachers in schools, advertising flyers are distributed to the schools, the library, and other public buildings and businesses, and social media. Local schools participate by publicizing the event and encouraging students to attend and enter the competition.

A new feature at the Cel-Earth-Bration event will be the TRASHION Fashion show that invites the kids to develop fashion out of recycled materials to raise money for the Ecology Club. There is a great video for the event on the Hawthorne Green Team [Facebook page](#).

## Hawthorne Green Map

The Hawthorne Environmental Commission/Green Team created an interactive Green Map, funded by a Community Catalyst Grant from Clean Air-Cool Planet. The green team registered with Green Map System, Inc. to become a licensed mapmaker and gained permission to use universally recognized Green Map icons to map out Hawthorne’s green living, nature, social and cultural resources on an interactive online map. A local high school student that was studying computers worked with the green team to develop the online version of the map. A professional graphic artist, also a Hawthorne resident, was hired to design a download and a printed version of the map.

The map is designed to promote green living and environmental awareness by promoting safe walking and biking routes that link residential areas to the train station, downtown areas, parks and recreational areas, historical sites and schools. The map helps to build community cohesion, encourage exercise and wellness and decrease air pollution and vehicle congestion on local roadways. In addition, increased foot traffic will stimulate the local economy, allowing local shop owners, restaurateurs, healthcare professionals, and other entrepreneurs to promote and grow their businesses. The public can even view and make comments to the map, as well as access the interactive map through a free app on their smartphones. The Hawthorne Environmental Commission/Green Team won the 2012 Environmental Achievement Award from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) for the Hawthorne Green Map.



## Anti-Idling Campaign with Mock Tickets

The green team has made anti-idling a priority. Partnering with the local police department and the Department of Public Works (DPW), the green team researched and mapped out the placement of 32 anti-idling signs outside heavy idling areas, such as area schools, the train station the post office and local businesses.

The local DPW, under the direction of a Hawthorne Police Department officer, placed signs on existing and new posts throughout the town. On the Saturday before Thanksgiving, the green team held its third TAG day

to educate residents about the legal, environmental and health implications associated with idling. The green team members were stationed at traffic lights to hand out to motorists mock idling “tickets,” which explained that idling for longer than three minutes is a federal offense in New Jersey. The green team developed a Kids to Kids program that focused on anti-idling activities for third graders that was taught by the Hawthorne High School Environmental Club members. Also, the green team members, in cooperation with a Hawthorne Police Department officer wrote an anti-idling resolution, which was adopted by the Mayor and Council on May 14, 2013.

### **Advice for New Green Teams**

Rayna recommends that green team leaders go through all of the Sustainable Jersey actions and be familiar with the various action plans before starting on the certification. She said it is fine to start with a small group and then grow as the programs develop. She started with four active members and the green team has now grown to about twenty people that meet on the fourth Monday of every month.

She said it’s important to develop partnerships with other established groups in the community. The Hawthorne Environmental Commission/Green Team works with the Board of Education, City Council, Chamber of Commerce, Boys and Girls Scouts and the Eagle Scouts. For example, in Hawthorne the Chamber of Commerce decided to start a farmers’ market. The green team helped support this effort in addition to a buy local campaign. The green team held its green fair at the farmers market and promoted it as a joint effort with the Chamber of Commerce and the green team.

When asked why she volunteers her time on the Environmental Commission/Green Team, Rayna said, “It’s gratifying work. Working with the Environmental Commission/Green Team has been a great ride. It’s amazing how the ideas and people come together. And we are really making a difference, gaining credibility and doing high caliber projects.”