

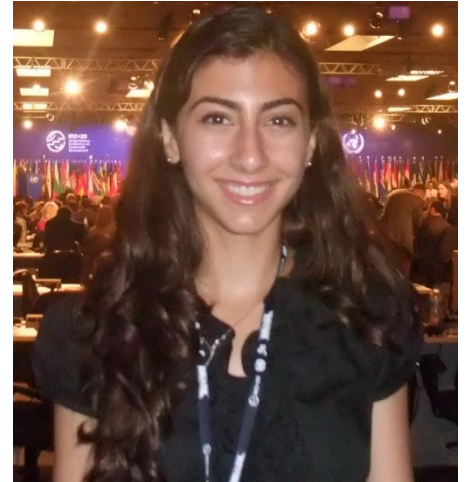


## November 2014 Sustainability Hero Amanda Nesheiwat, Environmental Coordinator, Town of Secaucus and Chair, Secaucus Green Team

Born two weeks early, Amanda Nesheiwat has always been ahead of her time. At 25 years of age, she has made a measurable impact and is a rising star for sustainability in New Jersey and beyond. Amanda said, "If we don't take care of the environment, then the environment can't take care of us. I feel it is my responsibility to do something."

In 2013, Amanda graduated with an environmental science degree from Ramapo College. While still in school, Amanda worked with young people as the NJ State Leader for the Energy Action Coalition and is the founder of a group called the [New Jersey Sustainable Collegiate Partners](#) which includes over 300 students representing 14 colleges in New Jersey.

Amanda is currently a United Nations (UN) representative for the Foundation for Post Conflict Development. She traveled with the [SustainUS](#) Youth Delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Doha, Qatar where she was the State Department Liaison for the delegation. As a UN Youth Representative she attended the Rio+20 UN Sustainable Development Conference in Brazil.



### Environmental Coordinator for the Town of Secaucus in Hudson County

Located in the Meadowlands, Secaucus has a population of more than 16,000. Amanda is the Environmental Coordinator in the [Environmental Department of the Town of Secaucus](#). She is the creator and chair of the town's green team and last year, Amanda led Secaucus to achieve the silver-level of Sustainable Jersey certification with 350 points. You can review the full [Town of Secaucus Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#) to learn more about the town's accomplishments. Secaucus is a leader in green initiatives and maintains the highest rate of recycling tonnage in Hudson County. The town passed an ordinance to "upcycle" fallen trees and has embraced solar energy and alternative-fuel vehicles.

When asked how she began working for the Town of Secaucus, Amanda said she looked up the address for town hall and paid a visit to Mayor Michael Gonnelli. She told him about her ideas and asked if she could help the town do sustainability projects during the summer. Mayor Gonnelli invited Amanda to help out with the town's first green festival. The festival was a big success. Amanda said, "I just came to them with more and more projects and eventually they hired me and they gave me an office."

Amanda has been the driving force in the creation of numerous green initiatives for Secaucus since 2010. She successfully pushed for a ban on Styrofoam and fracking. Secaucus was the first municipality to ban fracking in Hudson County. She also reached out to neighboring Jersey City to collaborate on a number of issues. The Town of Secaucus drafted an Open Space Plan that is included in the Municipal Master Plan, completed a full energy audit for the only LGEA-eligible municipally-owned facility, organized a weekly accessible Farmer's Market, created an anti-idling ordinance posting over 25 signs for enforcement, coordinated a local tree inventory and i-tree assessment of municipal trees and hosts an annual green summer festival.



### **Aquaponics at the Secaucus Community Garden**

The Secaucus Community Garden uses sustainably harvested wood and organic soil and plants in raised beds. The garden, located at Fountain Park, is easily accessible by residents and is maintained by members of the community including the senior garden club, environmental students, the health and environmental departments and Wrap-For-A Smile.



With the help of a \$1,000 grant, the town bought a solar pump for the garden to be more self-sustaining. The town is also experimenting with all-natural aquaponics. Aquaponics combines aquaculture and hydroponics, which grows fish and plants together in one soilless system. The second community garden is located at Secaucus Xchange Apartments. This garden has 54 raised beds. Residents rent out up to two beds per household for the entire growing season.

### **Secaucus Food Day**

Secaucus celebrates a Food Day event to coincide with the National Food Day. The goal is to raise awareness about buying local and organic foods. Participants are asked to pay attention to the food they eat and to make an effort to eat healthier. Twenty-two restaurants participated in the event, providing their healthiest dishes for the community to try. The event took place at the senior center and was open to the whole community. Participants were provided a cook book with recipes submitted by community members.

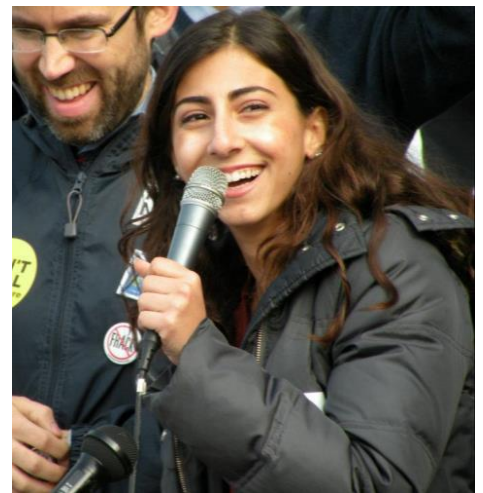


### **Secaucus Recycling Newsletter**

Amanda says that Secaucus is serious about contributing less to landfills and about reusing and recycling. Secaucus publishes a regular recycling newsletter that clears up confusion regarding the types of plastics and paper that the town recycles. It provides tips on how to go green and how to reduce consumption. Secaucus purchased a Smart Car for the recycling coordinator to travel around town and make sure that residents and businesses (including warehouses and outlets) comply with recycling laws. Enforcement has been effective because Secaucus has almost doubled its recycling tonnage and in 2013, Secaucus recycled about 86% of their garbage.

### **Secaucus Municipal Ordinance Passed to Ban Styrofoam**

Secaucus is surrounded by the Hackensack River which has many protected estuaries, marshes, creeks and streams that are home to migratory birds, endangered fish and protected wildlife. The town maintains a strong working relationship with agencies including the Hackensack Riverkeeper and the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission. These agencies, with help from the green team and community, contribute to the ecosystem by holding river and park clean-ups. On a normal clean-up day volunteers mostly pull plastic water bottles and Styrofoam clams and cups. Amanda gave countless presentations at the high school and middle school describing why Secaucus wanted to ban Styrofoam. In 2011, Mayor Michael Gonnelli and the town council successfully passed a ban on the use of Styrofoam in Secaucus. Local businesses like Outback Steakhouse, Uncle D's ice cream shop, the Amazon Café and the high school and middle school eliminated Styrofoam after the ordinance was passed.



### **An Almost Orthodontist Turns into an Activist**

When asked how she became passionate about sustainability issues, Amanda admits that she almost didn't go in this direction. Amanda was enrolled at Bergen Community College studying to be an orthodontist and was advised to enhance her resume by joining clubs and participating in extracurricular activities. She saw a flyer for the campus environmental club and attended a meeting. Around the same time that she became active in the club, she was taking a biology class that

covered how the human body is linked to the environment. The combination of the club activities and the content of the class transformed Amanda's thinking. Transferring to Ramapo College in her junior year, Amanda decided to pursue environmental science and has not looked back since.

Rachel Wieland, a professor at Bergen Community College and the environmental club advisor that first inspired Amanda had this to say, "Amanda is an extraordinarily leader. She is endlessly positive and upbeat, able to connect and inspire so many different types of people, and always has her sleeves rolled up on the next project that can happen." Professor Wieland added, "I predict that Amanda will be doing in the near future what some of us now say is impossible. Her level of emotional intelligence, social intelligence, sustainability know-how, and foresight to pick practical but progressive projects, makes me feel like I am soon going to be "kicking the tires" on our new and improved future. Something about the way she speaks and collaborates creates goodwill in an instant. And she makes you feel hopeful, not the wishy-washy hopeful, but the anticipated hopeful-- like when the "check is already in the mail" and it just a matter of time till it arrives."

Amanda has lived most of her life in Secaucus. Her parents moved to New Jersey from Jordan shortly after getting married. Although her parents were at first apprehensive about her change of majors, they now fully embrace her work and are proud of all she has accomplished. She is an avid reader and enjoys playing guitar. Right now she is reading the [Seven Spiritual Laws of Success](#) by Deepak Chopra and the [Art of Uncertainty](#) by Dennis Merritt Jones.

### **How to Stay Motivated**

Amanda's advice for green team leaders is to be flexible and work on projects that motivate you. She said, "Even one cleanup is making the world a more beautiful and cleaner place to live. I've shifted my paradigm from thinking, 'It's way too big, we can't tackle these issues,' to 'It's a big problem, but if I can do my part, then others will also follow.'"

For example, at one point her local bagel shop had not yet conformed to the town-wide ban of Styrofoam. She asked the staff to wrap her food in wax paper. On the day she made the request, she later learned from staff that the four customers behind her, who'd never before asked for a foam alternative, followed her lead. We're sure that this will not be the last time that people are inspired to follow Amanda's lead and look forward to seeing what the Town of Secaucus will do next!