

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

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Candice Davenport, RN, BSN, MPH, MCHES, HO
Health Officer, Public Health Nursing Supervisor and Health Educator
Maplewood Health Department, Essex County

With exceptional professionalism and creativity, Candice Davenport serves as the Health Officer for the Maplewood Health Department. She brings over 20 years in clinical nursing and public health experience, working in a hospital setting in maternal/child health and at the federal, state and local levels of government and academia. An advocate for health, education, the arts and the environment, Candice has distinguished herself as a stand-out sustainability leader and dedicated steward of positive change in New Jersey.

In addition to providing leadership to her community during the COVID-19 crisis, her extensive professional experience has also made Candice a valuable member of the [Sustainable Jersey Health Task Force](#). The task force launched the [Gold Star Standard in Health](#) in July 2021, after a two-year effort of collaborative research, strategy development and program implementation. The actions are aimed at leveraging the potential of local governments to build a culture of health and advance health equity.

“I support a ‘Health in All Policies’ approach,” Candice explained. “A healthy environment creates a healthy person and vice versa. If we are engaged and present in our relationship with our environment and surroundings, then we will be moved and take action on its behalf. This is the basis of the Sustainable Jersey Gold Star in Health. It’s a first step to help municipalities implement large scale efforts to impact health behavior and make systemic changes.”

She added, “While public health is in all policies, it doesn’t mean the health department does all things. In fact, to have a healthy community we must work with our partners and colleagues in municipal government: first responders like police, fire, and department of public works, code enforcement, social services, township legal counsel, community services and recreation, community development, building and zoning, engineering, planning boards and various committees. There is also the Board of Health which has a lot of policy, governance and enforcement authority; in our township the Township Committee is also the Board of Health. Our role is to provide them with the health data to make sound decisions for the health and safety of the community.”



Maplewood Health Department: In the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has made residents more aware of their local and state health departments. The Maplewood Health Department responsibilities include everything from investigating communicable and infectious diseases; raising awareness of the importance of immunizations; reducing environmental health exposures such as lead and vector-borne diseases, mental health and prevention of chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke.



For example, last Tuesday, Candice and her staff were responding to a number of local issues including water quality testing at the community pool, rising positive COVID cases, three foodborne illness outbreaks, a sick deer in the bushes outside the high school and securing signage to promote the summer meals

program. Having worked in various work settings, Candice said she loves working at the local level. “I get to make a difference every day. Healthy choices are easy choices when community efforts are aligned to protect and prevent disease. “

Love of Community and Importance of Service: Candice lives and works in Maplewood. She has three children in the local school system and is an active volunteer. “My parents both immigrated to the United States from the Philippines, became citizens and raised me and my siblings in Queens, New York,” Candice explained. “They instilled in us a love of community. The importance of service and responsibility to make your community a good place were things we grew up understanding. They made sacrifices, and entrusted us to make our lives and communities better.”

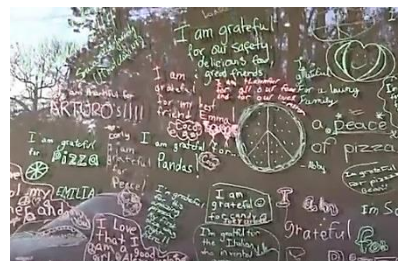
Sustainable Jersey Gold Star Standard in Health: Candice talked about her participation on the [Health Task Force](#) that developed the new Gold Star Standard in Health. She said, “It’s an honor to participate on this task force. The members represent many different interests and each participant works in a unique area of health. We worked together to develop a uniform approach for how to best advance health in a community. Science is constantly changing, so Health Gold will evolve as well, but I think we developed a great resource and guide for municipalities.” She added, “Towns that are working towards Sustainable Jersey goals are really ensuring that their communities are resilient and healthier communities for future generations.” To learn more about the Gold Star Standard in Health visit bit.ly/GoldStarHealth.



Advice for Municipalities Interested in Health Gold: Candice recommends that towns start with the foundational action: [Local Health Assessment and Action Plan](#). She said, “This action will help you assess and prioritize the health needs and contributing conditions existing within the community. It’s good to start with the assessment because municipalities have different characteristics that play a role in the health of the community. For example, if the town is located near a river, then water quality will be a focus, if you are a city that has a large senior population, then livability may be a priority.”

Sustainable Jersey Silver-Certified: Candice serves on the Sustainable Maplewood Committee which includes township department heads, elected leadership, community development, green team and environmental advisory committee members. This committee works in partnership with the Maplewood Green Team and Environmental Committee. Maplewood Township achieved silver-level certification in 2013, 2016 and 2019 and has been continuously certified since 2009. For more information, read the [2019 Maplewood Township Certification Report](#) or visit the [website](#), [Facebook page](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

The Gratitude Graffiti Project: Candice is the co-founder of the [Gratitude Graffiti Project](#), a community-wide practice to express one's gratitude through the creative use of art. Residents are invited to write one thing that makes them happy or that they are grateful for on the windows of participating stores. The low-budget, big impact project is very successful, attracting widespread media coverage and similar projects across the United States. In Maplewood, it has increased the community connectedness. Candice said, “A sense of place and the positive messages that surround us can affect the human condition. We are all connected to one another and our environment. Through our daily interactions, we each can have a positive effect on the other. I was amazed when I first walked around town and saw the store windows with messages of gratitude everywhere.” Watch the first inspirational video: [Gratitude Graffiti Project Video](#).



Maplewood Loves Wellness: Maplewood Township is a member of the [Mayors Wellness Campaign](#) and has a community-based program called [Maplewood Loves Wellness](#) that engages and empowers individuals to choose healthy behaviors and make changes that reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases. The township offers services for older adults that address livability, affordability and recreation. For youth, the focus is on healthy physical activities, alcohol and drug prevention and a summer meals program. Community-wide outreach is done to promote cancer awareness and adult health clinics are held to raise awareness of diabetes and heart disease prevention. Maplewood Township received 25 Sustainable Jersey certification points for these efforts with the action: [Building Healthier Communities](#).

Lead Education and Outreach Programs: The Maplewood Health Department manages a comprehensive lead education and outreach program. Local pediatricians work with the Health Department when they need guidance on case management and environmental interventions after a blood lead test. The Department contracts with the East Orange Health Department

to handle pediatric blood lead case responses and have collaborated to provide free blood lead testing in at-risk childcare centers. In 2017, the Maplewood Health Department worked with the South Orange/ Maplewood School District to address lead in the drinking water. As a result, new water filters were added to the school water fountains. Building landlords are sent information on lead remediation and exposure mitigation obligations and new residents receive household lead information. Maplewood Township received ten Sustainable Jersey certification points for these efforts with the action: [Lead Education and Outreach Programs](#). Sustainable Jersey has just released a new resource: [Municipal Guide to a Lead-Safe Community](#).



Grab and Go Summer Meals for Kids: The [Summer Food Service Program](#) (SFSP) is a federally-funded, state-administered program that provides free meals to help children in low-income areas get the nutrition they need throughout the summer months when they are out of school. Maplewood Township has a satellite location offering free summer meals, both breakfast and lunch, grab-and-go style to children under 18 and those 19 and over who attend a school and have physical or mental disabilities. “Food security is a crucial component of sustainable, self-reliant communities. By providing access to healthy food options, Maplewood contributes to positive health outcomes, which lead to healthier communities as a whole. We’re proud to be partnering with the Township of Irvington who are the leads and enable us to provide this site,” Candice said. The Maplewood Farmers Market is in its 26th season of supplying Maplewood residents’ access to healthy food.



Smoke-Free and Tobacco-Free Public Places: The Maplewood Township Committee enacted an [ordinance](#) prohibiting smoking in public parks. The parks have prominent signage and information is posted on the Township web site and anti-tobacco sites such as [Global Advisors on Smoke-free Policy \(GASP\)](#). Maplewood Township received ten Sustainable Jersey certification points for these efforts with the action: [Smoke-Free and Tobacco-Free Public Places](#).



Making an Impact: In June 2021, as the Township started to see the positive COVID-19 numbers go down, the Columbia High School production of “Matilda” was staged outside at Floods Hill on a temporary stage with audience members sitting on their own lawn chairs. Candice said, “I have to admit. I got a little emotional as I looked around at my family, friends and a hill full of community members congregating again. I felt that we, meaning public health and healthcare professionals, had contributed to helping my town work through the challenges of the pandemic. I take satisfaction in the Health Department’s accomplishments. I’m so proud of my co-workers and the larger public health community, who I view as my second family. I hope we can continue to support each other to be the best that we can be.”

Candice’s Education and Career: Candice has a Bachelor’s degree in Nursing from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master’s degree in Public Health and Community Health Education from New York University. She has worked in public health in New Jersey since 2002 and had prior experience working in pediatric ICU and maternal child health. For the Maplewood Health Department, she has been employed for nine years and is the Health Officer, Public Health Nursing Supervisor and Health Educator.

Candice is licensed as a registered nurse and a health officer in the state of New Jersey and a Master Certified Health Education Specialist. She is a former president and current active member of the [New Jersey Society for Public Health Education \(NJSOPHE\)](#). The organization comprised of health education professionals is dedicated to improving health through practice and research. She is also the co-president for the Suburban Essex Nursing Supervisors Association (SENSA) and was a member of the New Jersey Public Health Institute Design Team led by the National Network of Public Health Institutes, with the intention of creating the first state public health institute to lead the way in innovating and supporting public health infrastructure.

More About Candice: Candice and her husband Paul have three children and have lived in Maplewood for 20 years. As a PTA president and community volunteer, free time is hard to find in Candice’s schedule. She said that she enjoys hiking, playing piano, knitting and spending time with her family and friends. Candice is always looking for ways to connect with people by being creative; she tries to incorporate laughter and a good sense of humor both at home, but especially in the office. Her co-workers know that she is secretly obsessed with Baby Yoda. Candice said, “If my mention of Baby Yoda made you laugh, then it did its job!”

