

# FEBRUARY 2016 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



## MARY M. REECE, Ed.D. Chair, Sustainable Montgomery

Mary Reece is the director of special projects at the Foundation for Educational Administration (FEA), which is the professional development division of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Associations (NJPSA). Prior to her work at FEA, Mary served as a principal, assistant principal and supervisor for Edison Township Public Schools. She began her teaching career in Irvington School District and later worked at the New Jersey Department of Education.

Through her leadership and hard work at the municipal and school level, Mary is moving New Jersey toward a brighter future. Her commitment to the community encompasses the three interrelated components of sustainability: the environment, the economy and social equity.

Mary is the chair of the Montgomery Township Environmental Commission and Sustainable Montgomery. She is the secretary of the [Montgomery Friends of Open Space](#) and serves on the Board of Directors for [Young Audiences New Jersey & Eastern Pennsylvania](#) and [Community Action Reaches Everyone](#) (C.A.R.E.), an Edison-based community organization. In her professional capacity, she was a member of the Vision 2021 Panel for the National Association of Elementary School Principals and is an advisory board member of the [New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition](#). She also serves as the vice chair of the [New Jersey Arts Education Partnership](#). And, Mary is a founding member of [Creative New Jersey](#).



**Sustainable Jersey for Schools connection:** Mary is the chair of the Sustainable Jersey for Schools Leadership and Capacity Building Task Force. This task force works on actions that help schools create goals for a more sustainable future and develops indicators to track progress towards these goals. In addition, the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Associations (NJPSA) is a founding partner of the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program.

**Sustainable Jersey connection:** As the chair of Sustainable Montgomery, Mary led her green team to achieve Sustainable Jersey certification for Montgomery Township in 2009, the first year of the Sustainable Jersey program. Under her leadership, Montgomery Township renewed this certification in 2012 and 2015.

Montgomery Township's certification actions include the purchase of green maintenance equipment such as solar-powered trash compactors, the installation of solar panels at the Otto Kaufman Center and tree planting programs led by the Shade Tree Commission.

Montgomery Township has an active Environmental Commission that hosts an



annual Earth Day Fair. Mark your calendars, on Sunday, April 17, 2016, Montgomery Township will hold an [Earth Day Recycling Fair](#) that will provide collections for recycling common (computers, TVs) and unusual (Brita filters, Halloween costumes) items.

The township has a number of environmentally progressive ordinances. For example, the township has ordinances to protect trees during development, regulate wind turbine installations, allow for housing clustering to protect natural resources and require new developments to consider green design elements. To read all of the actions that Montgomery Township completed, read the Montgomery Township [Certification Report](#).

**Montgomery Township Diversity Survey:** As part of Montgomery Township's participation in the Sustainable Jersey program, the Environmental Commission conducted an anonymous [diversity survey](#) of all township boards, commissions and committees, including the Board of Education. The commission used the sample diversity survey provided by Sustainable Jersey, and modified some of the questions so that participants could respond in true anonymity. The survey was sent out by email and received a 47 percent response rate.



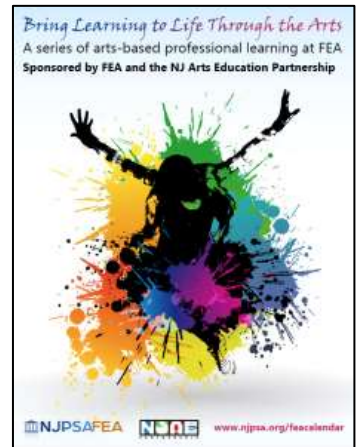
Based on the survey findings, the Environmental Commission made recommendations to the Township Committee. The recommendations were approved and now the Environmental Commission plans to proceed with a video series that will be broadcast on Channel 27 and posted on the township website. The video will include interviews of township staff and volunteer board/commission/committee members with the intent to make township residents more aware of what each department does, and what it's like to serve on some of the different boards and committees. Mary hopes that this kind of outreach will engage more members of the community who may be too intimidated to serve on a board or committee because they think they lack the expertise, or that they cannot devote enough time.

**Montgomery Township Wind Ordinance:** The Township Committee and Planning Board saw an increase in the number of solar panel arrays that were being constructed in the township as accessory structures under the zoning requirements. So the committee directed the Master Plan Committee to develop an ordinance. The goal of the ordinance is to encourage use of renewable energy sources, while controlling their installation and operation to safeguard residents.

The [Montgomery Township Ordinance](#) was developed using a grant from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) with funding provided by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. It streamlines the approval process for residents who meet the requirements, while protecting the quality of life for neighbors by requiring landscaping and screening, establishing setback requirements and limiting tree cutting. The ordinance also contains regulations for wind systems.

**The role of mentors:** Mary talked about the important role of mentors in her life. She in turn has served as a mentor for many administrative interns and other people as opportunities arise. She said, "I am appreciative of the tremendous mentors I have had in my life who really knew me and directed me to paths I may never have considered on my own. I was planning to teach at the college level after graduating from Rutgers and was advised to return to the school system. I took this advice and my time spent in the Edison School District was the best move I could have made. My colleagues, the students and the parents made the experience phenomenal. It was there that I started a program to support principals, which led me to get a grant that is funding the project I am overseeing now."

**Arts-based professional learning:** Arts-based education is important to Mary. She is coordinating a program, funded by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, at the Foundation for Educational Administration that provides professional development for "creative leadership teams" of principals, superintendents, supervisors, art specialists and other classroom teachers to collaboratively integrate the arts and the artistic process with the Common Core State Standards and other curricular areas.



**Education that led her to her current position:** Mary graduated from schools in Irvington in Essex County. She thought she might want to major in nutrition, but as she was pursuing her B.A. at Montclair State University she enjoyed student teaching and was channeled into the teacher education program. Mary later attended Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey where she achieved a Masters of Education (Ed.M.) degree and a Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.). Mary has presented at state, national and international conferences on such diverse topics as teacher/administrative tenure, special education issues, the arts and mentoring/induction. She has been an active member of local, state and national education associations, completing a term as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).



**Why sustainability matters:** “Living in a sustainable community is important to me so I volunteer my time to do what I can to get us there. As the chair of Sustainable Montgomery, I worked with the group and we made a conscious decision to make sure that our actions represent the three pillars of sustainability; so we focus on more than the environment, we include people and prosperity as well.”

**Advice for green teams getting starting:** “My advice for other green teams is to review the actions and determine what is manageable and then conquer those actions first.” Mary suggested, “The actions that your town is already doing will drive momentum. The next step is to start on the actions that your township will benefit from the most. For example we decided that we wanted to assess how the township was doing with diversity on our committees. We were experiencing some changes to our population and wanted to make sure that the population was represented in our leadership. So we decided to focus on the Sustainable Jersey Diversity and Equity Actions.”

**Where did she get her environmental values:** Mary was born in Newark, New Jersey and grew up in Irvington with her three sisters. Her parents met in Newark when her mother worked at Kresge’s Department Store and her father was in the service. Her father then went on to work for DuPont. Mary recalled, “I grew up recycling and composting, it was part of how we lived, even though being green wasn’t a movement back then. I remember delivering newspapers to the recycler for spare change.” She said that her family developed an appreciation for nature after spending summers in Leonardo, New Jersey and watching their father tend to a large back yard garden.

**What you may not know about Mary:** Mary met her husband Gary when she was working as a teacher in Irvington. Mary and her husband moved to Skillman, located within Montgomery Township in Somerset County, and raised two children named Andrew and Allison.



Mary said, “My travel bug must have influenced my children because my son lived in the Far East for 10 years and my daughter has been in Thailand for nearly 10 years now.” She said that Andrew returned from Asia to pursue a Ph.D. fellowship at Harvard University in mindfulness theory and the data sciences with the renowned psychology professor, Dr. Ellen J. Langer. Allison has taught yoga and meditation in Thailand for almost ten years. Mary said she is very proud of her “happy, out-of-the-box thinking children” whom she fully supports and enjoys as they pursue their adventures. Mary continues to be an active traveler. She has been all over the world including the Galapagos Islands, South Africa, China, Tanzania, Europe, South America, Antarctica, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, New Zealand and more. In her free time she enjoys photography and spending time with family and friends.