

## MARCH 2017 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



### **WILMA J. MORRISSEY** **Chair, Wall Township Environmental Advisory Committee (Monmouth County)**

Wilma J. Morrissey has served as the Chair of the [Wall Township Environmental Advisory Committee \(WTEAC\)](#) for the past 20 years and as a member of the Monmouth County Environmental Commission for 14 years. Incredibly dedicated and thoughtful about her work, Wilma is a tremendous leader and exemplary steward of the natural environment for Monmouth County, the South Coast Region and Wall Township. And she is certainly not done yet!

Under Wilma's leadership, the WTEAC received the 2015 Environmentalist of the Year award from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (the Governor's Environmental Excellence Award) and the 2016 New Jersey Environmental Champion award from the Environmental Protection Agency. In 2016, Wilma was officially recognized with a resolution by the Monmouth County Environmental Council for her contributions to the council. She was also honored with the Wall Township John R. Young Citizen of the Year award. Wilma has been on the Board of Adjustment for 18 years and is the District 2 County Community Leader. In the past, she has served on the Manasquan Watershed Association, the Shark River Environmental Round Table, the South Coast Watershed Committee, the Camp Evans Restoration Advisory Board and the Wall Township Recreation Committee. Wilma is an active member of Sustainable Jersey's Monmouth County Hub.

Wilma said, "I feel as strongly about environmental issues today as I did on the first day I got involved. I have a sense of responsibility and passion for this work. Each year, when I am re-elected as the chair of the WTEAC, I don't take it for granted. I am honored to serve and work with the talented people on the committee and in the community."

Having worked as a teacher for 30 years, Wilma is a natural promoter of ideas. Wilma explained, "Since the profession of teaching is a life of service, volunteerism is the natural extension or is a combination of both. I believe that education is the foundation of everything we do in life. Therefore, my greatest strength that evolved from teaching is promoting educational outreach activities in my capacity as the chair of the WTEAC. There is no doubt that I am a lifelong learner and my husband tells me that the world is my classroom."

**Life in Wall Township: Past and Present:** Wilma spearheaded a unique heritage book project that received a lot of attention and was a focus for the WTEAC receiving awards from the Environmental Protection Agency and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The WTEAC produced a commemorative heritage book titled, "Life in Wall Township: Past and Present," which depicts local plants and animals, water bodies, gardens, farms and historic sites. The book includes over 350 photographs, maps, documentation and illustrations covering all of



the Wall Township icons. The book was not sold commercially, but rather was distributed to local volunteers and commissions in addition to historical societies, libraries and institutions.

**Sustainable Jersey certification:** The WTEAC serves as the municipal green team and is responsible for working with the township to achieve Sustainable Jersey certification. The group meets monthly and has about eight community members that Wilma calls generalists--meaning they are not sustainability professionals. Wilma said, "Our team has found success by repeating the things that we do well. We build on our successes by figuring out what works and improving on them."



In 2013, Wall Township achieved Sustainable Jersey certification and is applying for re-certification now. Actions and activities done by the committee and municipality include community seminars, an open space plan, energy audits of buildings, a green fair, a native garden, a rain garden, site plan reviews, restoration of Wreck Pond, an Annual Arbor Day event, Earth Hour participation, environmental cleanups and protecting and preserving natural resources through education. Follow the [WTEAC Facebook page](#) to learn more.

Wilma said, "I am encouraged by the reach of Sustainable Jersey. If 78 percent of New Jersey municipalities are working on certification, that means there are a lot of towns stretching to do more sustainability actions to get certified. Imagine how much sustainability work is being accomplished across New Jersey."

The WTEAC has produced a number of brochures that cover topics such as Wall's bike tours, native gardens, rain gardens, clean water and lawn conservation, self-guided nature trails, open space, parks and activities, rare and endangered species, scenic watersheds and unique areas, anti-idling, and "The WTEAC – Who We Are and What We Do." You can download the brochures here: <http://www.wallnj.com/324/Brochures>.

**Certified by Clean Ocean Action's Blue Star program:** In 2015, the WTEAC achieved [Clean Ocean Action's Blue Star Certification](#).



The municipal Blue Star program combines the Sustainable Jersey program with Clean Ocean Action's focus on water quality protection. Blue Star selects a menu of actions from the Sustainable Jersey list that will have the most positive impact on water quality, including projects to treat stormwater runoff and homeowner educational programs that a town can implement to become better stewards of their waters. A candidate town must achieve 50 percent of the Sustainable Jersey points within Clean Ocean Action's menu list, as well as go one step further. There is an additional list of five waterway/conservation specific options and towns must complete one. For example, Wall Township partnered with Monmouth County in a Wreck Pond Sediment Control Dredging Project which now serves as a model to other municipalities. The depth of the water increased and the water quality was greatly improved.



**Restoration of the Allenwood Park Native Garden:** The WTEAC received a 2016 Sustainable Jersey Small Grant funded by PSEG Foundation in the amount of \$2,000 for the restoration of the Allenwood Park Native Garden. Barlow Flower Farm prepped the soil and laid out the native plants. The volunteers were instructed on how to properly install the plants. The garden adds beauty to the site for all its residents, saves money by using less water, and is low maintenance. The garden has again attracted birds, butterflies and beneficial insects in its natural habitat.

**Environmental poster, essay and poetry contests Wall School District students:** Every year, the WTEAC holds three contests for students. A high school environmental essay competition has been held for 22 years in grades 9 through 12, an intermediate school environmental poetry competition has been held for 19 years in grades 6 through 8 and an elementary school environmental poster competition has been held for 26 years in the four elementary schools from grades 1 through 5.



Wilma is responsible for adding and managing the essay and poetry contests. The poster contest was already in place. After 22 years of an environmental essay program, just think how many students in Wall Township have been inspired by writing an essay that increases their environmental awareness! The WTEAC received a 2016 Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions Environmental Achievement Award for this program.



Wilma said, “To reach more members of the community, we needed to go outside of our municipal box. By involving the schools and having a school coordinator work with us on each of these contests, we were able to grow a very successful program that has benefited many talented students. Our kids are the leaders of tomorrow. In Wall Township, we have had countless number of children submitting posters, essays and poems each year. That creates a ripple effect that has a lot of positive impact.” In all three award ceremonies, each student receives a certificate and ribbon and first place winners receive a cash prize.



**Education and past experience:** Wilma obtained a Bachelor’s of Science Degree in Business Administration from Trenton State College and a Master of Arts in Management and Supervision at Central Michigan University. Wilma retired as an educator in 2011 after almost 30 years of teaching. She was the Office Systems Technology Teacher for Adults in the Monmouth County Vocational School District. She also taught computer applications on the high school level. While she was teaching, Wilma was appointed as the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) Legislative Action Team Representative and reported on education legislation and on NJEA current issues at the monthly Monmouth County Vocational Education Association meetings.

**What you may not know about Wilma:** Wilma was born in Brooklyn but grew up in Manhattan and the Bronx with her brother and parents who were first generation Americans from Germany. Wilma attended parochial schools in New York and her high school graduation ceremony was held at St. Patrick’s Cathedral. She met her husband, John, at Bryant College in Providence, Rhode Island, where they were both college students. They married after college and lived in Germany for two years when her husband was in the Army. Wilma and John have been married for 56 years. When they moved back to the United States, the couple eventually bought three acres of land and built a two-story house in Wall Township. They have two children, Susan, who lives with her husband in Bath, Pennsylvania and Linda who lives with her family in Brick Township. Wilma has two grown grandchildren named Christie and Michael. In her free time, you can find Wilma with her friends at the Atlantic Club where she does the pool exercise classes.



**Advice for aspiring sustainability and green team volunteers:** Wilma said, “My advice is to get involved and volunteer. You will be surprised to see how everything falls into place. I never sought out these positions in the environmental movement, but I am glad they were presented to me. Things have come my way and I was open and ready when I was asked to serve.” Wilma is building strong local partnerships and setting high standards for all of us to follow as stewards of the environment.