

NOVEMBER 2017 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



BONNIE STEWART **Chair, Borough of River Edge Green Team, Bergen County**

Bonnie Stewart has been a volunteer member of the Borough of River Edge Green Team since its inception in 2009 and has served as the chair since 2012. She is also a member of the River Edge Environmental Commission.

Bonnie is a tireless leader and advocate for advancing the mission of the green team. As a full time employee of CBS Radio in New York City and a mother of two teenagers, Bonnie exemplifies the adage—“If you want something done, ask a busy person.” Bonnie is known as the spark and catalyst for the green team. She explained with a laugh, “If you are interested in our community and being more sustainable, then you are definitely going to hear from me, asking you to get involved. Coming from a Polish family, I am strong willed and don’t take no easily.”

Borough of River Edge-Sustainable Jersey Certified: The Borough of River Edge, led by Bonnie and the green team, achieved Sustainable Jersey certification in 2009, the inaugural year of the program. The Borough was recertified in 2012 and 2016. The green team meets monthly and has members from the following departments: mayor, council, school district, Environmental Commission, Shade Tree Commission, Beautification Committee, Recreation Department, Department of Public Works and the Chamber of Commerce. The green team also includes residents.

Bonnie’s projects with the green team include Project Porchlight, rehabilitation and replanting of a community garden, public education and outreach to improve recycling participation and promoting the green team at the annual River Edge Day and at local green fairs. Bonnie said, “Any time residents get involved in our community, it is a good thing. Our future goal is to get our local schools certified with Sustainable Jersey for Schools. We want to help children and parents be aware of simple actions that can be taken to have a big impact on the future. The green team always tries to be present at town events such as our farmer’s market each week or River Edge day in October to spread the word.”



The green team hopes to start new initiatives like an anti-idling public awareness campaign, rain barrel workshops and exploring alternative energy opportunities for the Borough. Bonnie has worked with three different mayors and is appreciative of the supportive council and current Mayor Edward Mignone. For more details on the program, read the [Borough of River Edge Certification Report](#).

Toy Drive-Materials Reuse Program: One of the most successful events that Bonnie has led is the toy drive with partner [Second Chance Toys](#), a non-profit organization that rescues and recycles plastic toys for children in need. The green team has done the event twice so far. Generally, about 300 residents stop by to deliver toys. The toys are then provided to needy children at a daycare center. Bonnie said, “It was amazing to connect the kids with the toys. As the green team chair, I am happy that the toys didn’t go into the oceans and landfills. Our team collects about 1,000 toys at these events in a four hour time span. We filled two large trucks.” The radio station WCBS FM came to the last event with free giveaways and placed PSA's on the air. This event includes partners such as the mayor, council, the Shade Tree Commission, Environmental Commission and the Boy and Girl Scouts.



River Edge Day Green Fair: Bonnie explained that the River Edge Day green fair takes months of planning, advertising and coordination, but is definitely worth it. She credits a great steering committee for making the event a success. She added, “On our organizing committee we made sure each participant was dedicated to the environment and also involved in another community organization that we could work with to partner on the event.” Bonnie said the event’s objective is to provide education to the community on simple actions to green their daily routine. Early in the process, the committee assigned areas of focus, providing a complete message without overlap. A paper shredding service was at the event and proved to be very popular. Bonnie noted, “Getting the kids involved was also critical to coordinating a successful green day. Students at the schools, the Boy and Girl Scout clubs and sporting leagues participated. When the kids get involved, the parents follow. In addition, their involvement assured us a strong attendance.” The event was publicized through e-blasts, media releases, the web-site, notices and public service announcements. Bonnie was proud of the special sponsor she secured. Boxed Water gave the event 15 cases of boxed water to distribute.

River Edge Complete Streets Policy: River Edge is crossed by some of the most traveled state, county and local roads in the area. The Borough of River Edge passed a Complete Streets Policy that considers all users of these busy roads in the planning process. The town has made many improvements including new sidewalks, pedestrian and bike signs, bike routes on roadways and more. Bonnie said, “When I drive through town now, I am proud to see the street improvements that make the town safer and better. The green team was a part of this effort.” The Borough received a [New Jersey Safe Routes to Schools Recognition Award](#) at the silver level. Bonnie said that River Edge is the only Bergen County municipality to receive silver. The award was based on the middle school sidewalk improvements, successfully petitioning the county to recognize the speed limit and the crossing guard training protocols.



Municipal Electricity from a Renewable Source: The Borough of River Edge buys its electricity from a renewable source. Municipalities are able to buy electricity on the open market that is then delivered through their usual utility supply channel. Municipal officials specify the amount of green content in their electricity mix, either by buying directly from a green energy supplier or participating in a buying pool that includes renewable power. By purchasing renewable electricity in this way, the municipality can often reduce its energy costs while also reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, become less vulnerable to fossil fuel costs and help create demand for more sustainable sources of energy. Since 2007, the Sustainable Energy Joint Meeting (NJ SEM) has aggregated electricity and natural gas purchasing for its member municipalities including the Borough of River Edge. The renewable electricity product includes 20 percent of renewables.



Education and Work Experience: Bonnie graduated from the River Dell Regional High School in Oradell and then received a degree in communications from William Patterson University which is located in Wayne, New Jersey. After graduation, Bonnie started working at CBS TV and Radio and is now a traffic manager at CBS Radio in New York City. This is a fast-paced job that entails sales and placing all of the FM music radio advertising. Bonnie is pleased that her CBS office building in downtown SoHo is LEED certified.

Advice to New Green Teams: Bonnie said, "When beaches close due to pollution and open space is replaced with tall buildings, I think we should step back and decide how to make a healthier world for everyone. New green teams should start small with one project that the whole community is interested in, include older adults, the borough departments, the schools, faith groups and your passionate environmentalists. Get a success on the books and then move to the next level. Sustainable Jersey has a [list of actions](#) to follow that make a comprehensive sustainability program possible."

What You May Not Know About Bonnie: Bonnie grew up in Oradell, New Jersey; she has three siblings. Her father worked for 35 years as a borough administrator. Bonnie said that her parents led by example; she appreciates how important it is to be active and involved in the community. Bonnie and her husband Brian have lived in River Edge for 13 years. They have a puppy named Bruno and two daughters: Olivia, age 16 and Brooke, age 14. When she is not working a 72-hour work week, meeting with the green team and taking her kids to softball, cheerleading or ballet practice, Bonnie enjoys running and has completed four marathons and a tough mudder. Bonnie's husband is a painter and plays in a band called Whale Blue Eye. She enjoys reading and yoga and planning her next vacation to Lavallette, where she has gone all her life and even got married.

Bonnie said, "My dream is to live in a little LEED certified, solar paneled house; I hope to grow my own vegetables, compost and live with a minimal impact on the earth. I will get there, but right now I am working within our current reality-raising our kids in a busy suburb. That is why the work we do with our green teams is so important now."