

MAY 2017 SUSTAINABILITY HERO



RALPH J. COOPER Chair, Upper Township Green Team (Cape May County)

Ralph J. Cooper has served on the Upper Township Green Team for four years and is a founding member of the Sustainable Jersey Atlantic-Cape May Regional Hub, which supports green teams in the two counties. Dedicated and generous with his time and knowledge, Ralph has a knack for engaging new green teams and community members to participate in the Sustainable Jersey program. Recognized as the 2016 Citizen of the Year by the Rotary Club of Ocean City/Upper Township, he is truly an asset to his community and a positive force making New Jersey more sustainable.

The formation of the Upper Township Green Team coincided with Ralph's retirement in 2013. Because he is a volunteer with other like-minded civic programs in his northern Cape May County municipality, he is able to make positive connections that enhance the work of all the groups. He is skilled in public relations and he says his secret is to "nudge" rather than shove; meaning he has had good luck when he helps people make behavioral changes with positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions. Ralph has perfected the art of tabling at events. He said, "If you bring coffee and donuts then you have an instant "in" with people. When you make sustainability easy and useful, people are usually receptive to getting involved."

Ralph's advice for green team members is to "Stay positive and find the right resource, whether it be funds or people to help projects get done." He added, "Upper Township now has sustainability as part of its brand; it's something we're proud of and intend to keep up."

Certified by Sustainable Jersey: Ralph helped lead the Township of Upper to achieve bronze-level Sustainable Jersey certification in 2014. As chair of the green team, he is now focused on helping the township get recertified in 2017, with the goal of silver-level certification. The Upper Township Green Team has about six volunteers and township committee staff. Ralph likes to use a peer review process to vet ideas. He said he presents ten ideas or possible projects and then sees which ones rise to the top after asking a group for input. Ralph manages the outreach and communications for the green team. He administers the [Upper Township Green Team Facebook](#) page, maintains the [Upper Township Green Team Website](#) and handles the email list of over 800 contacts. Ralph commented, "I like the Sustainable Jersey program because the



actions touch all aspects of life. Rarely do I meet someone who does not connect to one of the actions that fall into the “People, Prosperity and Planet” areas of the program.”

Upper Township Farmers Market: Ralph helped establish the [Upper Township Farmers Market](#), with successful markets in 2015 and 2016 and he continues to serve on the Farmers Market Steering Committee. “We borrowed plenty of best practices from nearby farmers markets in Ocean City, Brigantine and West Cape May. Their volunteers gave us a boat load of good suggestions that enabled the Upper Township Market to thrive. It has been a great way to bring the community together. It fosters a sense of pride and is a place where people can gather and socialize while supporting local food.”



Sustainable Jersey Atlantic - Cape May Regional Hub: Ralph is a founding member of the [Sustainable Jersey Atlantic-Cape May Regional Hub](#) that supports green team communities in Atlantic and Cape May counties. He explained, “The regional hub provides a way to learn new things and see what other green teams are doing. Most importantly, participating in events keeps me rejuvenated. It is nice to spend time with like-minded people.” You can join Ralph at an upcoming event on May 11, 2017 at 6:00 pm; the lecture will be on [Communicating Effectively with Municipal Leaders](#).



Shop Local and Bring Your Own Bag: Ralph is an active board member of the [Historical Preservation Society of Upper Township](#) and has maintained the Society’s website and social media and photography resources for the past ten years. He is the Historical Society’s representative with the [Upper Township Business Association \(UTBA\)](#), where he currently serves as treasurer and board member. Ralph is chair of the UTBA Membership Committee and also administers social media and email services for the more than 130 business and non-profit members.

He helped establish the successful Shop Local campaign for the UTBA and started the ongoing Bring Your Own Bag (BYOB) program designed to nudge local residents into the habit of using re-usable shopping bags instead of plastic bags. Shop Local rack cards promote hometown businesses in Upper Township with an embedded QR code linked to the UTBA website with an online member directory and periodic promotions. These two UTBA programs were some of the initial actions the Township of Upper did and the programs contributed points toward achieving certification with Sustainable Jersey.

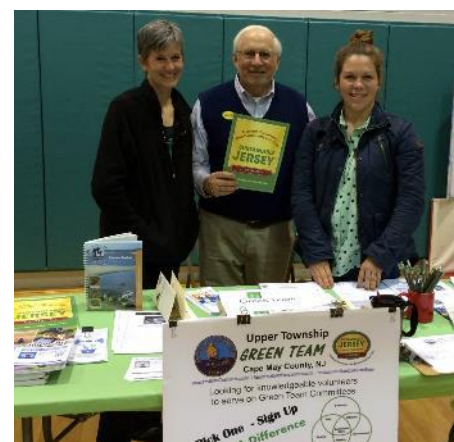
Green Business Recognition Program: A [Green Business Assessment campaign](#) was initiated by the Upper Township Business Association (UTBA), in conjunction with the Upper Township Green Team. The campaign consists of a checklist for business self-assessment of internal green practices. The self-assessment checklist covers areas of recycling, waste-reduction, energy conservation, water conservation, and purchasing local and recycled materials. In addition to providing recognition for UTBA members that operate their businesses with green best practices, the program heightens awareness of the general guidelines that lead to a more sustainable community. The UTBA encourages members to complete the [75 item questionnaire and submit their self-assessment](#).

ReStore for Habitat for Humanity: Ralph is looking forward to the Habitat ReStore, set to open in May for Cape May County. The 15,000-square foot former grocery store has been re-purposed into a Habitat ReStore. Ralph explained that the ReStore is a nonprofit home improvement store and donation center that sells used furniture, appliances, home accessories and building materials to the public. By doing this, Habitat ReStores divert hundreds of tons from landfills each year, accepting hard-to-dispose-of items. The proceeds from the sale of the donated goods fund Habitat for Humanity's work. The green team plans to promote the store while educating about the importance of reuse.



Past experience and affiliations: Ralph spent a career in newspaper publishing and 14 years as a contractor supporting the FAA William J. Hughes Technical Center at the Atlantic City Airport. He was a founding member and Secretary of the [Friends of the Ocean City Pops Orchestra](#) and currently serves on their Advisory Council. He established the Friends website and social media capabilities. In 2017, he was appointed to [the Cape May County Division of Culture and Heritage](#) Commission. Ralph is a founding member of the Advisory Board for the Friends of the [Cape May Music Festival](#), in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities.

Ralph is a former board member and Vice President for Technology on the Public Relations Council of Greater Atlantic City. He established their scholarship program that now grants funds to area students attending Stockton University, Atlantic Cape Community College and Rowan University. Ralph is an active volunteer with his Upper Township's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program.



What you may not know about Ralph: Ralph is a 28-year resident of Upper Township. He currently resides in Palermo, Upper Township, with his wife Ginny. Their two sons, Mark and Seth, live in the Washington DC area. All of the Cooper family graduated from Penn State University. Ralph loves taking photographs and provides organizations with his pictures to promote their work. He can always be found reading and just finished [Storm in a Teacup: The Physics of Everyday Life](#) by Helen Czerski which explains science to everyday people. But, he said it was Rachel Carson's book [Silent Spring](#) that has served as a motivator throughout his life. He read the book in high school and it focused his concern for the future of our planet and keeps him volunteering his time with environmental organizations.

