

SUSTAINABILITY HERO

December 2020



Tanara Hall

Member, Island Heights Green Team and
Island Heights Environmental Committee (Ocean County)

In 2014, Tanara Hall moved to the small coastal town of Island Heights Borough in Ocean County, New Jersey, from her home in Costa Rica. Costa Rica, a world leader in sustainability, is known for its role in the protection of nature and commitment to ambitious policies to combat climate change. Environmental stewardship has been important to Tanara from an early age.

With a degree in environmental health from the University of Costa Rica and professional experience in sustainability consulting, Tanara was a valuable addition to the Island Heights Green Team and [Island Heights Environmental Committee](#). She dedicates her time and boundless energy to helping Island Heights become more sustainable and is credited with making the programs and communications engaging. She excels in community outreach, graphic design and accessible communications. Tanara works for the [Ocean County Department of Solid Waste Management](#) where she helps to implement all aspects of the Ocean County District Solid Waste Management Plan through public outreach and education on recycling and composting.

Tanara said, “Island Heights has a devoted group of residents who care about the environment and sustainability. I found my happy place working in sustainability here. Participating on the green team and working at the Ocean County Department of Solid Waste Management is rewarding. I am so appreciative of all the volunteers and local businesses that support my crazy ideas. Also, my colleagues teach me so much and make work a wonderful place.” She has also been instrumental in securing grants for the Borough’s green projects. In 2020, Island Heights Borough received a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded by the PSEG Foundation to create a more inclusive environment for seniors, children and people with disabilities in outdoor community recreation spaces. This project will include installation of outdoor musical pieces at the Children’s Garden and equipment to support physical and mental exercise, boost social interactions and encourage creativity.

Tara Church, the chair of the Island Heights Green Team and Island Heights Environmental Committee said, “Tanara is our local sustainability hero. She is a role model for living sustainability and leaving a smaller footprint. We could not achieve Sustainable Jersey silver-certification without her. She spends countless hours volunteering her time to make a positive impact. Her life embodies sustainability.”



Island Heights-Sustainable Jersey Silver Certified: The Island Heights Green Team, also known as Sustainable Island Heights, works year-round on completing sustainability actions for their Sustainable Jersey certification

application. Tanara values the partnerships the group has created. “We are not only growing our green team members; we are also adding to our community network. Several volunteer groups in town reached out to us to publicize their events, help them with brochures and host combined activities,” she said. “People really appreciate our outreach and notice the work of the green team.” Collaboration partners include the Island Heights Volunteer Fire Company, the Boy and Girl Scouts, Island Heights Cultural and Heritage Association, Save Barnegat Bay, Island Heights Methodist Church, the Recreation Committee, Island Heights Grade School, Ring Around the Rosie Pre-K, Garden Club and the Friends of the Library. Island Heights Borough received bronze-level Sustainable Jersey certification in 2017 and then advanced to silver-level certification in 2018 and 2019. To read about the completed certification actions, review the [2019 Island Heights Borough Certification Report](#).



Ocean County Sustainability Hub: With front-row seats to the harmful effects caused by extreme weather events and plastic pollution on New Jersey beaches, thirteen coastal towns have come together to take on these challenges and more as the [Ocean County Sustainability Hub](#): Barnegat, Beach Haven, Brick, Island Heights, Lacey, Long Beach, Mantoloking, Point Pleasant Beach, Seaside Park, Stafford, Toms River, Tuckerton and Waretown. Tanara was instrumental in getting this Sustainable Jersey regional hub off the ground. She explained, “The Ocean County Sustainability Hub wants to improve communication between municipalities and organizations in order to give green teams the tools and steps to implement programs and projects to help Ocean County achieve sustainability.” She added, “The Sustainable Jersey certified towns can help the rest of our towns get on board to apply for certification and work together on different projects. We share materials and experiences between communities to make Ocean County develop in a more sustainable way. Collaboration is key to moving forward.”



Island Heights Cultural Assets Map: In an effort to identify the community’s strengths, the Island Heights Green Team completed Sustainable Jersey’s [Creative Assets Inventory](#) action. The first step was data collection—green team members interviewed groups and organizations and researched historical material on the Municipal Building. They reviewed resolutions, ordinances and plans for Ocean County and the watershed. At the popular Island Height’s Founders Day event, the green team members interviewed every local community group. The collected data was analyzed and synthesized in order to describe the cultural resources of Island Heights. In 2018, the Island Heights Green Team and Environmental Committee completed the [Creative Assets Inventory of Island Heights](#). Building on this work, Tanara created a community assets map. In November 2020, the map was added to the waterfront boardwalk; it provides a graphic vision of the ecological, cultural and civic resources in the community.



Creative Community Education and Outreach: Sustainable Island Heights has an active community education and outreach program. Tanara provides the graphics and maintains the popular [Sustainable Island Heights Facebook](#) page. The green team also uses [Instagram](#) and Next Door to share information. Tanara explained, “As a non-native English speaker, I understand the value of simple, clear communications. Not everyone knows all the details of sustainability issues, so it is best to share the basics and not start at the expert level.” The graphics touch on a variety of themes: sustainable holidays, low-waste celebrations, zero waste gifts, food waste and reuse of materials, plastic-free



celebrations and meatless Mondays. “First, I find out what is the ‘most asked’ recycling question. Then I create a graphic or event around it,” said Tanara. “For example, the question, “What can I do with my old couch?” was a great starter to discuss other reuse and recycling options.” As a way to get closer to the community, the green team has a table at the Farmers Market and answers questions on recycling, waste reduction, composting and native gardens.



Holiday Focus on Waste Reduction and Energy Education: In 2018, Tanara organized a last-minute used toy collection with Second Chance Toys; after collecting 50 toys that year, she realized there was a lot of organizations and parents trying to get rid of outgrown toys. In 2019, she organized two more collections and partnered with the Island Heights Fire Company, Bubby’s Beanery and Save Barnegat Bay. Five-hundred toys were collected. Tanara said, “This year the list of toy drop-off locations expanded to five and three towns are participating. We hope it will be the best year yet.” Tanara also started the Island Heights pumpkin composting drive. This is the third year that the Island Heights Environmental Committee will host a drop-off location. “This is a simple and successful way to use fall decorations for a good cause rather than tossing them in the garbage,” she said. Pumpkins, hay and corn stalks are composted, used by a local farmer or donated to the Popcorn Park Zoo.



“We also use the Halloween season to provide energy savings and rebate information. All of the decorating done during the holidays adds to electrical usage and increased bills, so information on financial savings during the holidays is a good way to catch peoples' attention,” Tanara shared. The green team promotes incentives available to residents through [New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program](#) and tables at popular community events to share energy education including the Island Heights Volunteer Fire Company Trucktober Fest and the Halloween Trunk and Treat event. The energy outreach efforts received certification points for the Sustainable Jersey action: [Residential Energy Efficiency Outreach](#).

Zero-Waste Promotion and Events: Tanara leads the recycling campaigns for the Environmental Committee and green team. The initiatives are adapted to the seasons and trendy topics are used to keep people interested. Tanara said, “We promote special recycling programs to divert waste from the landfill and change the perception of garbage to recyclable or reusable waste. We love showing zero-waste options for holiday giving and celebrations.” Tanara collects items for the numerous recycling drives and stores the materials in her garage until there is enough to recycle. She helps to “green” Island Heights’ special events by providing a zero-waste station with designated waste bins. Zero-waste events have included the Fire Company Summerbrew, the Fourth of July Bike Parade and the Halloween Trunk or Treat event.



More about Tanara: Tanara and her husband Clint live in Island Heights Borough and have a four-year old son named James. Her husband Clint partners with her on many of the zero-waste programs and her son likes to help in the garden by taking care of the vegetables and flowers. Tanara loves to travel and experience different cultures. She misses her family in Costa Rica and Peru and cannot wait to resume international travel when it is safe again. Summing up her thoughts on sustainability, she said “We all live on the same planet and everything we do now will affect the future. I want to leave a beautiful planet for my son and his future family.” We think she is off to an impressive start.