

SUSTAINABILITY HEROES

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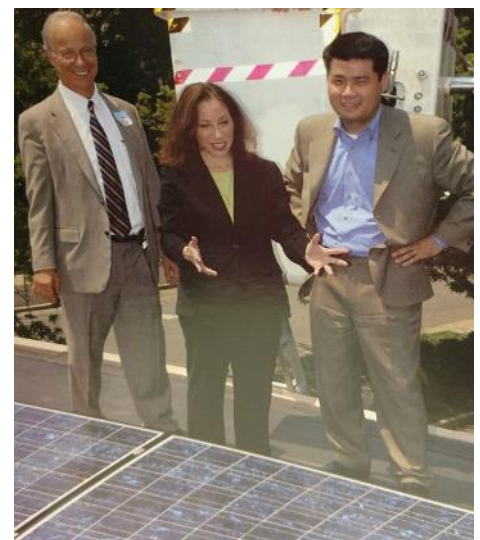
**Fred Profeta, Jr.
and Meryl Frank**
Co-Founders, New Jersey Mayors
Committee for a Green Future

Sustainable Jersey: A Decade of Impact: On February 26, 2009, Sustainable Jersey was formally launched at the New Jersey State House in Trenton with a press conference and words of inspiration from Governor Jon Corzine. This day was made possible through the contributions of many dedicated people and organizations including the New Jersey Mayors Committee for a Green Future and its visionary co-founders Fred Profeta, Jr. and Meryl Frank.

Two Mayors Bring a Vision for Green Future to New Jersey League of Municipalities: In 2006, Mayor Fred Profeta of Maplewood and Mayor Meryl Frank of Highland Park were actively leading sustainability efforts in their towns. To expand the movement state-wide, William Dressel, the former executive director of the [New Jersey League of Municipalities](#), brought the two mayors together. The three agreed that meaningful environmental change at the local level needed the leadership of a hard-working group of mayors.

New Jersey Mayors Committee for a Green Future: To inspire interest for a mayors committee focused on sustainability and cost savings, Mayor Frank convened a group of municipal leaders and experts in Highland Park in July 2006. There was a lot of interest in going green, but no roadmap for municipalities to make progress. As a result of these first meetings, the Mayors Committee for a Green Future was formed as a formal sub-committee of the New Jersey League of Municipalities. The committee was initially co-chaired by both Profeta and Frank.

Profeta said, “When I joined the Maplewood Township Committee, I finally had a bully pulpit to channel my environmental passion. We started with ordinances and didn’t look back. The municipal level is where people live and see the direct results of environmental progress. For example, if you put solar panels over the pool parking lot and save the town money in the process, then the community will see it and support the work.”



Frank explained, “At the time I was a new mayor, so I reflected on what I wanted my legacy to be. I was always interested in the environment and I knew that sustainability was where I wanted to make an impact. I drafted the [Highland Park 2020 Plan](#) and presented it before a group of state agencies. It was well received, and we went from there.” The Highland Park

2020 Plan for a Sustainable Community was divided into three categories: Environmentally Sustainable (A Green Community), Economically Sustainable (An Affordable Community) and Socially Sustainable (A Livable Community).

In 2006, at the same time as the Mayors Committee was forming, The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) was funded by the [Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation](#) to create a “Sustainable Communities Leadership Network.” The network was tasked with supporting municipal progress toward sustainable development by identifying best practices, facilitating peer-to-peer learning, developing metrics to judge performance and providing direct technical support and training.

These efforts were led by Randall Solomon at Rutgers University and Donna Drewes at TCNJ. Concurrently, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities were also working on sustainable community-related initiatives. The four parties agreed to come together under one banner and began to collaborate on the program that eventually became Sustainable Jersey.

Working together, they created the formula for Sustainable Jersey. Mayor Profeta explained, “The partnership married the political savvy and network of the mayors, the strong infrastructure and communication abilities of the League of Municipalities and the technical expertise of academic and governmental institutions.” Frank added, “In Highland Park, I told my staff to look at everything with green colored glasses. I wanted them to consider the sustainability options for each policy, new development and community effort, with the added focus of saving money. We were adding solar panels, rain gardens, green recycled art and more. Making sure all the projects we did were replicable was also important. We wanted other towns to be able to do the same things and it was a basis for forming the Sustainable Jersey actions.”



As the program was launched, Mayor Frank was appointed by President Barack Obama as the United States Representative, and subsequently, as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Profeta took over as the chair of the Mayors Committee for a Green Future. Frank said, “Although I moved on from the Mayors Committee, I never left the fight for the environment. I work on a global level with women. The environment, particularly climate change, disproportionately effects the lives of women. Women need to tell their stories and take leadership if we really want to see a change.”



Promoting Sustainable Jersey to Mayors: From 2006 to 2011, the Mayors Committee for a Green Future served as the advisory board that tested and gave candid advice on what works at the local level. This group also served as the head cheerleaders by promoting the program to mayors, community groups and green teams that needed an extra push to register with Sustainable Jersey or make progress.

Profeta spoke at environmental events around New Jersey. He was often accompanied by Randall Solomon, Mayor Art Ondish and other members of the Mayors Committee. He said, “I visited several town council and environmental commission meetings a month, spreading the word about the benefits of the coming Sustainable Jersey program and its capacity to green up the entire state,



one municipality at a time.” Profeta even presented at the 2009 Local Government Climate Change Leadership Summit in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Profeta said, “At the 2007 League of Municipalities’ convention in Atlantic City, I presented Sustainable Jersey, explaining that the program would begin with a three-pronged approach: developing standard criteria by which communities would be known as 'green', compiling simple web-based tools to assist local governments in meeting the criteria and providing incentives to reward municipalities that met the criteria.” He added, “New Jersey became the first state in the nation to have a municipal certification program for sustainability with a level of rigor and objectivity that the mayors felt necessary to achieve real change.”



In 2012, Sustainable Jersey evolved from a partnership into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a [Board of Trustees](#) that took over the role of the Mayors Committee for a Green Future. Proud of what Sustainable Jersey has accomplished, Profeta said, “Mayors are well-positioned to influence the behavior of their constituents and the 565 municipalities in this state provide powerful leverage for achieving that result on a grand scale. Sustainable Jersey has made a real difference.”



More about Fred Profeta, Jr.: For more than thirty-years, Profeta has been leading sustainability programs. In 2010, he received the New Jersey Governor’s Environmental Excellence Award in the Environmental Leadership Category. As the Mayor of Maplewood Township from 2004-2008 and the Deputy Mayor for the Environment and Township Committee member from 2009-2010, Profeta worked to advance environmental progress on the local scene and across New Jersey. In Maplewood Township, this focus found its way into many municipal documents and projects including redevelopment plans, the construction of a LEED certified police station and the creation of an Environmental Action Plan.



Maplewood Township was one of the [first 34 towns](#) to achieve Sustainable Jersey certification in 2009 and has since achieved Sustainable Jersey certification at the silver-level. Under Profeta’s leadership, Maplewood was named a Climate Champion of the Year by Clean Air-Cool Planet and received an EPA award for environmental excellence. In April 2009, Profeta received a personal Green Leadership award from the United States Green Building Council. In November of the same year, Profeta and Maplewood Township were awarded the inaugural 2009 Sustainable Jersey Leadership Award.

Profeta holds a B.A. from Yale University and an LL.B. and LL.M. from Harvard Law School. He is a New York lawyer specializing in appellate litigation and has been the senior partner of Profeta & Eisenstein since 1987. Profeta continues to participate as a member of the [Maplewood Green Team](#) and he serves on the board of [Green Faith](#) and the [South Orange and Maplewood Community Coalition on Race](#).

Continuing the family interest in the environment, Profeta's son Tim is the Director of the Nicholas Institute for the Environment at Duke University. Profeta's daughter Katherine is a Professor at Yale Drama School where she teaches

courses in theater and dance. Fred and his wife Susan (a recently retired primary care physician) have a dog named Ringo and four grandchildren to keep them busy in addition to all their other activities.

More about Meryl Frank: Meryl Frank served for ten years as the mayor of Highland Park, before being appointed by President Obama as U.S. Representative and Ambassador to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2010. After completing her term, she established Makeda Global, a consulting firm focusing on women’s political participation and leadership around the world.

Ambassador Frank works with a wide range of women, from the female Members of Parliament in Afghanistan, to basket weavers in rural Kenya, to women executives at Microsoft in the United States. Frank said, “Women understand the importance of their environment. Women farm, they walk long distances to fetch water and they care for the children and the sick. They see the effect of climate change every day, first hand.”

In 2016, Frank was asked to serve as the Master of Ceremonies at the Women Leaders and the Global Transformation Summit held as part of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP22). The focus of the event was to strengthen the role of women as leaders in climate change. The group discussed the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development goals and the historic Paris Climate Agreement. Frank included Sustainable Jersey concepts and examples of her sustainability work in Highland Park in her introduction.

Ambassador Frank is a lifelong advocate for social, economic and environmental justice. She is a graduate of Rutgers University and of Yale University where she earned graduate degrees in international relations, political science and public health. Frank is married to Steven Gabel, and is the mother of four children: Isaac, Eli, Eve and Belle.

