

# Sustainability Hero



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## Kenneth A. Jones

**Bergen County Hub and  
Glen Rock Environmental Commission (Bergen County)**

Ken Jones is a sustainability leader in the [Sustainable Bergen County Hub](#) and the [Glen Rock Environmental Commission \(GREC\)](#). He leads the energy team and has spearheaded initiatives in renewable energy aggregation and electric vehicle adoption.

Known for his consensus-focused facilitation of the Sustainable Bergen County Hub and the North Jersey Electric Vehicle Group, Ken is generous with his time and talents. A skilled presenter, Ken has spoken to countless community organizations, committees, elected officials, residents and neighboring towns to share information and gain support for complicated energy issues. Some might be surprised to learn he is a scientist and medical writer who worked for nearly 30 years in the pharmaceutical industry. He has a resume full of professional accomplishments, discoveries, papers and patents. It was his expertise in areas such as electrophysiology and neurobiology, or the functions related to the electrical properties of the brain, that sparked his interest to lead renewable energy projects for the environmental commission.

Ken said, “Being sustainable fulfills my childhood Boy Scout motto—help other people at all times. It’s our duty to help others, and for me that includes future generations. Being good stewards of our resources, taking sustainable actions and increasing renewable energy use are things we should all be championing.”

**Borough of Glen Rock: Sustainable Jersey Silver-Certified:** GREC’s co-chair, Sylvia Rabacchi, is married to Ken. Ken’s participation in the Environmental Commission was preceded by Sylvia, who has been a dedicated and highly effective environmental leader in the

[Borough of Glen Rock](#) for the past 11 years. She is responsible for advancing, encouraging and working on initiatives including energy audits, a green business program, plastic reduction, municipal rain gardens, landscaping best practices, solar power education and more. The Borough of Glen Rock was first certified with Sustainable Jersey at the bronze level in 2012 and has since advanced to silver-level certification in 2018. Thanks to Sylvia’s efforts, [GREC’s web page](#) on the Glen Rock Borough’s website is a comprehensive resource for residents with background about all their projects and accomplishments. Since 2011, Glen Rock Borough and Glen Rock Public Schools have received over \$16,000 from the [Sustainable Jersey Grants Program](#). To learn more about their sustainability programs, review the [2021 Sustainable Jersey Certification Report of Glen Rock Borough](#).



**Sustainable Bergen County Hub Styrofoam Free:** Ken is a founding member of the Sustainable Bergen County Hub. GREC hosted the first Sustainable Bergen County Hub meeting in 2018 and welcomed over 20 municipalities. The Sustainable Bergen County Hub’s monthly meetings are hosted by the participating towns on a rotating schedule. The first project initiated



by the group was the implementation of a strategy for educating the community about the harmful environmental and health effects of Styrofoam, and to find ways to reduce and recycle Styrofoam.

The Sustainable Bergen County Hub formed a Styrofoam Team that organizes collection drives to keep expanded polystyrene, or "EPS" used for packaging, out of the landfills. Thanks to their advocacy work, the Bergen County Freeholders passed a ban on XPS (or extruded polystyrene) food containers from all county property. In 2019, Sustainable Jersey presented the [Creativity and Innovation Award](#) to Fair Lawn, Glen Rock, Leonia, Oakland, Oradell, Ridgefield Park, Ridgewood and Wyckoff for this initiative.

Starting in 2018, Ken and other volunteers with the Bergen Hub began organizing Styrofoam pickup events. These events typically prioritized residents from the organizing town but were open to any resident of Bergen County for the last two hours. Glen Rock held six Styrofoam pickup events during the next three years. Glen Rock Recycling Center staff provided assistance and volunteers were recruited to help with the collection. These collections were aided by a grant from the Bergen County Utilities Authority to purchase a shipping container for temporary storage of the material. Residents received information about how to distinguish Styrofoam from related materials. Ken said, "The lessons the Bergen Hub learned doing these drives helped us mentor other municipalities as they initiated Styrofoam recycling efforts. But the real payback was the tremendous upswelling of public support for these events. The Hub regularly receives requests for more frequent collections." As a result of these efforts, the Glen Rock Department of Public Works initiated a pilot program to collect Styrofoam from residents.

Currently, the Styrofoam Committee is coordinating the purchase of a Styrofoam densifier unit, using funds received from Bergen County, to be installed in one of the Hub's participating towns. Ken said, "Densification is key to making the entire process viable as it removes the air from the lightweight material, creating a product that is easier to store and handle and can be sold to specialized recyclers such as Foam Pack in Springfield, New Jersey."

**Glen Rock Electric Vehicle Chargers:** Working with GREC Co-chair Ben Meyer, Ken secured a grant from the New Jersey Department Environmental Protection [It Pay\\$ to Plug In](#) program that provides grants to offset the cost of purchasing and maintaining electric vehicle charging stations.



Ben and Ken helped with the bidding documents, worked on the site plans and conducted the promotion and outreach. With funds from the [It Pay\\$ to Plug In](#) grant and Tesla, GREC was able to install two Level 2 electric vehicle chargers at no cost to the Borough. The chargers, among the first public chargers installed in Bergen County, were placed close to the downtown business district to encourage owners of electric vehicles to come into town, park and shop at the local merchants. The Creative Art Sub-committee of GREC created a floral design on the car charger electrical panel out of used bottle caps. The Borough of Glen Rock received 15 Sustainable Jersey certification points after completing the action: [Public Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure](#).



Ken said, "When I started this work, I think there were about 15 electric vehicle chargers in North Jersey and now we have jumped to over 100. As an owner of an electric car, I can confirm that the chargers made it easier for some Glen Rock residents to make the shift to go electric and have encouraged electric vehicle drivers from neighboring communities to visit Glen Rock for their shopping and dining."

The Borough of Glen Rock recently added a Nissan Leaf electric car to the municipal fleet funded through a grant from the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities [Clean Fleet Electric Vehicle Incentive Program](#) that Ken submitted. Ken explained, "The benefits of fueling transportation with electricity, rather than petroleum, are important in New Jersey. The electric vehicle chargers are important steps to achieving a faster switch to electric vehicle use and it's one of the highest impact strategies for making New Jersey's energy infrastructure more sustainable."

Ken promotes electric vehicles across New Jersey. He leads the [North Jersey Electric Vehicle Club](#) and moderates the Facebook page that allows owners of electric cars to share experiences while building awareness of the advantages for those considering a purchase. Together with like-minded members of the Sustainable Bergen County Hub and the [North Jersey Electric Vehicle Association](#), Ken has co-organized a number of electric vehicle car shows over the past five years to facilitate the adoption of more sustainable transportation.



**Glen Rock Energy Aggregation:** Representing GREC, Ken approached the Glen Rock Borough Council with a proposal to form a Renewable Government Energy Aggregation (R-GEA) program. Although the mayor and council were supportive, they asked the GREC energy team to do public outreach to educate and assess residents' acceptance of the opt-out program. "We used every possible venue from tabling events, presentations to local organizations and webinars to introduce the program and gauge community sentiment. I was very proud of the fact that the governing body recognized the importance of making renewable energy an easy choice for the majority of residents, despite a vocal minority of skeptics," Ken said. Glen Rock's R-GEA was the first in New Jersey to offer 100% renewable-sourced electricity.

At the successful conclusion of the first contract, the Borough of Glen Rock joined the Sustainable Essex Alliance (SEA) Energy Procurement Cooperative in which the following seven member municipalities collectively organize to procure energy on behalf of their residents: Maplewood, Glen Ridge, Montclair, Verona, Livingston, South Orange and Glen Rock. "This group has tremendous knowledge," said Ken, "and increasing the market for renewable energy is key to developing a more sustainable approach to energy generation and use." The SEA Energy Procurement Cooperative launched a 17-month contract, beginning April 2021, that provided participating residents of Glen Rock with power supply that contained enhanced renewable energy content while also providing some savings on monthly electric bills. The contract with Energy Harbor successfully concluded in September 2022 and resulted in 62% of residents participating in the program. A typical resident saved \$30 over the course of the 17-month contract and 2,768 tons of CO2 emissions were avoided by the town because of this program.

The program stimulated a lot of discussion, not only within Glen Rock, but in several neighboring towns who are now developing their own plans for an R-GEA program. Glen Rock Borough received 50 Sustainable Jersey Certification points for completing the action: [Renewable Government Energy Aggregation](#). Ken said the [Sustainable Jersey on-line resources](#) have helped him when he is putting together programs. He recommends the [Sustainable Jersey How-To Guide: Renewable Government Energy Aggregation](#).

**Education & Experience:** Ken graduated from Drew University with a BA in Zoology and received a PhD in Physiology from Rutgers University. He did additional research as a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Neurobiology at Harvard Medical School. He began his career as a research scientist for the Glaxo Institute for Molecular Biology in Geneva, Switzerland, where he established an in-vitro electrophysiology lab to study the molecular pharmacology of serotonin receptors and the role of Ca<sup>2+</sup> homeostasis in neurodegeneration. Over the span of his career, he has worked for 29 years as a scientist and medical writer and has over 40 published peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and patents.

**More About Ken:** Ken grew up in Delaware and is the youngest of three brothers. His sustainability leanings may stem from his parents, who loved the outdoors, valued conservation and took the family camping, hiking and boating. His parents were active members of the [Appalachian Mountain Club](#) and took the boys on camping tours of the National Parks. Ken and Sylvia both attended Harvard University but met again in Europe when Ken was working in Switzerland. The couple married and returned to the United States. They have two daughters in their 20s who are pursuing careers in wildlife biology and psychology. Ken is also a flute player and has been with the [Glen Rock Pops Orchestra](#) for eight years. In his free time, he enjoys hiking with his family and biking the many Rails-to-Trails available in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

