



Stephen Jasiiecki

**Chair, Sustainable Margate
and Sustainable Downbeach (Atlantic County)**



Stephen Jasiiecki, also known as Scuba Steve, has spent his life enjoying Absecon Island’s beach, wildlife and beautiful waters. For the past ten years, he has actively worked to find solutions and build meaningful partnerships to preserve and protect the shoreline he loves. As an avid photographer, writer, kayaker and outdoorsman, he has made it his mission to document, and educate the community about, the importance of stewardship and the impacts pollution have in Atlantic County. Steve is the chair of [Sustainable Margate](#), and a member of [Sustainable Downbeach](#), [Sustainable Jersey Atlantic-Cape May Hub](#), and the City of Margate [Planning Board](#).

Steve has led beach walks and kayak tours, and is often the man behind the table at local events with the “Know Your Beach” environmental display. He is always ready to promote the work of Sustainable Margate and the Atlantic-Cape May Hub. Communication in the City of Margate has the added challenge of reaching year-long residents and the summer visitors who spike the local population in the summer months.

“In conservation, the goal is to change the behavior of people. When I can share the beauty of the ocean and the three wetlands and encourage people to understand that we live in a sensitive environment, they start to understand how connected everything is,” Steve said. “When you value the environment, you will do more to protect it. I want to inspire a new generation to dream about becoming conservationists themselves.” Steve said his biggest challenge is getting beyond the tree-hugger image and making sure that people understand environmental issues are not political, they are about survival. He said, “I want people to really care. I do this by making the information interesting through photos and hands-on experiences.”

Progress through Collaboration: Realizing that sustainability issues do not stop at the town line, municipal green teams have joined forces on Absecon Island and across Atlantic and Cape May counties. Sustainable Downbeach is comprised of the Longport, Margate, Ventnor and Atlantic City green teams. Steve has been an integral part of the partnership which has resulted in beach cleanups, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, watershed management plans and ordinances to control construction site pollution, balloon releases and single use plastic reusable bags. Through collaboration, Sustainable Downbeach is making considerable progress.

Steve speaks at many local meetings and helps contribute to the Atlantic-Cape May Hub events with topics such as lead awareness, sustainable landscaping and seed planting. Steve explained, “I ask what we need to do, and I get to work.” He made himself available to speak to municipal councils and environmental commissions when Sustainable Downbeach was rolling out the plastic bag ban. He said, “I’ve learned not to be afraid of failures. When we don’t get an ordinance passed, I still view it as a success because we learn from it, and we get it right the next time. Most importantly, I make sure we celebrate each victory and thank everyone who helped. Positive encouragement helps us to keep going against the odds.”



Sustainable Jersey Certified: The Sustainable Margate Green Team, established in 2013, was originally led by Monica Coffey, who still serves as a member. Steve was participating in the [Rutgers Environmental Steward Program](#) and he needed to find a local research program to complete his classwork. He reached out to the green team, and they asked him to develop the City of Margate Fleet Inventory that added 10 points to the 2014 Sustainable Jersey certification. Steve has served as the Sustainable Margate chair since 2018. He said the work of Sustainable Margate is made possible thanks to a great volunteer team, the support of the [Margate City Mayor and Commissioners](#), partners like [Clean Ocean Action](#), [Surfrider Foundation of South Jersey](#) and the [Margate Business Association](#), and municipal staff including Margate Recycling Coordinator Anthony Edge. Steve is currently working on the Sustainable Jersey recertification application. In 2021, the City of Margate achieved certification at the bronze level. To see all the actions completed, review the [2021 City of Margate Certification Report](#). Margate received a \$20,000 [Sustainable Jersey grant](#) funded by the PSEG Foundation that was used to fund the Margate, Longport and Ventnor Watershed Management Plans. In 2016, Margate received a \$2,000 grant from Sustainable Jersey to install a native species/pollinator garden at the city's municipal complex.

Construction Site Plastic Waste Pollution: New construction has increased on Absecon Island as older homes are replaced with newer ones. As a regular kayaker, Steve realized that the white dust he was seeing floating on the surface of the water was microplastic dust often called contractor snow. Plastic particle contaminates generated by the cutting, scraping, drilling, of products from poly compounds such as TREX and AZAK are buried in the ground, wetlands and the ocean. Microplastics in the ocean can bind with other harmful chemicals before being ingested by marine organisms. They have been detected in marine organisms from plankton to whales, commercial seafood, and even drinking water. After making this connection, Steve brought the issue to Sustainable Margate and started educating colleagues and the community about the problem.

In March 2024, the City of Margate successfully passed a resolution to amend the city's construction code to require contractors and homeowners to take protective measures to prevent microplastics from entering the environment. Working with Sustainable Downbeach, the movement spread to Hamilton Township and Somers Point City, with these towns passing their own resolutions. Longport and Monmouth Beach have an ordinance pending. Steve said, "We're hoping to add more towns to this list. A resolution is good, but an ordinance is better. If we work town by town, perhaps the State will take notice and take it from there to make it a law. I'm pleased to say that our work in Margate has resulted in greater compliance and contractors and workers are more mindful of their worksites."

Sustainable Margate member Sherri Lilienfeld created a resolution template for municipalities and a flyer that can be provided to contractors, and shares these materials with other towns. Interested towns can download the Contractor Microplastics flyer in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). In addition, NBC10 Jersey Shore bureau reporter Ted Greenberg did a story in January 2024 that aired on the local news: [Watch the video](#).

Balloon Release Ban: The City of Margate adopted the first balloon release ban in 2014 to protect marine life and prevent littering. Sustainable Downbeach and the Surfrider Foundation joined the movement and helped to encourage all Atlantic and Cape May County coastal communities to pass an ordinance that prohibits the intentional release of balloons. The eight towns in Atlantic County that have passed these ordinances protecting wildlife are Atlantic City, Brigantine, Egg Harbor City, Galloway Township, Longport, Margate, Somers Point and Ventnor City.

In 2019, the Atlantic County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved an ordinance banning the release of helium filled balloons in all county parks. Steve is now focusing on statewide legislation. Margate, Longport and Ventnor received the 2017 [Sustainable Jersey Collaboration Award](#) for this and other impactful collaborations. Steve said, "We want residents and visitors to stop releasing balloons, including mylar balloons, which float into the atmosphere and drop further out into the ocean where marine mammals mistake them for food. Balloon releases often cause the death of marine mammals due to choking or ingesting."

NJ Osprey Population Protection: In late June and early July, Steve is on call to help erect osprey nests and band ospreys who make their home in the marshes and bays of Absecon Island. This is when ospreys have



nestlings that are 3-4 weeks old and are unable to fly, making it a good time to band them for future tracking. Steve works with Bill Stuempfig, who volunteers for the [New Jersey Osprey Project](#). “Ospreys are an indicator species,” Steve said. “They are a clue to the health of the wetlands. A good population is a clue that the marshes are healthy.” There are about 45 osprey nests on the Wild and Scenic Great Egg Harbor River and its tributaries located west of the Garden State Parkway. Nesting surveys are conducted by [Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey](#) staff and specially trained volunteers. Surveys are conducted in all major colonies from Point Pleasant south to Cape May, and west along the Delaware Bayshore.

City of Margate Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects: In 2014, Ventnor and Margate sought funding from the New Jersey Department of Transportation–Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs to develop a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian circulation plan. The cities were awarded a joint planning grant and worked together to develop the [Ventnor-Margate Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#). As the first multi-municipal initiative to be funded under this program, the study offered a unique opportunity to develop a plan with shared objectives towards creating safer and more accessible travel for pedestrians and bicyclists. The Margate Planning Board formally adopted the plan in 2017 and has been implementing projects from the plan. The City of Margate received 10 certification points for completion of the Sustainable Jersey action: [Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Plan](#).



Atlantic Avenue stretches along the beach for a mile and a half across the length of the City of Margate. It is the last street before the beach and ocean. This street sees a lot of bicycle and foot traffic, as people need to cross the heavily trafficked street to get to the beach. The City of Margate embarked on a Road Diet to make the street safer for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles. In 2021, Atlantic Avenue was redesigned, and the four-lane roadway, with two lanes in each direction, was changed to one travel lane in each direction with a center turn lane and widened bicycle lanes, increasing safety for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. The project also improved walking and bicycle routes between the Tighe School and William H. Ross Elementary School. Amhurst Avenue, located along the Marina District, was improved to reduce flooding and a raised pedestrian walkway was added. Amhurst Avenue was made a one-way street with a bike lane. Amenities like bike racks, benches, trash receptacles and improved lighting were added.

MyCoast: New Jersey: To build awareness and educate the public about the changing shoreline, Steve has led the effort of Sustainable Margate’s promotion of the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve’s [MyCoast App](#). This app is used to collect and analyze photos of coastal events and places. Photos are linked to data about weather and tides to create reports that help stakeholders like government agencies, business owners and residents to understand coastal change and make informed decisions. Participants upload data to a website where it becomes part of a database so scientists can document changes in vulnerable flooding areas.



In 2023, Steve brought together representatives of the [Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve](#), the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the Margate Department of Public Works to discuss getting a MyCoast Photo Station. The meeting was successful, and a station, which works in conjunction with the MyCoast App, was installed on the Margate Fishing Pier. The stationary camera/phone holder provides a place where visitors can photograph an area and upload images to the MyCoast site. For an example, review Steve’s [page of reports](#).

Portable Water Filtration Tower: To help reduce the use of single use water bottles and encourage people to bring their own reusable water bottles, the Ventnor, Margate and Longport Downbeach green Teams collaborated to purchase a portable, filtered water bottle refilling station to use at events. The water station was funded through a \$4,500 Sustainable Jersey grant.



More about Steve: Steve has lived his whole life in Atlantic County. As a retired electrician, Steve has more time to dedicate to his writing and photography; he has contributed articles to [Downbeach.com](#). Steve also volunteers as an interviewer, recording the oral histories of local veterans for the [Veteran’s History Project](#) affiliated with the Atlantic County Historical Society. The recorded stories are shared with the veteran, the historical society and preserved in the National Archives of the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. In his free time, he enjoys kayaking, biking and scuba diving. He is also a scuba fossil hunter. In North Carolina, he found several huge teeth from the extinct megalodon—the largest shark that ever lived.

