



December 2014 Sustainability Hero Charnette Frederic, MHA, LNHA Irvington Council President and Green Team Chair

Councilwoman Charnette Frederic is known for mobilizing the community and rallying support for worthy causes. She has been an avid supporter of community health and wellness initiatives and is the driving force behind the Irvington Green Team.

Growing up in Cazale, a rural village high up in the mountains of Haiti, Charnette enjoyed full days immersed in nature that continue to influence her work today. A true community leader, Charnette understands the importance of pursuing sustainability and feels it's her responsibility to take care of her community and the environment.

At the age of 17, Charnette moved with her family from Haiti to Irvington Township and enrolled in Essex County College (ECC). She said, "One biology course with Professor Byron Johnson at ECC was enough to fall in love with science. Within three and a half years, I was done with both my associate degree at ECC and my bachelor degree at Rutgers University." To add to this she also obtained a Master in Healthcare Administration from Seton Hall University.



Education is of the utmost importance to Charnette's parents. Although her father and mother had limited schooling, they made it as a priority to provide the best education for their children. Charnette said, "My mother was so involved in the community and giving back. If I needed help with school work, or a mentor to help reach a goal, my mother found the right person in her large circle of friends that could help me succeed." Charnette made the most of her opportunities; she has worked as a Senior Scientist at Roche Molecular Systems, a division of Hoffmann-La Roche Diagnostic Company since 2002.

First Haitian-American Councilwoman in Irvington and Essex County

In 2012, Charnette was elected to the Irvington Township Council. She became the first Haitian-American Councilwoman in Irvington and Essex County. As a council member, Charnette is intent on enhancing Irvington's quality of life. She says "perception is crucial in the world that we are living; I want to change the perception of Irvington and becoming Sustainable Jersey certified was another way to make my township shine, while providing the community with a healthier environment."

After hearing about Sustainable Jersey at the New Jersey League of Municipalities Conference, Charnette took the lead to get Irvington certified with the Sustainable Jersey program. She recruited the green team, gained acceptance to pass resolutions, worked with township departments and filled in the application paperwork.

The [Irvington Green Team](#) meets monthly and is a small but dedicated group that includes two councilpersons, the Irvington health officer, the South Ward District leader, a media expert, the Irvington research officer and concerned citizens. This year Irvington Township achieved Sustainable Jersey certification and was honored at the Sustainable Jersey Annual luncheon in Atlantic City.



Irvington did two of the eleven priority actions by completing the Sustainable Land Use Pledge and the Prescription Drug Safety and Disposal action. Irvington also fulfilled the following initiatives: 1) Community/School Gardens, 2) Green Building Resolution, 3) Building Healthier Communities, 4) Complete Street Program, 5) Recycling Depot, 6) Construction and Demolition Waste Recycling Ordinance, 7) Innovative Community Project: 100% Smoke Free Parks, 8) Animals in the Community Education, 9) Lead Education and Outreach Programs, and 10) Energy Audit for One Building. You can read the [Irvington Township certification report](#) for a description of each of the certification actions that were completed.

Irvington Mayor's Wellness Campaign

Members of the current green team and the Irvington Health Department established the Irvington Mayor's Wellness Campaign. The campaign includes numerous ongoing programs that facilitate and promote community health and wellness. Charnette is proud of the partnership between the green team and the Irvington Health Department with green team member and Irvington's health officer Dr. Atif Nazir. The coalition includes the help of the Irvington Board of Education, Health Department, Housing Authority, Police Department, Fire Department, Parks and Recreation Department, local business, and faith based and community partner organizations to promote healthy physical activities and healthy nutrition option in the community. A number of programs support this campaign including:

Local Bodegas Healthy Choices Program

The local bodegas healthy choices program adds healthy food racks to local corner stores through a public/private partnership. Six neighborhood stores now offer Irvington residents healthy food options like fresh fruit. The goal of the initiative is to provide residents with healthy food and ultimately to give store owners an incentive to provide healthy choices. The six bodegas were chosen because these stores are frequented by school children. A secondary goal of the program is to help prevent childhood obesity. Irvington hopes the store owners will see a demand and eventually expand the healthy options as part of their inventory.

Irvington Play Streets Program

Irvington has started open/play street events that create two to three blocks of safe, fun, car-free space while featuring locally organized programming for people to enjoy.

The Irvington Green Team reached out to the council members from each ward to coordinate the events and mobilize the community members to participate. The Play Streets program provides recreational opportunities aimed at youth in Irvington's neighborhoods that currently lack adequate resources and access to recreational programs.



The mayor, council members, block association members, local community leaders and Township employees from the Recreation Department, Fire Department, Health Department and Police Department all came out and played with youth and community members to promote healthy physical activities. Programming included free public health screening, free public health educational literature and nutrition information as well as physical activities targeted towards youth and families. All participants enjoyed healthy food, fresh fruits, juices, nuts, granola bars, green salads, smoothies, lemonades and water.

Irvington Township applied for and received a \$9,000 Sustainable Jersey Small Grant for the Safe Park Program, which is a part of the Play Streets Program. The Safe Park Program will revitalize and upgrade the safety of the play spaces at 40th Street Park. Physical improvements, increased presence of Irvington public safety personnel, and park clean-up efforts will address both the physical safety of visitors to the park and ease the minds of residents when considering 40th Street Park as a viable recreational option.

Florence Avenue Elementary School Garden

Over the past 2.5 years, the township, with guidance from current green team members, has helped to establish and subsequently support various community and school gardens throughout Irvington.

The first of these gardens is located in the East Ward and is overseen by the East Ward Joint Block Association, along with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Irvington Councilman Paul Inman and the community. This particular garden runs a number of programs benefiting many residents in the East Ward.

The green team recently cut the ribbon on a brand new garden at the Florence Avenue School, to be overseen by the school principal, maintained by school maintenance staff, student council and the Irvington Green Team volunteers, supported by a master gardener from Rutgers University to serve the community in the West Ward of Irvington. The green team is continuously assessing new sites to encourage formation of new gardens.

Fran Kroeckel from the Master Gardeners of Essex County, Rutgers Cooperative Extension has provided hands on training in the garden and in classrooms on the garden curriculum to teachers and children. Additionally, the Florence Avenue Elementary School garden will teach students about healthy nutrition and the positive environmental impact of sustainable local food sources, as well as provide access to open spaces and outdoor recreation activities. The garden beautifies the school and teaches about food sources and the environment.



Book of Gratitude

There is a saying, “When you need something to get done, give it to a busy person.” This is definitely the case with Charnette, but she in turn seems to get her work done intelligently and with a smile on her face.

Charnette serves on the boards and is a member of many organizations including the Sustainable Jersey Essex County Hub, Neighborhood Health, and the Fondation des Cazaliens D’Outre Mer (FOCOM). She is also the President of the Florence Avenue School Parent Teacher Association (PTA). In her free time Charnette likes to spend time with her family, especially her husband, Joseph Frederic, and son, Ben. Ben and his friends have been a big help with the community garden and other green team activities. Charnette enjoys horseback riding, roller-skating, reading and visits to neighboring New York City. She’s thankful for her husband, Joseph Frederic, who she says has been very supportive. Charnette also enjoys writing and she has been working on a book of gratitude to document the amazing experiences of her life and thank the people who have supported her.

Advice for other Green Teams

The Irvington Green Team continues to move forward. Under Charnette’s leadership the group is working to implement the recommendations from the energy audits, initiate renewable community energy aggregation and have community members sign the [Green Team Pledge](#). An Irvington Green Fair, planned for December 7, is shaping up to be a large community event.

Charnette hopes the Irvington Green Team can be an example for other towns and she would love to mentor green teams just getting started. She said, “My advice to them would be to keep pushing forward; if you keep pushing for what you want, you will eventually be successful. There are no ridiculous ideas, wishes or aspirations; just put your mind to it. But it is important to plan. She likes the saying, ‘If we don’t plan, we plan to fail.’”