



## July 2014 Sustainability Hero Dominikija Prostak, Chair, Frenchtown Green Team

Frenchtown's Green Team Chair, Dominikija Prostak, has big expectations; she has found that the bigger the problem solved, the bigger the return and the bigger your capacity grows.

She likes to tell the [Zig Zigar](#) story of the man who was fishing on a pier; he kept the small fish and threw back the large ones. Someone eventually questioned the man to find out why he was keeping the small fish and throwing the big ones back. He said, 'I only have this itty bitty frying pan.' Dominikija makes a conscious effort to not be constrained by the small frying pan problem in life and her work with the Frenchtown Green Team.

Frenchtown Borough is located along the banks of the Delaware River in Hunterdon County, across from Bucks County, Pennsylvania and has about 1,300 residents. Dominikija is of Ukranian descent. She grew up on a farm in Hunterdon County and has lived in Frenchtown for about 25 years.

Sustainability wasn't a conscious focus when she was growing up, it was just everyday life at the farm where she said pesticides and wasteful practices were not tolerated. In her professional life, she was a Frenchtown councilwoman for four years; she was a member of the business association for many years and currently owns her own business.



### Volunteer Led Frenchtown Green Team Achieves Sustainable Jersey Certification

The [Frenchtown Green Team](#) was established by municipal resolution for the purpose of obtaining Sustainable Jersey certification in late 2010. Since its inception, the green team worked methodically on Sustainable Jersey actions and achieved certification in 2013 at the bronze-level. You can review the certification report [here](#). Actions completed include Energy Audits for Municipal Facilities, a Community Garden, an Education for Sustainability Program and implementation of a Complete Streets program. In addition, the team embraced activities outside of Sustainable Jersey actions including park clean-ups, documenting progressive backyard gardening techniques and planting and maintaining planters in the downtown.

Dominikija volunteered countless hours to pull together the Sustainable Jersey certification application for the town and said it was well worth it when she was able to attend the Sustainable Jersey Annual Awards luncheon in Atlantic City with the other certified towns. The green team meets the third Monday of the month and has a core group of about seven people that attend. The Frenchtown Green Team also enjoys support from Mayor Warren Cooper and participation of the Frenchtown Borough staff.

### Making Your Green Team Financially Sustainable

Dominikija feels strongly that green teams should strive to be financially sustainable by raising funds. She said, "With less than 1,300 residents we took the stance that raising funds to support our green team, without the use of taxpayer monies, was the sustainable thing to do." She recommends that green teams consider doing green fairs, dinners and wine tastings to raise money. In addition, Frenchtown applied for and received a \$2,000 [Sustainable Jersey Small Grant](#) in 2012 that was used to fund green team events, promotions and marketing.



One of the Frenchtown Green Team's most successful events is its green fair; the most recent one raised \$1,342. The green fair is one of the first events where Dominikija used her 'think big' approach. In the past, the green team had

done a nice fair with about 12 vendors in the downtown. The first Green Fair Committee envisioned a fair with 20 to 30 vendors dispersed in the downtown. Dominikija worked with the group to help them understand that if you're going to do the work for the fair, you might as well make it a big fair. The fair took place at Old Frenchtown Field, a large open space suitable for many more vendors.

For the 2013 Fair, the Steering Committee was carefully selected based on experience, talent and commitment to local sustainability. The outreach to the community was extensive and included the schools, businesses, churches and civic groups. About 60 vendors and organizations were secured for the event after reaching out through media releases, the Borough website, the [green team Facebook page](#) and word of mouth.



The event included a speaker's tent with continuous talks and demonstrations around sustainable living, a 4H petting farm, healthy food vendors, free water from the local well and local entertainment. The green team was focused on making the event educational so they traded live music for educational speakers like Mike McGrath, host of the nationally syndicated public radio show "You Bet Your Garden." The green fair attracted both Frenchtown residents and visitors from out of town and was attended by an estimated 1,200 people throughout the day.

The green fair was easily accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists. Bike racks for parking were provided on site by [HART Commuter Information Services](#). HART is a non-profit that promotes sustainable transportation in Hunterdon County by working with commuters, employers and communities. HART's Sustainable Hunterdon initiative provides local municipalities with free assistance as they pursue Sustainable Jersey certification. Tara Shepherd, the Executive Director of HART said, "Dominikija reached out to HART asking for help with the Sustainable Jersey certification transportation actions. She brings a passionate and innovative spirit to the work, which is important for leading a green team."

A Complete Streets policy was adopted by the Borough and numerous improvements have been made to make the community more bicycle and pedestrian friendly. A repaving and drainage project along Bridge Street included the installation of accessible ramps and parking, two raised crosswalks and restriping. With HART assistance, Frenchtown has conducted three walkability audits and upgraded several crosswalks in the downtown area to a more visible "continental" design.

#### **Annual Rummage Sale: Reuse Prevents Landfill Trash**

In June 2013, the Frenchtown Green Team, in cooperation with Kingwood Township's Green Team, held a rummage sale. The proceeds collected were split, and an additional \$1,116.64 was added to each of the green team's coffers. Dominikija said "the universe has a way of making things happen when you get out there and work hard." Right before the rummage sale she got a call from someone that was closing an estate. The caller was offering the contents of the estate free of charge as long as the contents were moved off the property. Well, Dominikija recruited pick-up trucks from her brother and a green team member to pick up and deliver the estate's goods to the rummage sale. The infusion of estate materials really added to the sale and the profits. Also, the sale prevented useful things from going into the landfill.

Dominikija's advice for green teams is to concentrate on marketing. She finds that promotion is a key factor to making sure the community knows about the good work and important green team issues like backyard composting. She said that it is key to embrace diversity on the green team. "There will be conflicts, but it's the job of the chair to find the gem or talent that every person brings to the table," she added.

Over the years, Dominikija has been on a mission to improve the health of downtown Frenchtown. She feels strongly that a thriving, sustainable downtown directly correlates to the heart and value of the community. In recent years, Frenchtown has become a cultural destination with many art galleries and specialty shops and restaurants. The county expression, 'Relax. Slow Down. You're in Hunterdon County now,' may not apply to this creative self-starter. We look forward to seeing what Dominikija and the Frenchtown Green Team will do next.