



September 2014 Sustainability Hero Monica Coffey, Chair, Sustainable Margate

As the eldest daughter in a family with three children, Monica Coffey definitely shows the leadership and drive common with the first child. Born and raised in South Jersey, Monica grew up in Turnersville and has spent the last 12 years living in Margate, New Jersey.

As someone who has always been environmentally-focused, Monica has made it her goal to get the City of Margate Sustainable Jersey certified. She is the chair of Sustainable Margate, the city's green team. Monica said, "When you love where you live and the people in your community, it only makes sense to join a green team and take steps to make the city more sustainable."

Home to Lucy the Elephant

Located in Atlantic County, Margate is a popular Jersey Shore destination and home of Lucy the Elephant (a 65-foot wooden elephant) and Marven Gardens, of Monopoly board game fame. Located on Absecon Island, Margate is approximately 1.5 miles long and one mile wide at its widest point. Two miles west of Atlantic City, the city has a year round population of 6,354 persons that grows to over 25,000 people in the summer.



Taking into consideration the size, location and fivefold swell in population during the summer, Sustainable Margate has a different set of challenges and opportunities when working on Sustainable Jersey certification actions. The green team consists of up to 18 people with a smaller core group that implements many of the projects. The group is diverse; it includes the president of the Margate Business Association, the public works commissioner, a representative of the library, a local business owner, city staff and community members.

Atlantic County Utilities Authority

In addition to her tireless volunteer efforts with the green team, Monica has worked for 23 years at the Atlantic County Utilities Authority (ACUA). For the past 19 years, she has served as the communications manager and prior to this she worked as the household hazardous waste coordinator for four years. In addition to her core responsibilities, she manages public education programs and develops materials to increase environmental awareness. She also assists with the very successful annual, county-wide Earth Day celebration that attracts 4,000 attendees. The ACUA organizes and supports many sustainability initiatives, including a [bike collection](#) program that accepts bikes and refurbishes them for donation to local children through St. Nicholas of Tolentine Church in Atlantic City. The next collection is on Saturday, September 6, 2014. Before the ACUA, Monica was the Gloucester County recycling coordinator.

Monica has a BS in Marketing from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, a Masters in Environmental Education and Conservation from Rowan University and is a few credits shy of an Urban Planning Certificate from Rutgers University.

Pre-School Connections Lead to Sustainable Margate

Many of Monica's best green team partners have developed from friendships and acquaintances in Margate. This was true with Brenda Taube who is the Margate Commissioner of Public Works. Commissioner Taube works closely with Monica on sustainability initiatives and makes it a point to thank Monica often for her passion and commitment to Margate and the environment. Monica first met Commissioner Taube at the Ross School in Margate as they picked up their daughters who were in the same class.

A friendship grew and when the commissioner took office, she rekindled some earlier efforts to get the city involved with Sustainable Jersey. Luckily, Commissioner Taube is also focused on the environment and understood the benefits of getting Margate involved with the Sustainable Jersey program. Monica has had good luck recruiting green team members at school events, her latest addition came after she met a parent on her daughter's school field trip; this parent is now a key member of a subcommittee that is exploring ways to limit carry-out bags throughout the city.

To help the green team gain momentum, Monica applied and helped secure a \$2,000 capacity building grant from the Sustainable Jersey Small Grants program. The grant is being used to fund a municipal carbon footprint plan and to develop promotional and educational materials for the green team.



Post-Sandy Strategic Planning Report

Margate was hit hard by Hurricane Sandy and the city is working to develop a post-Sandy Strategic Planning report. As a result of the storm and growing understanding of the impacts of climate change on coastal communities, funding is being made available to assist communities in becoming more resilient. One of the requirements to access the funding is that towns develop strategic plans to demonstrate how they intend to deal with climate adaptation and prepare for increased flooding. [Climate Adaptation: Flooding Risk](#) is a new Sustainability Jersey action and this work will count towards the city's Sustainable Jersey certification.

Public Forum on Climate Change, Sea Level Rise, Flooding and Storm Water Management

When asked about recent accomplishments, Monica was quick to mention a successful event that Sustainable Margate put on in conjunction with Margate City officials this summer. Attended by about 100 people, the workshop brought together New Jersey's top experts to discuss how government and residents can adapt to the changing environment. Presenters included Dr. Ken Miller of Rutgers University who is well-known for his research into sea level rise, Lisa Auermuller, the Watershed Coordinator for the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve to discuss an online tool Flood Mapper, which helps municipalities plan for resilience and Dr. Chris Obropta of Rutgers University, whose specialty is storm water management. Community members received a lot of information and the forum is helping to build momentum for future resiliency planning in Margate and in other coastal towns in South Jersey.

Municipal and Community Carbon Footprint

Margate is partnering with Stockton College on a municipal and community carbon footprint study. The study, to be conducted by three sustainability students under the direction of Professor Patrick Hossay, will measure the amount of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions produced by the city in a given year. The footprint will detail the sources of emissions so that actions can be focused on the largest emitters. Monica said that the footprint will also enable Margate to track its progress and determine if new policies are having an impact.

Options for Bikes and Pedestrians

One of the priorities of Sustainable Margate is to increase bike and pedestrian traffic throughout the city and across Absecon Island. A grant currently before the New Jersey Department of Transportation would convert Atlantic Avenue to two lanes and increase the size of the bike lane. Monica is also hoping to add more bike racks at the beach to encourage residents to leave the car at home.

Sustainable Margate is making progress on a Safe Routes to School initiative for the two schools in Margate, the elementary school and the middle school. Incidentally, both schools are also ahead of the game with renewable energy, the roofs have had solar panels since 2009. Although Margate is a walkable city, many people drive their kids to school. Monica invited David Calderetti from [Cross County Connection](#) to make a presentation about Safe Routes to Schools. He gave an inspiring talk to an audience that included the superintendent of schools, parents and community members. Sustainable Margate will launch the program with a walk to school day on October 8 and hopefully continue with a walking Wednesday promotion.

Sustainable Jersey Atlantic/Cape May County Hub

Sustainable Jersey is especially excited that Monica has stepped up as one of the steering committee members for the newly formed Sustainable Jersey Atlantic /Cape May County Hub. This group is bringing together all of the green teams in Atlantic/Cape May counties to develop partnerships, share information and work together. The next meeting of the Atlantic/Cape May County Hub is on October 22, 2014 at the Atlantic County Community College. The event will feature Chris Badurek of the NJ Resiliency Network speaking about the importance of resiliency planning. He will share the tools and resources available to help communities through the process, while earning Sustainable Jersey certification points through new resiliency planning actions



Perseverance and Passion

Monica tells the green teams that she works with that “Perseverance is key. First start with a core group of people that have the time and desire to make the community more sustainable. A big group is nice, but most importantly you need people who can get things done and make things happen.” She said, “The best way I have found to do this is to find out what people are passionate about and help guide them to the right action or project that fits their interest.”

Four Daughters and Half-Marathons

In addition to her full time job and volunteer work, Monica is the proud mother of four daughters, Katherine, age 12, Claire and Ava, 9 year old twins and Elizabeth, age four. She loves running and participating in half-marathons around Atlantic County. Overall Monica said she is happiest when she can spend time with her family - she enjoys the outdoors and cooking meals at home. She’s thankful for her husband Jim, who she says is a huge help and enables her to be active in the community.

It’s amazing the ripple effect that one focused, smart and committed individual can have on their community. Monica and the hard working members of Sustainable Margate in partnership with the City of Margate are making great strides. Sustainable Jersey looks forward to reviewing their certification application and accepting the city into the growing list of certified towns.