

Building a Better Future for All

by Linda Sechrist

In a township of 70,000 residents, heartfelt intentions, combined with small actions, can lead to positive changes. This idea was exactly what Lori Braunstein, executive director of Sustainable Cherry Hill, had in mind when she approached the mayor in 2007 with an offer to collaborate with township decision-makers and build a more sustainable future for her community.

"I don't have a background in environmental science and I'm not the outdoorsy type," says the Woodcrest resident. "However, I am the parent of a daughter who is a college freshman and a son who is a high school sophomore."

Feeling a sense of responsibility for the world's present condition, Braunstein lay awake nights and imagined a time in the future when her children would hold her accountable for not acting on the evidence of climate change and the limitations of Earth's natural resources. "I pictured them saying, 'We trusted you to live sustainably, and you didn't,'" reflects Braunstein,

whose musings and increasing unease with environmental problems led her to rally her neighbors and friends, who supported her when she called upon town council members. "Our approach was positive," advises Braunstein. "We wanted to know how we could help them to make a difference." The strategic partnership resulted in a Green Action Plan that was passed by the council in 2008.

Although Braunstein may not have been enamored of the outdoors when she began her activism in 2007, she is now well educated in it, having since then completed the Environmental Leadership Program's yearlong fellowship certification course and the Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education's New Jersey Learns Leadership training course. Today, the result of what she and other community members have learned is embodied in Sustainable Cherry Hill (SCH), a volunteer, 501(c)3 nonprofit outreach and educational organization that fosters global sustainability at a local level.



SCH strives to continuously tap Cherry Hill and the surrounding region's greatest resource—its people—in order to facilitate a shift to a sustainable lifestyle, one that avoids environmentally damaging and socially inequitable consumption patterns and instead works in harmony with the planet, its resources and their limits. The organization hosts educational events and networking opportunities; supports community-based task forces; and acts as a general clearinghouse of information on sustainability news, happenings, legislation and grant opportunities.

Essentially a community group, SCH recognizes that everyone who makes small changes helps to collectively bring about big differences. Members know it is critical to establish and nurture relationships with all area stakeholders: government, schools, businesses, faith groups, other community groups and individuals throughout South Jersey.

For individuals interested in joining SCH in its mission to assist a communal shift toward sustainability, there are many ways to get involved. From taking part in action-oriented task forces and attending monthly educational events, networking opportunities and occasional fundraisers to offering support through donations or sponsorships, simply joining an email list or checking the always-fresh website, there are entry points for everyone.

Visit SustainableCherryHill.org, email Lori.Braunstein@SustainableCherryHill.org, or call 609-238-3449.

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