

2019 January-March, Bi-Monthly Board Report, Education & Outreach, Becky Laboy, E&O Specialist
March 21, 2019

In support of OCSCD's APO, which includes in its vision "to be recognized as a conservation leader", and includes in its mission to "protect, restore and sustain fully functioning soil resources...", "further natural resource stewardship through educational programs..." and "develop and nurture effective relationships... to sustain functioning ecosystem services...", the Education Department has championed 2 main initiatives to effectuate OCSCD's vision and mission:

1. **Jersey-Friendly Yards Initiative:** created and launched by the Barnegat Bay Partnership, and piloted by OCSCD, Jersey-Friendly Yards has propelled OCSCD to the forefront as a conservation leader in the Barnegat Bay watershed. The 4 successful JFY grant projects completed over the past 4 years resulted in the installation of 22 Jersey-Friendly gardens and landscapes (including an award-winning "2018 Garden of Distinction" at OceanFirst Bank in Toms River) and 50 outreach programs reaching 2000 community members. In partnership with Barnegat Bay Partnership, OCSCD continues to grow and build on our success through relationship building with community members and through outreach efforts at venues throughout Ocean County, as well as New Jersey. OCSCD and BBP have partnered with Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Ocean County to host 2 annual Jersey-Friendly Yards Conferences, and are planning the 3rd annual Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference for Saturday October 19, 2019. OCSCD and BBP are seeking a partnership with the NJDEP Watershed Ambassador program to incorporate JFY into the annual training provided to each cohort of Ambassadors, in an effort to "train-the-trainer", and get the Jersey-Friendly Yards program into other New Jersey watersheds. Becky continues to write grants to secure funding to support further Jersey-Friendly garden installations, as well as education and outreach efforts.
 - **SHIP Gardens:** In partnership with Jakes Branch County Park, OCSCD is continuing to manage and maintain these "Jersey-Friendly demonstration gardens" as tools for teaching and learning. The SHIP Gardens are established along the "Plant Discovery Trail", as it is now officially named by the Park. The Blue Bird Nest Boxes, installed last year by an Eagle Scout, will be incorporated into this trail as an interrelated nature feature. Jersey-Friendly Gardener, Lisa Mazzuca, has taken the role of volunteer garden manager.
2. **Urban and Community Agriculture Initiative:** With the launch and completion of the 2017 Urban Agriculture Conservation (UAC) grant through NACD, OCSCD has focused efforts to increase community food security, improve access to healthy food, and provide education and resources about urban agriculture practices. A sustaining result of the UAC grant is the formation of the **Community Garden Network of Ocean County (CGN)**, developed from a need to create a network of community gardeners, to share knowledge and resources, help sustain existing community gardens and help develop new ones, and to connect communities with fresh, nutritious food. The resulting CGN is a partnership between OCSCD, Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station, Rutgers Master Gardeners of Ocean County, Fulfill, Soil to Soul, Southern Ocean Hunger Foundation, Wrangle Brook Community Garden and Community Garden of Beach Haven. We hold monthly meetings with a core group of leaders, and have confirmed 6 educational programs on our calendar this year.
 - For our first "project", the CGN of OC has connected with the Toms River Green Team, who requested assistance to jump-start their garden at Riverwood Park in Toms River. They have a fenced-in garden area that needs attention. CGN will assist in cleaning it and planting the 6 available beds, in an effort to attract community gardeners. Food grown by CGN will be donated to the local food pantry. Once established, the garden will be managed by the Toms River Green Team and gardened by the community. create a network of community gardens, sustain existing and help develop new community gardens,

Following is a list of programs and events implemented by the Education Department that support the above initiatives and the overall mission of OCSCD.

Outreach Programs, Conferences and Events: (APO Item #5, Activity 5 & 13)

- **January 22:** The **Community Garden Network of Ocean County**, offered our first education program, "Crop Planning, Seed Sowing and Winter Sowing", hosted by Rutgers Cooperative Extension. (**33 people** attended)

- **February 2-6:** Becky attended the **NACD Annual Meeting in San Antonio Texas**. Inspiring talks about conservation and partnerships were offered at the Opening General Session, the Leadership Luncheon, and the Closing General Session. She attended daily programs focusing on the following topics: “Social Marketing Strategies to Inspire Conservation Stewardship”, “Interactive Story Maps, How to Enhance District Reports”, “Spreading the Conservation District Message”, and “Embracing Conservation Assistance Opportunities”. She met fellow UAC recipients at the “Urban Agriculture Meet-and-Greet”, and attended the “Urban and Community Conservation Symposium” featuring 6 Conservation Districts showcasing their UAC grant funded urban and community projects. Becky also participated in the “Meadows Center for Water and the Environment” Field Trip at Texas State University in San Marcos. This trip offered an overview of NACD, offered opportunity for networking with other Conservation District employees and partners, and provided insights into potential projects which OCSCD can initiate and engage. **“Thank you” to the Board for providing the support to send Becky on this educational trip!**
- **February 12: Potter Creek Crusaders.** Becky provided a program, “Soil Scientists”, to this afterschool environmental group of 6th graders. Students use Rapitest Kits to determine a soil sample’s N, P, K and pH. Students learn the importance of nutrients and pH to plants. “Soil Scientists” is now listed on the OCSCD website as one of our offered programs for children. **(19 students participated)**
- **February 14: Berkeley Township Historical Society.** Becky presented, “Attracting Birds to Your Jersey-Friendly Yard”. Jersey-Friendly plants were highlighted, along with the birds that benefit from them. **(23 students attended)**
- **February 27: MATES EXPO** Becky attended as a judge for the Botany projects. **8 amazing student projects** were presented. The first place winner in this category conducted a project called: “The Effect of Inorganic Fertilizers on Ulva Lactuca” by Taner Drexler. It has a direct correlation to the goals of the Jersey-Friendly Yards initiative – to limit/eliminate detrimental fertilizers in the Barnegat Bay. I’ve reached out to Dr. Wnek for a copy of his report. OCSCD’s APO lists one of the “Values and Appreciation” as “effectively apply science, research and management to sustain our natural resources.” One possibility is to explore partnerships with student researchers on soil and plant related topics, such as Taner Drexler’s project.
- **March 2: Native Plant Society of New Jersey Annual Spring Conference,** exhibited the Jersey-Friendly Yards table. (approximately **125 people** attended)
- **March 5: Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve,** in partnership with Watershed Ambassador, Naomi Jainarine, Becky and Karen presented “Jersey-Friendly Yards Tutorial”.
- **March 9: Pinelands Short Course.** Becky and Karen Walzer co-presented, “Attracting Birds to Your Jersey-Friendly Yard”. We introduced participants to the Jersey-Friendly yards website, and showcased Pinelands specific Jersey-Friendly plants that are beneficial to birds and wildlife. **(55 attendees).**
- **March 12:** The **Community Garden Network of Ocean County** hosted “The Role of the Gardener in Combating Climate Change”, presented by Jeanine Cava of *Soil to Soul* and Greg Vizzi of The Greater Hammonton Permaculture Club, at Barnegat branch Library. **(15 people** attended)
- **March 18:** Volunteer Work Day to install fencing around the 5 gardens, and reapply mulch.
- **June 8: Barnegat Bay Blitz.** The NJDEP is moving the annual Blitz location to a different watershed. BBP will now be taking the lead on implementing one in the Barnegat Bay watershed. OCSCD will work with the Forked River Team Captains.

Anticipated Outreach Programs, Conferences and Events: (APO Item #5, Activity 5 & #13)

- **March 25: Toms River Intermediate South Afterschool Environmental Club.** Program: “Soil Scientists”, will be presented to this afterschool environmental group of 6-8th graders. Students will use Rapitest Kits to determine a soil sample’s N, P, K and pH. Students will learn the importance of nutrients and pH to plants.
- **April 9:** The **Community Garden Network of Ocean County**, “Integrated Pest Management” by Rutgers Masters Gardeners IPM Committee.
- **April 17: Barnegat Bay Environmental Educators Roundtable.** This year’s theme: “Changing Climate, changing Watershed”. Over a dozen exhibitors, 7 workshops, keynote: Lisa Auermuller, Assistant Director of Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve. (See attached for workshops and keynote descriptions.)
- **April 29: Sierra Club of Ocean County,** “Jersey Friendly Yards Tutorial”; Karen Walzer and Becky Laboy.

- May 2: **Brick Branch of the OC Library**, “Jersey-Friendly Yards – landscaping for a Healthier Barnegat Bay”; Becky Laboy and Karen Walzer.
- May 11: **Envirothon**. As co-coordinator of the Wildlife Station, Becky has been attending monthly meetings, and is writing the “Wildlife Station – Written Test” for this event. OCSCD Volunteer, Irene Tish, will be assisting with the Wildlife Station this year.
- October 19: We are planning for our **3rd Annual Jersey-Friendly Yards Conference**. Our theme is: “Putting Your Jersey-Friendly Yard into Practice”.

Grants: (APO Item #4, Activity 1)

- **No current grants at this time.** Becky continues to search for grant opportunities that support the District’s mission.

Anticipated Grants: (APO Item #5, Activity 1)

- In partnership with BBP, OCSCD submitted “**Bay-Friendly Stewardship Program**” proposal, requesting \$92,756.65 total, of which **\$53,500** is designated for OCSCD. NJDEP will be announcing grant awardees in March.
- OCSCD submitted a grant to Pollinator Partnership: “**Jersey-Friendly Pollinator Gardens**”. This project will result in the creation of a Jersey-Friendly Pollinator Garden curriculum. The curriculum will be based on the Jersey-Friendly Yards website and will guide teachers and students through the steps necessary to design, create and install their own Jersey-Friendly pollinator garden, using the tools and resources on the website. The Pollinator Partnership will be announcing their awardees in February. *We were notified that we did not receive this grant.*
- OCSCD had submitted an application to EPA’s “**Local Foods, Local Places**” program for an opportunity to receive a two-day training workshop on how to create a strategic plan – with the premise of creating opportunities to grow fresh food in Lakewood. (This is a non-monetary grant.) We were offered a semi-finalist interview with LFLP administrators, which we conducted on December 13, with our Steering Committee. *We were notified that we did not receive this grant.*

Special Events: (APO Item #5, Activity 4, 6, 10, 14)

- **Poster Contest:** Theme: “Life in the Soil: Dig Deeper”. We received 24 entries with representatives from all four grade groups. Staff selected one winner from each grade group. The 4 finalists are submitted to the Board to select one Grand Champion Winner. This Grand Champion Winner will receive \$50 and her/his school will receive \$500 in native plants (provided by Pinelands Nursery) for a Jersey-Friendly garden. The four winning posters will be submitted for entry into the State competition.
- **22nd Annual Environmental Educators Roundtable:** will be held on **April 17** at the Lighthouse Center for Natural Resource Education. Presenters include: NJ Sea Grant Consortium, Conserve Wildlife Foundation, Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of OC, ReClam the Bay, and Project Terrapin, with Lisa Auermuller of JCNERR providing the Keynote.
- **Envirothon:** scheduled for **May 11**. This year’s focus is, “Agriculture and the Environment: Knowledge and Technology to Feed the World”. Becky is preparing the Wildlife Written Test.
- **Trout in the Classroom:** 2019 TIC Field Day at the FREC will be on **May 16**. We will host several high schools for their trout release and provide a rotation of programs.
- **Barnegat Bay Blitz:** the NJDEP is moving the Blitz location to a different watershed. BBP will be taking the lead on having one in the Barnegat Bay watershed on **June 8**. OCSCD will work with the Forked River Team Captains.

Professional Development: (APO Item #3, Activity 3)

- February 1, 15, March 6, April 1, 24, : Rutgers Green Infrastructure Champions Program workshop series. Topics include: “How to identify green infrastructure projects in your town”, “Moving from planning to implementation of green infrastructure”, “Maintaining green infrastructure practices/projects”, and more.
- March 2: Native Plant Society of New Jersey Annual Spring Conference (and exhibited JFY)

Internships/Volunteers: (APO Item #5, Activity 12)

- Lisa Mazzuca, one of OCSCD’s “Jersey-Friendly gardeners”, has offered her volunteer services to assist with managing and maintaining the SHIP gardens.