

# 11th Annual Sustainable Raritan River Conference and Awards Ceremony



## Resilience and the Raritan

**Richard Weeks Hall of Engineering**

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Busch Campus

500 Bartholomew Road, Piscataway

**Friday, June 7, 2019**

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## 2019 Sustainable Raritan Award Recipients

### Public Education Award

#### **Michele Bakacs, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Rutgers**

Michele Bakacs has been a staunch champion of Environmental Education in the Lower Raritan Watershed for more than a decade. She has developed and conducted rain barrel builds, rain garden workshops, Green Infrastructure and community gardening learning sessions, lead remediation outreach and much more to the English and Spanish speaking residents of Middlesex and Union Counties. In recent years she has oriented the education and outreach work conducted by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Office to include a stronger focus on Raritan River issues.

Perhaps more significantly, Ms. Bakacs has worked to build the capacity of area nonprofits to develop and offer environmental education programming that addresses Raritan River issues. Ms. Bakacs helped ensure the successful launch of the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership by making connections to expand LRWP's network of partners, by lending her expertise in K-12 science standards and resources, and by helping the LRWP focus on areas in need. She also helped launch a new civic science bacterial monitoring program for the freshwater/brackish areas of the Raritan River.

### Citizen Action Award

#### **Susan Edmunds, Mill Brook Guardian**

Through her on-going stewardship and historical research on Mill Brook, Dr. Susan Edmunds has documented the condition of this tributary of the Raritan River for the past 30 years, while helping to clean litter from the stream, maintain its riparian buffers and restore portions of degraded areas. As a self-appointed guardian and advocate of the ecological well-being of the Mill Brook, Dr. Edmunds has continuously learned about and shared her understanding of how people, especially residents living along the Mill Brook, can better care for this waterway. To this end, she has researched and photographed the Brook and synthesized her findings into a wonderful online "storymap" titled, "Millbrook: Portrait of an Urban Stream".

Dr. Edmunds has shared the history and ecology of the Mill Brook many times at nearby venues, on local television programs, and through informal conversations. Dr. Edmunds has successfully encouraged others to

appreciate the Mill Brook as much as she does, and she believes and has clearly demonstrated that, when residents visit and learn about Mill Brook, they too will become good stream stewards.

### **Stewardship Award**

#### **Doriann Kerber, Councilwoman, Borough of Milltown**

Ms. Kerber has been instrumental in engaging the local community to address the municipality's stormwater issues with green infrastructure. She brings tremendous energy to all her projects. Her extensive community volunteering goes far beyond work in her hometown of Milltown to include serving as voting member of the Middlesex County Water Resources Association, member of the Jersey Water Works Green Infrastructure Committee, member of the Milltown Green Team, member of the East Brunswick Green Team, member of the East Brunswick Sustainable Task Force, and member of the Board of the Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership. She also has completed the Rutgers Green Infrastructure Training Course to become a Green Infrastructure Champion.

Councilwoman Kerber is a steward of stewards. Ms. Kerber believes in community outreach, and she helps the larger Central New Jersey community improve their environmental stewardship by volunteering to assist them as they implement local Green Infrastructure projects. Ms. Kerber has helped multiple communities identify and write thousands of dollars of grants for Green Infrastructure projects. When the grants come through, she organizes community members to remove impermeable surfaces and plant rain gardens, and she works to ensure community capacity for on-going maintenance and stewardship.

### **Leadership Award**

#### **Walter C. Lane, Director of Planning, Somerset County**

Under Walter's astute leadership since 2014, the Somerset County Planning Division is widely seen as a recognized planning leader in New Jersey. In his role as Planning Director, Walter has initiated and successfully implemented highly innovative and award-winning projects that support economic development while preserving vast amounts of open space and active farmland. The success of these efforts is due to his leadership and the collaborative working relationships he has established with all of the 21 municipalities in Somerset County, the Somerset County Business Partnership, state and regional agencies and a multitude of public- and private-sector partners.

Walter has worked tirelessly to advance the County's planning priorities. Many of the planning initiatives launched in Somerset County during the last several years address the key issues originally outlined in the Sustainable Raritan River Action Plan. These planning projects support efforts to preserve critical habitat, sustainable redevelopment, public access to the Raritan River, storm water management and resiliency.

### **Citizen Action Award**

#### **James Lemieux, Student, Raritan Valley Community College**

Jamie is a full-time student in environmental science at RVCC. As a part-time campus sustainability intern, he spent the fall of 2018 repairing a large deer enclosure in the riparian buffer on campus and removing invasive species from the area. He also periodically collected water and soil samples from inside and outside the enclosure to help monitor changes in soil and water quality over time. Jamie also took the initiative to apply for a Nature Conservancy Roots for Rivers grant to expand the riparian buffer along the stream that runs through campus and drains to the North Branch of the Raritan River. After receiving funding, and with support from the

New Jersey Water Supply Authority, he ordered 350 trees and shrubs, and organized teams of student volunteers to plant and secure the trees.

Jamie also assisted the Manville Green Team with their own Roots for Rivers grant. They had received the funding but were having difficulty marshalling the manpower and expertise to implement the project. With support from the Green Team and Manville's Department of Public Works, Jamie made the arrangements to order the trees and shrubs and have them delivered, and then organized volunteers to get the vegetation and tree guards in the ground.

## **Government Innovation Award**

### **Monmouth County Division of Planning – Naval Weapons Station Earle Partnership**

The NWS Earle Joint Land Use Study and Climate Resiliency response is a study and planning partnership which aims to help protect and restore natural lands and shorelines and provide climate resilience to the area surrounding Naval Weapons Station Earle. The partners took steps to implement the study by negotiating for a five-year land purchase agreement through the federal Readiness and Environmental Integration (REPI) Program. In the first year, this program is contributing \$765,000 toward open land acquisition within the Raritan Watershed near Earle, and that amount will be matched by other funds.

Additionally, the partners are conducting a Climate Resilience Study for Raritan Bay, which is designed to improve the resiliency of NWS Earle facilities and navigation channels by proposing at least ten resilience projects that vary in size and scope and could include living shoreline creation, wetland restorations, habitat improvements and stormwater management improvements. A key to the success of this partnership has been Monmouth County and NWS Earle's strong successful outreach to local communities and conservation organizations to ensure that detailed information is included, and to maximize the engagement and support of local residents and elected officials.