

Sustainability Hero



March 2023



Lois Kraus

Co-Chair, Westfield Green Team (Union County)

Lois Kraus is the co-chair of the [Westfield Green Team](#). A retired risk manager and middle school science teacher, her time is now focused on educating others about sustainability and resiliency. As co-chair of the Westfield Green Team, she coordinates volunteers and team priorities, as well as pioneering the Green Career Fair for high school students. Lois is generous with her time and talents, taking these initiatives outside of municipal borders to collaborate with those around New Jersey. Lois is passionate about working with student groups to help them set and achieve their environmental goals.



Lois's list of achievements and memberships is impressive. She is a [New Jersey Science Convention](#) board member, a [Climate Reality Leader](#), a Rutgers Tree Steward, a [Rutgers Master Gardener](#) and a [Rutgers Environmental Steward](#). In 2020, Lois co-founded Advocates for Transforming Landscaping in New Jersey (ATL-NJ), a volunteer cooperative seeking to transition away from the use of two-stroke, gas-powered landscaping equipment in New Jersey. She is a Duke Ecology Master, a [Rutgers Green Infrastructure Champion](#), a Rahway River Stream Assessor, an [Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education](#) (ANJEE) member, a Union County Invasive Species Strike Force member, a 4-H Volunteer, a [Literacy New Jersey](#) English as a Second Language volunteer, an Informal Environmental Educator and works part-time at [Sustainable Haus](#), a zero waste, refill and home goods shop in Summit.

Lois said, "The next generation deserves a healthy planet. I feel a tremendous responsibility to our youth to serve as a role model. I especially enjoy working with young people in support of their passions to make a difference. As an educator, I'm grateful that New Jersey was the first state in the nation to make climate change education required for K-12 in all subject areas. Educating people about sustainability takes a lot of patience and requires meeting each individual where they are to make incremental but positive change."



Lois first joined the Westfield Green Team in 2019 to fulfill a class assignment given by one of her environmental heroines, Dr. Daniela Shebitz, the executive director of the School of Environmental and Sustainability Sciences at Kean University.

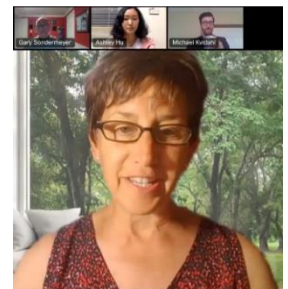
Town of Westfield - Sustainable Jersey Silver Certified: The [Town of Westfield](#) has achieved silver-level certification in 2020, 2021 and 2022 and was the recipient of the [Sustainable Jersey Rookie of the Year Award](#) in 2020. The 25-member green team meets monthly and is organized by areas of focus. Lois said, "The Westfield Green Team members are impressive. I'm lucky to work with so many accomplished and active leaders including my co-chair David Siegler, Medea Villere, Tim Van Epp, Janette Spezio, Catherine Hirschman Choudhry, our highly supportive council liaison David Contract and many more. We're also fortunate to have a very active Student Auxiliary Green Team (high school/middle school students) who collaborate with us on school based initiatives." The Town of Westfield has received \$54,000 in [Sustainable Jersey grants](#) over the years which has helped to support the launch of various green team projects. To learn more about the sustainability actions that Westfield has accomplished, read the [2022 Sustainable Jersey Certification Report of the Town of Westfield](#).

Electric Lawn Equipment Outreach: Members of the Westfield Green Team researched the health and environmental impacts of gas leaf blowers and were alarmed with the findings. To learn more, Lois arranged for a virtual presentation for the

Sustainable Jersey Union County Hub by Jamie Banks, president of [Quiet Communities, Inc.](#), a non-profit that helps communities reduce health and environmental harm from noise and pollution. Following the meeting, Lois and Quiet Montclair member Peter Holm teamed up to form Advocates for Transforming Landscaping in New Jersey (ATL-NJ), a cooperative of volunteers from 40+ communities seeking to transition away from use of two-stroke landscaping equipment in favor of more sustainable practices. ATL-NJ is working with Sustainable Jersey to create a certification action that addresses these issues.

While watching the outcomes of other New Jersey municipalities with seasonal bans on gas leaf blowers (Maplewood, Montclair, Princeton and South Orange), Lois and Westfield Town Councilman David Contract decided that a municipal pilot was more suitable. “The Westfield Green Team is committed to educating residents, businesses and the government on the benefits of using electric lawn equipment instead of two-stroke, gas-powered. This has led to many actions such as a partnership between Westfield Department of Public Works (DPW) and the [American Green Zone Alliance](#) (AGZA),” explained Lois. AGZA helps municipalities and corporations transition from gas to electric equipment for routine grounds maintenance work. A goal for the partnership is to showcase the DPW’s efforts to use electric equipment as an example for residents and landscaping companies to follow in making the same transition.

Green Collar Career Fair: Lois and Medea Villere of the Westfield Green Team partnered with John Henry from the New Jersey School Boards Association to promote Green Collar Careers. Virtual sessions were created to provide students, both college-bound and non-college bound, with ideas for entering the growing Green Collar workforce. The 40-minute sessions, moderated by students, feature an expert in the offshore wind, solar and recycling/waste management industries. Watch the 2022 presentations: [Solar Energy](#), [Recycling/Waste Management/Circular Economy](#) and [Off-Shore Wind](#). Also available are the Green Collar Career Fair series from 2021: [Session 1](#), [Session 2](#), [Session 3](#) and [Session 4](#).



Residential Food Waste Recycling: Initiated by the Westfield Green Team Zero Waste Lead Catherine Choudhry, the Town of Westfield started collecting residential food waste at its [Westfield Conservation Center](#). All types of food are collected in designated bins when the Center is open. The town has contracted with [Green Bucket Compost](#) to pick up the food scraps once a week. Many food businesses in town also have contracts to have their food collected. At the processing facility, the food scraps are made into an engineered bio-slurry (EBS). The EBS is then taken to Rahway Valley Sewerage Authority's anaerobic digester. The gasses that are captured in the digester are used to help power the sewage facility. Westfield is the first municipality in Union County to feed into the program. Working with Dr. Susie Hung, the principal at Jefferson Elementary School, the Westfield Green Team and Westfield Department of Public Works also started a food waste recycling program at the school in partnership with the Board of Education. In 2012, Westfield received a \$20,000 Sustainable Jersey grant that helped expand the recycling operations at the Westfield Conservation Center.



Green Infrastructure Plan: Reducing stormwater runoff and consequent local flooding and pollution of the local streams and rivers into the Rahway River watershed is a key issue for Lois. The Westfield Green Team worked with Dr. Christopher Obropta, the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Specialist in Water Resources, to create strategies and plans. The work was done with funding and direction from Westfield and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and highlights green infrastructure opportunities within Westfield. The [Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program](#) prepared an [Impervious Cover Assessment \(ICA\)](#), [Green Infrastructure Action Plan](#) and [Green Infrastructure Strategic Plan](#). Lois explained, “These plans provide us with a 10-year roadmap to add green infrastructure and reduce stormwater runoff in our community.” The Westfield Green Team organized training sessions that Rutgers Cooperative Extension staff provided for the Public Works Department staff and residents and sponsored a meeting with the Town’s Public Works Committee. The Town of Westfield received 20 certification points for this work by completing the Sustainable Jersey action: [Green Infrastructure Planning](#).

Tamaques Park Rain Gardens: In 2020, a system of three linked [rain gardens](#) were installed in Westfield’s most used and visible public place, in the center of Tamaques Park. The 2,700 square foot series of gardens capture stormwater runoff from the parking lot and features perennials and native plantings. The rain gardens were designed, and construction was supervised by the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Water Resources Program. The Westfield Department of Public Works provided the excavation equipment and operator. Westfield Green Team members Bianca Wright, Nancy Albanese and Lois are joined by other residents to help maintain the gardens which require frequent weeding and maintenance. The Town of Westfield received 10 certification points for this work by completing the Sustainable Jersey action: [Green Infrastructure Implementation](#).

Robinson Creek Stream Lab: In May, the Westfield Green Team partnered with Westfield High School teaching staff, Union County environmental specialists, the [Rahway River Watershed Association](#), the [AmeriCorps NJ Watershed Ambassadors Program](#) and community volunteers to create a field experience for 250 high school students. Students visited Tamaques Park and learned about water quality testing, stream assessments, macroinvertebrate sampling, rain garden function and the impact of invasives in the Tamaques forest. Lois, Tim Van Epp, Bianca Wright, Denise Ricci and other Stream School certified agents monitor the stream's overall health.

Stewardship at Brightwood Park: The Westfield Green Team and [Friends of Brightwood Preserve \(FOBP\)](#) are supporting the Town in preserving Brightwood Park as a nature preserve for education and enjoyment of nature for present and future generations. Following acquisition of housing on park land in the 1960s, the town built a dam with a six-acre lake, fenced the area and laid out nature trails. The Westfield Green Team lends support to FOBP programs in the preserve via an Invasive Plants Strike Team, Spotted Lanternfly eradication, native plant sales, demonstration gardens and pollinator patches.

Adopt-a-Drain Program: For her Rutgers Environmental Stewards project, Lois implemented the Adopt-A-Drain program in Westfield. With the support of Westfield Town Councilman David Contract, Town Administrator Jim Gildea and Public Works Supervisor Richie Eubanks, she launched the [New Jersey Adopt-a-Drain](#) program to protect the Rahway River watershed from pollutants that flow into the Rahway River from the town's 3,000 storm drains. The drains are adopted by residents who volunteer to keep their drain clear of leaves, trash and debris. The results are measured by the number of residents participating and the quantity of trash/leaves/debris removed from storm drains reported by participants. The program is promoted through social media, local media, [flyers](#) and word of mouth.



Free Market and Second Chance Toys: The Westfield Free Market is an impressive green team project. Residents can donate or take home (at no cost) yard sale quality items such as clothing, kitchen items, garden tools and small furniture pieces. Lois explained, "We had 300 car loads of goods unloaded and shared, resulting in about seven tons of donated items and just a small portion set aside as trash." In addition, the Westfield Green Team partnered with Zoe Cook-Nadel, the director of [Second Chance Toys](#), an organization that rescues and recycles plastic toys for children in need by donating them to community organizations.



Energy Fair and Alternative Energy Outreach: Westfield Green Team members Peter Goldberg, Amarish Mehta and Walter Korfmacher are leading initiatives to promote alternative energy. Their [Energy Fair](#) displays the latest electric vehicles, electric bikes, electric scooters and electric lawn care equipment. The green team provided leadership to help the Westfield's Town Council pass a revised solar ordinance to enable homeowners to install front facing solar panel systems that meet certain design and installation requirements. They are now using the revised ordinance to promote the adoption of solar panel systems to all. The Town Council passed a [Community Solar Resolution](#) and the green team is educating the community about ways to install solar panels or enroll in [NJ's Community Solar Program](#). Westfield received 25 certification points for this work by completing the Sustainable Jersey action: [Municipally Supported Community Solar](#). The green team promotes residential home energy audits through the [Westfield Home Energy Savings Program](#), which offers residents an energy audit at a discounted rate of \$49. In 2019, Westfield received a \$10,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded by the Gardiner Environmental Fund for low-emission (Low-E) window inserts that were used in Town Hall to help save energy. Westfield received 20 certification points for this work for by completing the Sustainable Jersey action: [Residential Energy Efficiency Outreach](#).

Bike-Friendly Sustainable Jersey Grant: Thanks to the efforts of Westfield Green Team Alternative Transportation leads Jay Goldring and Karrie Hanson, Westfield received a \$20,000 Sustainable Jersey grant funded by the PSEG Foundation in 2022 to install a bike oasis within the downtown area. The bike oasis will house bikes while residents shop or dine downtown and will include places for cyclists to rest, charge phones and make bike repairs. The project is intended to make Westfield more bicycle-friendly and establish its downtown as a bike-friendly shopping destination. The green team held an Eco-Tour last year and residents were encouraged to ride their bikes to homes showcasing different aspects of sustainability.

More About Lois: Lois is a lifelong New Jersey resident with two grown children, a son and daughter. She lives with her husband Scott and her dog Gio, named after the former Yankee Gio Urshela. She enjoys gardening, hiking, the New York Times Spelling Bee, cooking and her annual visit to New Orleans Jazz Fest.