



October 2014 Sustainability Hero Harriet Shugarman, Chair of the Wyckoff Environmental Commission and Green Team

Harriet Shugarman described feeling “honored, excited, but also more than a little apprehensive,” when she was invited to attend the 2014 United Nations Climate Summit just two days after marching with 400,000 people at the People’s Climate March in New York City. Harriet, a former government and International Monetary Fund policy analyst, has dedicated her life to educating people about the power we have to alter the earth’s fate. Needless to say, this green team chair is fully embracing the ‘think globally, act locally’ mantra while serving as a role model for us all.



In 2009, after 20 years as a policy analyst and economist with governments and intergovernmental organizations, Harriet refocused her energy, expertise and passion, and launched [ClimateMama](#). Targeting parents of all ages, ClimateMama makes climate change information and education accessible and understandable to all.

Harriet said, “Climate change is real, here and now, and we can do something about it if we begin to take action now. So, instead of being scared, I am excited by the opportunities that we have to really change the course that humanity is on. It gives me hope, keeps me energized and allows me to meet so many amazing people along the journey that I am now on.”

Harriet spent her childhood in Edmonton, located in the province of Alberta, known as Canada’s oil country or the Texas of the North. Her hometown provides an interesting backdrop to her work today. She grew up rooting for the Edmonton Oilers and many of her friends and neighbors are linked to the oil industry.

Harriet said “Growing up, almost everyone I knew had some connection to the oil patch. You took this for granted and didn’t think about broader consequences, like climate change and water pollution, only that the oil fields helped provide a good life for those around you.” Perhaps this background helps her understand and better communicate the link between the use of fossil fuels and the changing climate, and why these realities trump other issues. Harriet was one of the 1,253 people arrested in Washington DC in 2011, fighting to stop the building of the Keystone XL Pipeline. She is also fighting local pipelines and the fossil fuel infrastructure and waste that she says accompany them.



In the spring of 2007, Harriet was selected from thousands of individuals across the country to participate in a training program conducted by Former Vice President Al Gore and sponsored by The Climate Reality Project. Harriet is part of the

first group who were personally trained by Mr. Gore to educate the public on climate change. ClimateMama grew out of Harriet's work with The Climate Reality Project.

She has a BA in International Relations and Economics from the University of British Columbia and an MBA in International Marketing and Management from Thunderbird School of Global Management. Harriet blogs on climate change issues and policies for a wide range of media outlets and organizations including: Lifetime TV's The Balancing Act, Christian Science Monitor's [Modern Parenthood](#), Safer Chemicals Healthy Families, MSNBC, [The Global Team of 200](#), Rodale News, [Maria's Farm Country Kitchen](#), and the [Healthy Child Healthy World](#) Network. As well, Harriet serves on numerous boards, including [The Mothers Project](#), [Mothers for Sustainable Energy](#); [The Barack Obama Green Charter High School](#); [Air-Soil-Water](#); and [The North Jersey Public Policy Network](#).

Wyckoff Environmental Commission and Green Team

Although focused on shaping international and national policy, Harriet is also fully engaged at the local level. She is the chair of the Wyckoff Environmental Commission and the Green Team that led the municipality to become Sustainable Jersey bronze-level certified in 2011 and silver-level certified in 2013 with an impressive 350 points.

Located in Bergen County, Wyckoff Township has a population of about 16,700 and the green team is a vibrant and active part of the community. It has generated, led and motivated a wide range of sustainable programs in the community.

Harriet said the Wyckoff Green Team grows and shrinks in membership depending on the current projects. It has been as large as 50 people but normally there is a core group of 10-15 people working on initiatives. The team includes teachers, a renewable energy industry professional, a scientist, an arborist and volunteers from many of the different organizations and committees in town. The Township Committee has been an active supporter of the green team, with several Township Committee members regularly participating. The green team has a great [website](#) that is a resource for the community and local media looking for updates on sustainability programs in the community.



Harriet said, "In order for people to have an 'ah-ha' moment they need to get their hands dirty at a community-wide clean up and shredding day or be part of a movement to generate 1,000 signatures from townspeople to promote the use of reusable beverage bottles at local sporting events, as we have done in Wyckoff." She says that this type of hands-on work creates ownership of environmental issues that in turn develops a base to help strengthen state and national movements. The Sustainable Jersey program has provided the structure and resources for her to engage volunteers and better reach the community.

Green Wyckoff Business Program

The Green Wyckoff Business (GWB) program is a collaborative effort of the municipality and the Chamber of Commerce. The goal of the program is to encourage business owners and operators to not only, recycle, reduce and reuse materials but also to strive to visibly and vocally improve the community environment. It promotes sustainable business practices in Wyckoff by recognizing those businesses that work towards this end, and in return it encourages residents to support the

local businesses. To review the actions businesses are asked to achieve, review a [past welcome letter](#) that includes the list of actions.

Nifty Fifty Recycling Program

Harriet is proud that the Wyckoff Environmental Commission/Green Team and the Township Committee have a long term commitment to encourage and educate residents on the importance of recycling and litter abatement. Their award winning recycling program called [Nifty Fifty](#) encourages residents to help the township reach a goal of 50% recycling. An incentive is that the town will save about \$100k if the residents meet this target. The ongoing program is publicized and promoted on the Township's website, in each e-mail sent to residents, in flyers, mailers and announcements and through educational programs that the township runs. Each month, the township keeps track of the progress toward its "Nifty Fifty" goal by updating its online "[recyclometer](#)."

In support of this goal, each year the Wyckoff Environmental Commission/Green Team sponsors a litter abatement event called [Team Up to Tidy Up](#). To engage the youth of the municipality, previous years have included t-shirt logo contests with the overall winners printed on the 300 free t-shirts given out at the annual event. In 2013, the group created and gave out hats that said "Green it Up! Wyckoff, NJ." Additionally, the Chamber of Commerce has regularly awarded gift certificates to winners. Residents including Boy and Girl Scout Troops, school groups and local volunteer groups, tour the Township's recycling depot, and tours are given regularly on request.



Ma-Me-O Beach on Pigeon Lake

Harriet doesn't leave her passion for sustainability at the office. If you spend a little time with her, you will soon see how she inspires those around her to make changes. Harriet said, "I love the fact that when I walk by an idling car in a school parking lot, people turn it off. I love that people feel they need to tell me why they didn't bring a reusable bottle to a lacrosse game but will remember the next time, or how they forgot their reusable bag, but that it won't happen again! No one is perfect and sometimes we all do "leave the lights on," but I believe that collectively, we can make a difference."

Harriet lives with her husband and two children, Elliot and Alana, who she says "are her passion and inspiration for everything she does." She loves hiking, skiing, traveling and all things outdoors. She tries to get out into nature as much as possible because it helps her remember why she is working so hard to bring attention to sustainability and climate issues.

Harriet and her family went on a much needed summer vacation to Ma-Me-O Beach which is a summer village located on the southeast shore of Pigeon Lake in Alberta, Canada. Growing up, Harriet spent summers here, with her mother and grandmother who also spent every summer here since they were young children as well. She now brings her children to this beach to share this special place. Unfortunately last year, her summer vacation was interrupted by a massive fish die off, the third time this has happened in the past five years. Thousands of dead fish washed up on the shore. Harriet joined a small brigade of volunteers armed with pitch forks and shovels to help remove the rotting fish.

The province sent researchers out to the lake to investigate and said higher temperatures combined with human caused pollutants were likely the root of the kill. Harriet was quoted in a local newspaper drawing the connection to climate change and pollution. She says that these types of experiences are starting to happen to all of us, negatively impacting and altering our family stories and shared memories. It fuels her urgency, especially because as she noted, "Our children are watching and their future and their now depends on what we do in the near future."