

# SUSTAINABILITY HEROES

## January 2020



### Cathy Elliott-Shaw and Sruti Desai

#### Bordentown City Green Team (Burlington County)

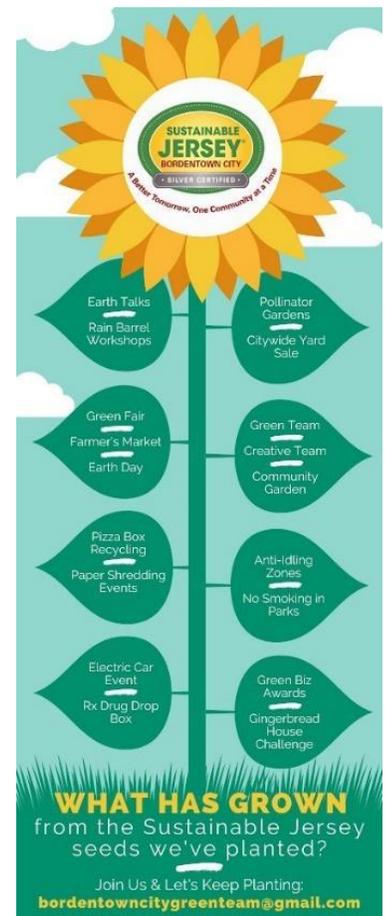
Thanks to the dedication of Cathy Elliott-Shaw and Sruti Desai, Bordentown City is a four-time recipient of the Sustainability Champion award and a leader in New Jersey known for innovative sustainability initiatives at the local level.

Cathy, who has served as the co-chair of the Bordentown City Green Team since 2013, has been at the forefront of Sustainable Jersey efforts in Bordentown City. She leaves no stone unturned when it comes to finding ways to make Bordentown City more sustainable. Sruti explained, “Cathy is the backbone of our sustainability efforts. She inspires those around her to roll up their sleeves and get involved. She encourages volunteers to take what they are passionate about and bring it to life. Cathy is a true rock star and our community is more whole because of the hard work, perseverance, love and energy she puts into every single thing she does.”

Sruti joined the team in 2017 and has helped expand the reach of green team projects in the community. Sruti is the co-chair of the Bordentown City Creative Team, co-manager of the Bordentown City Farmers Market and is a key member of the Bordentown City Green Team. The community has benefited tremendously from the drive and energy that Sruti brings. She is highly organized and a skilled communicator. Cathy said, “Sruti sees opportunities where others see challenges. She naturally makes connections to find the right people and organizations to help with tasks.”

Together, Cathy and Sruti possess the right mix of compassion, intelligence and tenaciousness. Over the years, the initiatives implemented by this team have provided Bordentown City’s 3,900+ residents with a more sustainable community.

**Sustainable Jersey Silver Certified:** In 2010, the Bordentown City Green Team was formally established by the City's governing body as a committee under the Bordentown City Environmental Commission (BCEC). With the support of the governing body and the BCEC, the volunteer-based green team achieved Sustainable Jersey bronze-level certification for Bordentown City in 2010 and silver-level certification in 2013, 2016 and 2019. Bordentown City received the Sustainability Champion award for a small community (population below 5,000) four times: 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019. Bordentown City Deputy Mayor John Brodowski is an active member of the green team. His support has bolstered the work of the volunteers and his tireless efforts to support initiatives, attend events, apply for grants and make connections for the BCEC and green team has made a measurable difference.



Cathy said, “Over ten years, I’ve seen how Sustainable Jersey organized our sustainability work and led us to try new actions we may not have considered. It keeps us on task and continually moving forward.” The green team supports ongoing projects such as the community garden, a native plant demonstration garden, the Lime Kiln Alley Park Pollinator Garden, Earth Talks, rain barrel workshops, community paper shredding days, recycling education, green business recognition, green challenges and reusable shopping bag education. To stay connected, visit the [Bordentown City Green Team Facebook](#) page and for a full overview of all the actions completed, read the 2019 [Bordentown City Sustainable Jersey Certification Report](#).

**Advice for Green Teams:** How did this volunteer green team achieve 535 Sustainable Jersey certification points for Bordentown City in 2019? Sruti recommends that green teams work to strengthen community partnerships. She explained, “The Sustainable Jersey actions all tie together. We’ve been more successful when we don’t do the work in silos. The creative team, the farmers market and the pizza box recycling project are just a few examples of initiatives that have complemented each other.” Cathy said, “As green team chair, I like to focus where I think we can make a difference. We work on the seemingly small things that add up to a big impact community-wide.” This year Sruti created flashcards for 75 Sustainable Jersey actions that she thought the city could complete. She brought the cards to a BCEC meeting and asked everyone to pick two cards from the pile in order to be the manager of those actions. Most of the committee members agreed and it resulted in the group achieving more certification actions than in previous years. Sruti said, “Sometimes it seems like no one has time or wants to do the work, but it doesn’t hurt to ask. When we presented the work as manageable and fun projects, it got done.”

**First Pizza Box Composting Program In New Jersey:** In 2019, Jeff Tober of [Fernbrook Farms](#) asked the city to establish a partnership with his farm to spearhead a pizza box composting program where the city would collect pizza boxes from residents that would then be used in single row crops on the farm. Led by the Bordentown City recycling coordinator, the BCEC and the green team, a drop box was constructed and placed in a public space so residents could easily access it. In the five months following its unveiling, the drop box collected upwards of 2,000 pizza boxes. Fernbrook Farms transported the boxes to the farm and used them in the fields. The city is considering expanding the program to other farms in the area. Since pizza boxes are not recyclable if there is any oil or food on them, this program reduced the city’s waste stream by diverting the boxes from the landfill to the farm. Fernbrook Farms uses the boxes to suppress weeds while recycling the carbon/organic matter from the boxes back into the soil. Sruti said, “While this is a work in progress, we hope to work with other municipalities to help them establish partnerships with local farms to implement a similar program. This project has the added benefit that our residents will now think twice about their waste and understand that alternatives to landfills exist like composting.”



**Bordentown City Green Business Recognition Program:** Working with the [Downtown Bordentown Association](#), the green team developed a green business recognition program in 2015 to highlight businesses that are voluntarily implementing strategies to reduce energy consumption and waste, use sustainable materials, offer greener products and contribute to the local community. In 2018, the green team launched a [Green Business Self-Survey](#) that a local business can fill out to highlight its sustainability successes and help the green team evaluate and award exemplary businesses. Businesses that are selected for recognition are acknowledged at a



Bordentown City Commission meeting and presented with a framed certificate and window decal for display.

**Bordentown City Creative Team and Community Assets Map:** The [Bordentown City Creative Team](#) has two co-chairs, Sruti Desai and Melissa Pillik, and is made up of eight other members that include green team members, business leaders, artists and teachers. The creative team developed a Bordentown City creative assets inventory that informed the [Bordentown City Community Asset Map](#). The purpose of the map is to help identify the resources, places and things that characterize the City and identify the aspects that support its long-range sustainability goals. Examples of community assets can include physical features such as parks, schools, houses of worship, local businesses and walkable streets as well as intangible characteristics like the City's history, pride and charm.

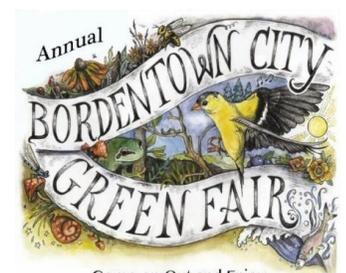


The Bordentown City Creative Team hosts many popular community events. The group partnered with Bordentown Neighbors Acting Together to host The Great Women of New Jersey event. Doors to Old City Hall, a city-owned historic building that has gone underused for many years due to restoration efforts, were opened and reenactments of key female historical figures were performed. In 2019, the Bordentown City Creative Team worked on a grant application for ArtsTank that would support a Shakespeare on the Beach project that will be held in August 2020. While the grant was not awarded, it enabled the group to work with community stakeholders and brainstorm new and inventive projects. In December 2019, the Creative Team held its 3rd annual Gingerbread House Challenge where the public was asked to submit creative gingerbread houses that were displayed in Old City Hall for judging and voting.

**Bordentown City Farmers Market:** The [Bordentown City Farmers Market](#) was launched in 2009 as a collective partnership between the BCEC, the Burlington County Freeholders, the Bordentown City Commissioners, the Downtown Business Association and community stakeholders. BCEC members and green team volunteers helped launch the market which just celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2019. Sruti became the co-manager of the Farmers Market in 2019 with Hillery Lamb as manager. The duo oversaw the implementation of some successful improvements such as moving the market from a week night to Sundays during the day, adjusting the vendor fee structure, converting the application to digital format and introducing new vendors. As the co-chair of the Bordentown City Creative Team, Sruti invited local artists and musicians to participate in the market each week. Sruti noted, "After managing the creative assets inventory and planning 18 weeks of performances for the Farmers Market, I have a new appreciation of the depth of the talent in our town. The resulting collaboration between our local creatives and the Farmers Market has been a big win."



**Bordentown City Green Fair:** In 2009, BCEC members and green team volunteers assembled a small team to spearhead the very first green fair. Cathy and then green team co-chair, Cindy Gallagher, took the lead in 2013 and thanks to Cathy's passion for sustainability, the Bordentown City Green Fair celebrated its 10th anniversary in June 2019. The event is advertised with posters at local businesses. Postcards and brochures are distributed to resident's doorsteps and yard signs promote the event around the city. An extensive social networking marketing campaign includes posting on the Bordentown City, BCEC and other community websites.



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Children's Activities  
Eco-Friendly Goods  
Native Plants  
Local Food Vendors

Carslake Community Center  
207 Crosswicks Street,  
Bordentown City, NJ      Sponsored by  
The Bordentown City Green Team  
Contact: bordentowncitygreenteam@gmail.com  
Website: bccecc.com

Cathy said, "I love that the green fair has become a well-established community event. People look forward to visiting the fair year after year and attendees learn many ways, big and small, how to live a more sustainable lifestyle." She added, "The theme of the fair has always been 'think globally and

act locally.’ We want attendees to see how they can work together as citizens, residents and as individuals to make a difference and become more sustainable now and for future generations.” The green team invites local businesses to participate as vendors and the event features works by local sustainable artists. Food vendors are asked to provide locally produced food, vegetarian and vegan options and minimize packaging with biodegradable utensils. In 2019, the event transitioned from providing individual plastic water bottles to a water station with large jugs of water for attendees and vendors to fill their water containers. The green team partners with local artist Stephanie Neuhaus who creates the beautiful promotional poster each year.

**Bordentown Citywide Yard Sale:** The BCEC and green team work together to host an annual Bordentown Citywide Yard Sale the first Saturday in June. Residents are encouraged to gather their unwanted household items and let other people give them a new home. The mission is to be green, repurpose, reuse and recycle. Cathy said, “More than just a yard sale, this is a community event that gives neighbors an opportunity to meet and socialize. Organizations, such as Kiwanis, raise money for a good cause and young entrepreneurs learn business skills by selling lemonade and home baked cookies. The influx of visitors supports the local downtown as people walk through the main business area. We’ve found that a simple yard sale day has a multitude of benefits for the community.”

**More about Sruti Desai:** Sruti was born and raised in New Jersey to parents who taught her very early on the importance of and connection between family, education, community and service. After 15 years of working in marketing and operations, Sruti realized her true passion is the art of human connection—ways in which we interact with, build relationships with, uplift, motivate, engage and help one another. Since moving to Bordentown City in 2013, she put her passion to work by taking an active role in serving her community. She is co-chair of the Bordentown City Creative Team, co-manager of the Bordentown City Farmers’ Market, a member of the Old City Hall Restoration Committee and also the Historical Society and Girls on the Run New Jersey East. Sruti graduated from Northeastern University in 2006 with a BA in Communications and in 2013 with an MBA and MS in Finance. As for future goals, Sruti is excited to expand the Pizza Box Composting program, collaborate with local students to get them more involved in sustainability initiatives (planning a zero-waste summit for Earth Day 2020) and pursue clean energy initiatives that will propel Bordentown City forward.



**More about Cathy Elliott-Shaw:** Cathy grew up in Pennsylvania, near Philadelphia, where her father was an arborist and her mother worked at her grandfather’s garden supply store. Early on, Cathy developed a passion for plants and a love of the outdoors. After graduating from Cook College at Rutgers University, now The School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Cathy and her husband moved to Bordentown City. Cathy graduated with a BS in Plant Science in 1982 and an MS in Plant Pathology in 1987. The couple raised two children and a little over a year ago, welcomed their first grandchild to the family. Professionally, Cathy retired in 2019 from her role as team leader for the Urban Acquisition and Statewide Park Development Team for [Green Acres](#), but recently returned as a part-time employee. Through the Green Acres program, which is a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection program, hundreds of thousands of acres of conservation and recreation lands have been preserved and hundreds of public parks have been developed with Green Acres funds. As the chair of the Bordentown City Green Team, Cathy has been a guiding force behind many of the green team initiatives, such as educational workshops, rain barrels workshops, composting, energy efficiency fairs and an annual tree planting in conjunction with the Bordentown City Shade Tree Commission. Cathy is an avid gardener and very active in the music programs at her church. She also enjoys reading, hiking and visits to the Jersey shore. Cathy looks forward to what the green team will accomplish in 2020—in particular, she is excited to continue working with community partners to assess and improve the City’s parks, trails and natural areas.

