



Town Square: Time to take on climate change crisis



The Acting Locally For A More Sustainable World Conference is set to take place Jan. 25 at

By JOSE GERMAN

Special to Montclair Local

As we enter a new decade, the planet's state is far more dire than in 2010. Climate scientist Michael Mann calls the past decade "a lost opportunity," the price being a "procrastination penalty of climate inaction." Due to our inaction, according to the United Nations Intergovernmental Commission on Climate Change, we now need to reduce our emissions 45% by 2030 just to hold global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. Although we have the means to do this, lack of political will means there is little chance of it happening.

Because of past inaction, preserving a vibrant, healthy planet may no longer be a realistic possibility. Instead, we are now looking at "less bad" options and figuring out how to adapt to our new environmental reality. What's worse is that we have known about the consequences of climate change for decades now, but our efforts to stop this crisis have been very limited.

It's tempting to give in to hopelessness, but I'm reminded of a quote I saw recently: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago; the second-best time is today." The failure to act in the past must not become an excuse for inaction in the present.

READ: [GARDENING FOR LIFE; FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE](#)

READ: [TOWN SQUARE; PLANNED PARENTHOOD PRESIDENT CEO SAYS 'OUR DOORS ARE OPEN'](#)

How will the climate crisis affect us locally?

New Jersey is one of the states most susceptible to catastrophic effects of climate change. In recent years, we have seen devastating storms, most memorably the nightmarish Sandy, and such damage is likely to intensify in the future as sea levels rise, storms become more intense, and weather patterns become more unpredictable.

Sea level rise and more frequent heavy rains are expected to increase flooding and storm surges, threatening infrastructure and displacing communities. New York City is building a system to mitigate the water damage in lower Manhattan, which faces frequent flooding and may even be under water within a generation. Sea level rise will endanger Newark and all municipalities along the lower Passaic River. Last year we even had a destructive flash flood in Montclair Center, far removed from major waterways.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND OUR HEALTH

Higher temperatures in the Northeast are likely to increase heat-related deaths and decrease air quality, especially in urban and suburban areas. People at greatest risk include young children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing health conditions like asthma.

Studies indicate that “climate change is lengthening the pollen season of common allergens . . . particularly for northern portions of the U.S. including New Jersey. Warmer and wetter conditions may increase seasonal activity and the extent of suitable habitat for ticks and mosquitoes, elevating risks of human exposure to vector-borne diseases like Lyme disease and West Nile Virus.”

A THREAT TO LOCAL FOOD

The changing climate likely means reduced agricultural yields, threatening both local livelihoods and the region’s economy and affecting the availability of local food in Montclair supermarkets and restaurants. According to a Rutgers University study, “New Jersey’s \$1 billion farming industry faces increasing threats from invasive insects, weeds, and diseases expected to be made worse by hotter temperatures. Left unchecked, the costs could be substantial to protect the Garden State’s 10,000 farms.”

A THREAT TO OUR TREES

Rising temperatures and changing weather patterns stress our trees, making them vulnerable to diseases and parasites. We are already suffering a major crisis with our white ash trees caused by the invasive emerald ash borer. This crisis is exacerbated by hotter temperatures allowing the insect larvae to survive winter. As a result, Montclair’s beautiful tree canopy will lose about 2,000 trees in the next few years.

WE ARE RUNNING OUT OF TIME

In the words of UN Secretary-General Antonio Gutierrez, “The point of no return is no longer over the horizon. It is in sight and is hurtling towards us.” The prospect is frightening, and can us feel overwhelmed and powerless. We need to get out of our comfort zone and switch from being spectators to being implementers. The climate crisis will affect our region and the beloved town where we live. Let’s act now to preserve at least a fraction of the world that we grew up in and build a better legacy for our children and grandchildren.

As a community, we can do much locally to help in the worldwide crisis.

- We can request our elected officials to create an official plan for climate crisis readiness.
- We can take part in climate change initiatives of the township and nonprofit organizations promoting education and implementing projects to mitigate the environmental damage caused by the climate crisis.
- We can take actions in our homes and yards, our transportation habits, and our diets to make our lifestyles more sustainable.

Yes, the crisis is daunting but hope comes with action. Let's act now, as individuals and as a community, so that in 2030 we won't be looking back on another lost decade.

Want to learn more about the climate crisis and connect with local organizations?

On Jan. 25, more than 45 environmental organizations and community groups will gather in Montclair to discuss the climate crisis and take local actions. The Acting Locally for a More Sustainable World Conference will be held at 30 North Fullerton Ave., Madonna Hall (Immaculate Conception Church), from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For additional information, visit neearth.org.

Jose German is the president of the Northeast Earth Coalition, and writes the "Gardening for Life" column for Montclair Local.



Acting Locally conference draws a crowd in Montclair



Keynote Speaker Dr. Rachel Emas of Rutgers-Newark at The Northeast Earth Coalition's Fourth Annual Acting Locally for a More Sustainable World Conference, with about 45 vendors and 100 attendees in the Madonna Hall of Immaculate Conception RC Church, Saturday, Jan. 19.
ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

By ROBIN WOODS

For Montclair Local

Locals interested in finding out more about local food sustainable communities, renewable energy and clean air and water found answers to many of their questions this past Saturday, Jan. 19, during the 4th Annual Northeast Earth Coalition (NEEC, nearth.org) conference held inside Immaculate Conception Church.

Networking, information and demonstration opportunities were available to conference attendees from 45 participating individuals and groups, including the Montclair Environmental Commission, Meredith Taylor from Rutgers University Hunger & Food Insecurity on Campus and Aidan's Butterflies (film and discussion). A panel led by Lindsay Kayman discussed Urban Ecology in "All Its Power and Beauty: A Manifesto Under Our Feet," with a Q&A session closing the conference.

People who wanted to learn about composting could buy Do-It-Yourself composting kits from WHO. Vendors sold free-trade jewelry and jams. Information about water conservation and other issues was available from Americorps NJ Watershed group, Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, and others.

At the conference, community leaders and groups from northern and central New Jersey gathered together to network about environmental issues, including local food, sustainable communities, alternative transportation, renewable energy, clean air and water and climate change activism.

About 100 people attended the conference, which lasted from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The NEEC's mission is to work at the community level to protect the environment, and promote local sustainability and food security, said Jose German ("Gardening for Life" columnist for Montclair Local). German founded the NEEC in Montclair four years ago, as the continuation of "being an Eagle Scout as a teenager, and came up with an environmental restoration project to qualify for a badge."

Gomez is particularly proud of The Crane Park Demonstration Garden. Its yield from 65 varieties of plant products grown at Lackawanna Plaza and Glenridge Avenue is donated to Toni's Kitchen and Salvation Army; an example of a local food solution for sustainability. More than 250 butterflies are raised there each summer, and bees have also discovered the garden as a pollination gathering site.

He also talked about other gardens, including the Walnut Street Parklet Garden, which uses two parking spaces to grow pesticide-free plants, and 73 See Community Garden, 73C Pine St.

Debra Kagan, President of Bike & Walk Montclair, talked about the steps the township is taking to create the first pedestrian and bicycle paths.

Kagan said that after receiving a grant from the Department of Transportation in 2015, the Complete Streets Policy calls for improvements to meet 2009 standards while working with members of the planning board. Bike & Walk Montclair works in conjunction with Partners for Health Foundation, one of the conference co-sponsors.

Keynote Speaker Dr. Rachel Emas of Rutgers University-Newark talked about looking at local solutions for

sustainability, with food grown, raised, produced, processed and distributed in the same area where it is consumed. Farm-to-table, farm-to-school and farm-to-hospital eliminates the middleman and is “grown nearby to where it is eaten. If you don’t have food equity, you really can’t do anything else,” she said, adding that keeping it local also keeps money in the community, where dollars multiply themselves to the economy. This increases employment, entrepreneurial and business knowledge as well. However, she said, “maintaining, supporting and continuing to ensure success with community food systems is a difficult goal to work for.”

Township Sustainability Officer Gray Russell told Montclair Local the importance of making policies that take into account economic responsibility and environmental stewardship for social equity and justice. People, planet and profit are used as a way to “provide for the needs of the current generation without taking away from future generations’ ability to fulfill their own needs and be cognizant of years to come.”

Ten township-owned buildings received energy efficiency upgrades and improvements, some as simple as replacing incandescent lights with LEDs that use fewer kilowatts and energy, Russell said. Overall, the message of the conference was that acting together locally as a strong community can help to achieve a more sustainable world.



Culture in brief: Environmental summit in Montclair



Volunteer Margy Schilling chats with Food Access Coordinator Lisa Martin at the City Green table, in the Third Acting Locally for a More Sustainable World Conference, networking for environmental issues with activists, businesses, and organization directors in the Montclair Public Library, Sat. Jan. 27, 2018. ADAM ANIK/FOR MONTCLAIR LOCAL

On Saturday January 19, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., at the Madonna Hall, (Immaculate Conception Church) 30 North Fullerton Ave., the [Northeast Earth Coalition](#) presents the fourth “Acting Locally for a More Sustainable World Conference.” The event is free.

This event, say the organizers, is one of the largest environmental and community activist gatherings in northern New Jersey. About 45 different groups will be represented. At the conference, attendees will have the opportunity to meet community leaders and groups from northern and central New Jersey to network about environmental issues, including local food, sustainable communities, alternative transportation, renewable energy, clean air and water, and climate change activism.

[READ: SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE KICKS OFF THIRD YEAR IN MONTCLAIR \(2018\)](#)

Dr. Rachel Emas will be the keynote speaker. Emas is assistant director of the MPA program in the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) at Rutgers University-Newark. Her research interests include sustainability and sustainable development policy, public service education, and policy implementation. Emas has extensive international service experience as Executive Director of the International Commission on Accreditation of Public Administration Education and Training (ICAPA).

Montclair resident Professor Iain Kerr will also be a presenter at the conference. Kerr is a designer “working at the intersection of creativity, ecology, and emergent systems,” the organizers state in a release. His focus is on designing novel processes to transform seemingly intractable problems into problems worth having for worlds worth making. Kerr is the Co-Director of the MIX Lab at Montclair State University. The MIX Lab’s mission is to foster innovation at all scales, with a particular focus on disruptive and qualitative innovation. Iain regularly works as a consultant, lecturer, and workshop leader on ecology, creativity, innovation, and design (MIT, Harvard University, Columbia University, Parsons, Yale, CCA, and RISDI).

The Northeast Earth Coalition is a local non-profit organization that works at the community level to protect the environment and promote local sustainability and food security. For additional information, visit www.neearth.org

Location:



Letters to the editor, Jan. 25



Winter gardening

I hope folks will come to my vegetable garden at 56 Gordonhurst Ave., Montclair, from 10:30 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 3, to see how I raise most of my family's vegetables year-round with no poisons or power machinery.

You will see the cold frames from which I harvest two meals a week of Chinese cabbage all winter long, even this winter. It tastes great in a stir-fry with home-grown garlic harvested in June and chopped peppers frozen throughout the harvesting season.

I enjoy gardening and really enjoy the taste of the food we eat year-round. My health has improved greatly since I began gardening, and my husband's is fine, too. Beyond that, there are at least two other reasons to encourage local gardening.

When I was young, about 45 percent of Americans were farmers. Now only 4 percent are. The decrease is due to the introduction of heavy machinery and chemicals into farming. Neither is good for the health of consumers, but they increase the profits of mega-food companies. You can eat locally and organically if you join a community-supported agriculture to help support a local farmer in return for regular deliveries of food during the year. If you join my gardening/environmental email list at kenschaft@pegasus.montclair.edu, you will get a list of local CSAs at the appropriate time in early spring.

Second, our country does a lot of environmental damage shipping food. Eat locally. Come on Feb. 3 to learn about how this can be done.

Pat Kenschaft

Montclair

Environmental summit in Montclair

On Saturday, Jan. 27, at the Montclair Public Library, more than 36 community groups, organizations and environmental activists will attend the third annual Acting Locally for a More Sustainable World Conference. Cyndi Steiner, a Montclair resident and executive director of New Jersey Bike and Walk, will be the keynote speaker. Gray Russell, sustainability officer of Montclair, will speak about sustainable communities. Samantha Richardson, director of horticulture at Greater Newark Conservancy, will give a presentation on the positive impact of urban farming in low-income communities, and Jerry Vorbach, environmental manager, will speak about climate change's local impact.

The conference is sponsored by the Northeast Earth Coalition and Partners for Health Foundation. The conference provides a chance to meet community leaders from Northern and Central New Jersey to network on environmental issues, including local food, sustainable communities, alternative transportation, renewable energy, clean air and water, and climate change activism. This conference is one of the largest gatherings of environmental and community activists in New Jersey. Participants will have the opportunity to watch the premiere of a short film, "Spotlight on Sustainability," produced locally by Julia Sickler and Nelson DePasquale.

One goal of the event is to meet one another to collaborate more effectively on the "Great Work" of our time—"healing the earth so all life can thrive." No matter which environmental or sustainability door one first comes through, we find we share the same values and vision about environmental protection, clean water and air, renewable energy and safe food. We all want to make our communities more sustainable and eco-friendly. All are welcome at this exciting chance to celebrate our local efforts to improve the quality of life of our communities.

Jose German-Gomez

Montclair