

## **SOMERSET COUNTY TOWNS & SCHOOLS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AT 2009 ENERGY FORUM**

On September 12, 2009, the Somerset County Energy Council hosted a half-day *Energy Smart Somerset Forum*, the first county-wide gathering of municipal and school district representatives to discuss issues of energy efficiency and renewable energy. At the event, speakers from some of Somerset County's most innovative towns and one very energy-savvy school district shared information on how they are saving energy and reducing their contribution of greenhouse gasses through a wide array of programs that promote efficiency and cut energy waste in their buildings, vehicles and infrastructure operations.

These towns – Bernards, Green Brook, Hillsborough and Bridgewater/Raritan – have learned that saving energy also saves dollars, whether tax or individual. Many of their initiatives involve no-cost or low-cost changes, such as turning off equipment when not in use, that can easily be duplicated by other towns and schools. Other initiatives involve an investment in efficient equipment that will take from months to years to pay for itself, but which is a win over the long term. Still others focus on educating residents about the ways they can save energy at home or at work. The towns shared their information in hopes that other towns will see the light – the compact fluorescent light, that is – and commit to energy efficiency as a standard way of doing business. Here are their stories.



Participating in a discussion at the Sept. 12 Energy Forum are, left to right, Keri Bencotter, Chairman, Green Brook Environmental Commission; Gloria McCauley, Hillsborough Township Committee; Bruce McArthur, Administrator, Bernards Township; and Connie Coriell, Energy Efficiency Coordinator, Bridgewater-Raritan School District.

**Bridgewater-Raritan Regional School District** – In 2007, the District took the unusual step of hiring an *Energy Efficiency Coordinator* to implement an innovative program called Schools for Energy Efficiency (SEE). As a result, they saved over \$300,000 the first year. Near the end of the second year, through basic behavior changes on the part of staff and students, and improvements in the way building systems are operated, the District has saved over 2.8 million kilowatt hours of electricity and a whopping \$650,000. The program involves educating users and tracking energy use to root out waste, increase efficiency and spread the message of energy savings. And the program is fun -- employing visits from the Energy Hog, bike pedaling demonstrations to show how much energy it takes to light up a bulb, energy assemblies, and lots of rewards and publicity for success. The District received national recognition from the U.S. EPA, earning an ENERGY STAR Leader Award for 10% energy reduction and an ENERGY STAR Label for superior building operations at Milltown Primary School. Bridgewater-Raritan was the first school district in New Jersey to earn ENERGY STAR awards.

**Bernards Township** - The Township's energy initiatives are led by a very active Green Team that includes residents and environmental commission members, but even more importantly, has strong participation by town administrative staff and the Department of Public Works. Bernards invested in an energy audit for town buildings in 2007, and calculated the carbon footprint of all municipal operations. Since that time, they have implemented many of the recommendations from the audit, including installing motion sensors and LED exit signs, and adding daylighting fixtures and passive solar tubes at DPW garages, the town pool and locker rooms. The town makes use of efficiency software, and has rewired municipal buildings to reduce energy waste in its computer network and routers. Even the police are getting involved in energy savings – they now report street, building and park lights that are on when they should not be (sometimes due to overgrown vegetation covering a light sensor).

**Hillsborough** – Township officials recently adopted new ordinances to facilitate energy innovation. Hillsborough now permits vertical access wind turbines as a conditional use in all zones. It also requires green technologies and involvement of a LEED professional for development in its Town Center, and new parking lots must use LED lighting. The Carrier Clinic, which straddles Hillsborough and Montgomery, will soon unveil one of the largest solar installations in New Jersey, and Hillsborough plans to install solar panel arrays on some municipal facilities and to replace older HVAC equipment with more efficient models.

**Green Brook** – Each year since 2007 the town's Green Design Group has hosted an annual Green Fair to help residents understand their options for saving energy at home and at work. They involve students and scouts, as well as energy professionals and the NJ Clean Energy Program, at interactive displays and booths where residents can buy energy-efficient light fixtures, talk to energy contractors, and are encouraged to sign an energy pledge. This year, Green Brook joined forces with several adjacent towns to increase the fair's impact. The Township also signed on to the BPU's Community Partners Program, which uses cash rebates to incentivize residents to replace older appliances with Energy Star models. Starting this fall, the Green Design Group and the local fire company will offer thermal scans of private homes, to show property owners where their heating dollars are being wasted.

***Other Energy-Saving Achievements and Programs  
in Somerset County Towns and School Districts***

- Hillsborough: partnered with neighboring Montgomery Township on an anti-idling campaign for vehicles.
- Bernards: completed a LEED-certified renovation/expansion of its Sewer Treatment Plant administration building.
- Bridgewater: LEED-certified municipal building.
- Bernards: reduced mowing of lawns and detention basins, reducing fuel and labor costs, air pollution and noise.
- Bernards: developed a Green Guide online resource to advise residents and businesses on ways to save energy and reduce carbon footprint.
- Somerset County: commissioned an energy audit and has implemented numerous audit recommendations including high-efficiency light fixtures, changing thermostat settings in county buildings, purchasing 37 hybrid vehicles, and replacing traffic signals on county roads with LED lights.
- Bernards: saved on vehicle fuel costs by purchasing different equipment and siting a new storage facility to eliminate extra truck trips during road salt application and yard waste pickups.
- Peapack Gladstone, Bedminster and Far Hills: partnered to host a Green Community Festival in November 2008, featuring dozens of green vendors and exhibitors. Attendees pledged to reduce their personal carbon emissions by over 1 million pounds.
- Bernards: investigating a power purchase agreement with a solar provider to install panels at the town's sewer treatment plant and over an old landfill.

***If your Somerset County town or school has energy accomplishments you would like to add to this list, please send them to: [EnergySmartSomerset@yahoo.com](mailto:EnergySmartSomerset@yahoo.com)***