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West Milford gets the bronze

By Linda Smith Hancharick

Sustainable West Milford achieves Sustainable Jersey certification

WEST MILFORD — West Milford has earned the bronze - that is bronze certification from Sustainable Jersey.

"We were one of the first municipalities to register, but we were finally awarded bronze certification in November 2011," said Renee Allesio, chairperson of Sustainable West Milford, a sub-committee of the Environmental Commission. "We are one of 96 certified municipalities in the state; one of three in the county - Hawthorne and Paterson are the other two."



Renee Allesio, left, listens as Mayor Bettina Bieri talks about the Sustainable Jersey designation the township received. Bieri is holding the plaque designating West Milford its bronze certification. Photo by Linda Smith Hancharick

Mayor Bettina Bieri and the council applauded the committee for its efforts.

A sustainable community establishes strategies to promote a healthy environment, a vibrant economy and a just society, according to Allesio. Sustainable communities encourage efficiency, conservation and the use of renewable resources.

Benefits of certification
Sustainable Jersey is a

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certification program started in 2009 for municipalities throughout the state

that want to go green, save money, and take steps to sustain their quality of life over the long term. Sustainable Jersey provides access to grants and other funding opportunities.

The Sustainable Jersey program identifies concrete actions that municipalities must implement to become certified and provides "how to" guidance and tools to communities. It also allows access to grant money.

Sustainable communities encompass the three equal, interrelated components of sustainability: prosperity, planet and people.

Prosperity is the component that encourages support for the local economy and use of community resources. Planet stresses the practice of responsible environmental management and conservation. People is the component urging the embrace of social equity and fairness.

A group effort

Allessio thanked Bieri for "backing this program 100 percent from the beginning." She also gave thanks to the committee members who worked hard on getting the certification, including Dave and Wendy Watson-Hallowell, president and vice president respectively of Sustainable West Milford, Steve Sangel, longtime chairman of the West Milford Environmental Commission, and the regular members of the sustainable subcommittee including Tom Tamayne, Tim Dalton, Doris Aaronson, Terry Milin, Marilyn Lichtenberg and Gary Oppenheimer.

She added that West Milford's Environmental Commission is one of the oldest in the entire state.

She also thanked the town council, current and past, for having the foresight to pass ordinances and resolutions that promote sustainability.

"Sustainable communities prosper with good government that is trustworthy, open and accountable to the people," she said.

Many, including former planning board Chairman Andy Gargano thanked Allessio for her work in achieving this milestone.

The benefits show

Allessio went over some of the programs initiated by Sustainable West Milford including the Community Garden, the educational series held at the West Milford Presbyterian Church and the Hillcrest Community Center, the Medicinal Garden, the Farmer's Market, Green Fest, Ample Harvest, the West Milford High School Green Team and the newest project, the West Milford Time Bank where residents share their talents to help others.

"The EC members have dedicated thousands of hours to researching environmental issues and creating ordinances that protect our environment, public health and our natural resources - a tree ordinance that actually saved historic trees on the Wallisch estate during the pipeline

construction, septic and fertilizer ordinances that protect our water, an active open space policy and one of the oldest natural resource inventory lists in the state," said Allesio.

West Milford has been a leader in environmental issues. Recycling Coordinator Dave Stires was a 2011 New Jersey Clean Community recipient. The township planner and planning board are working on a Master Plan to be in conformance with the Highlands Act, Allesio added.

Looking to the future

Allesio was thrilled with the bronze designation, but she said the committee will not rest on its laurels.

"There is no doubt that West Milford is a leader, but we have only scratched the surface," she said. "Sustainable Jersey is an ongoing project that needs to be renewed every three years. We are going for the silver. It's not just about Sustainable Jersey, it's about community."

Anyone interested in joining the committee is encouraged to do so. They meet the fourth Tuesday of the month at Hillcrest Community Center.

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Dan Noonandnoon wrote on Jan 28, 2012 3:46 PM:

" West Milford will not be gold as long she is mayor "



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