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Sustainable Lafayette: New Board, New Energy, New Projects

By *Sophie Braccini*



From left, front to back: John Eaton, Erika Pringsheim-Moore, Kim Overaa, Melinda Krigel, Michael Cass, Steve Richard, Gailene Nelson, Nanette Heffernan, Brad Crane, Community Engagement Manager Pamela Palitz and Wei-Tai Kwok. Not pictured Amanda Walter. Photo Sophie Braccini

Over the past 10 years, the nonprofit organization Sustainable Lafayette has strived to make Lafayette greener. It recently instated new members to its board to help foster new ideas and projects, but also, as founding members leave the center stage, to make sure that the group - as its name suggests - is sustainable.

New board members Michael Cass, Melinda Krigel, Wei-Tai Kwok, Gailene Nelson and Amanda Walter are all Lafayette residents involved in differing aspects of environmental activism.

Krigel was exposed to Sustainable Lafayette through the green schools programs. "I have been co-chair of the 'Wastebusters' committee at Happy Valley Elementary for three years," she says. She met Sustainable Lafayette board members while attending monthly meetings with the school's "green" representatives. "That gave me a better understanding of the goals of the organization and its impact on our community," she remembers. As a journalist, she covered a number of environmental issues and pursued a graduate degree in environmental law and journalism. Krigel plans to advocate for kids' education on the board.

"If children have the opportunity to practice environmental responsibility at school by doing such things as recycling their papers or composting their lunch leftovers, then these practices can carry over into other part of their lives," she says.

The school's program was also Kwok's entry point. "My wife Violet was a Sustainable Lafayette volunteer helping Happy Valley Elementary School adopt more sustainable recycling practices," he says. A self-described humanist, Kwok says he's passionate about saving the people who live on the earth. "If we exhaust our natural resources, life will be difficult for our children," he says. In August of 2013, Kwok traveled to Chicago for three days with 1,200 other volunteers from across the country to learn the latest facts about climate change. Al Gore was one of the teachers. Since then Kwok has passed what he's learned on to 1,200 people and plans double that number this year. "This is a critical year in global climate negotiations," he says. "We ask, what must America do to create success on the road to Paris (December climate conference)? Then we can ask what must Lafayette do to create success and get other cities to act with us?"

Associate City Planner Michael Cass has served as the staff liaison for the City of Lafayette's Environmental Task Force for about two years. "The task force studies environmental issues and makes environmental policy recommendations to the city council," he said. "I was inspired to join based on my interaction with a number of current and former board members, who are actively working to make Lafayette 'green.'" Cass grew up in a family where environmental issues were routinely discussed. This year, as the chair of the Waste Diversion Committee, Cass plans to partner with Republic Services to help Lafayette reach its goal to divert 75 percent of all waste from the landfill. He is also actively involved with a small committee that is planning Lafayette's 10th Annual Earth Day Festival, which this year will focus on different transportation options.

Walter heard about Sustainable Lafayette through newsletters, "but it wasn't until I met Brad Crane - a fellow Lafayette Elementary School parent who also bikes his kids to school each day - that I became actively involved in the organization," she says. A very outdoorsy person, Walter runs a communications agency whose clients are green-minded architects and builders. This year on the board she will be co-leading, with Gailene Nelson, a new initiative focused on getting our kids outside. "We are so fortunate to have Lafayette's many open spaces in our backyard," she says. "Gailene and I want to encourage kids to connect with and play in our beautiful outdoors. We also want to help parents understand the many developmental and health benefits of unstructured play in nature."

"These kids are the next generation of Sustainable Lafayette members, it is a win/win to get them engaged," says Nelson, who is passionate about conservation and comes from a tech background. She is very interested in helping Sustainable Lafayette use technology more effectively. "I'm big about shortening time-to-market and getting things done," she says.

For more information about Sustainable Lafayette, visit www.sustainablelafayette.org.

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