

SSAFE Newsletter

Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment



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Forging Links With Colleges



Let's Staff Up Sustainability

The value of a permanent oversight position.

Are Your Buildings Green-certified?

How to find a recognized program that is right for your campus.

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Fernando Lopez | Survival Media Agency

Demonstrators in Cancer Alley advocate for environmental justice.

Environmental Justice

Four Lives, One Planet

By Steven Fellows, RiverWoods Durham

The environmental justice movement demands fairness in access to a clean and healthy environment for all, particularly those in disadvantaged communities. It is a movement born from necessity, as environmental burdens disproportionately fall on those with the fewest resources to protect themselves. This reality can be understood through the lives of four individuals from different walks of life.

Bob lives in a spacious, air-conditioned home in Lexington, MA. He commutes 15 miles to his office in Boston in an SUV and spends

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Environmental Justice (cont'd)

summers at his second home in Maine. Several times a year, he flies to California to visit family and friends. An avid carnivore, Bob's diet has a significant environmental footprint. His water comes from a protected, carefully treated watershed. He can afford organic food, regular health screenings, and top-tier medical specialists. His substantial income provides a buffer against many environmental hazards.

Farham lives in a modest, two-room mud-brick house in Larkana, Pakistan, where he farms rice on six acres of land. His son, who once helped supplement the family's income by sorting through hazardous waste imported from wealthier countries, died from a rare form of cancer. In recent years, Farham has lost half of his crops due to severe flooding and soil erosion, both worsened by climate change.

Aishath resides on Dhiffushi, a small island in the Maldives, where she makes her living as a fisher. Rising sea levels have led to severe coastal erosion and frequent flooding, with saltwater intruding into freshwater supplies. Scientists predict that within decades, Dhiffushi and other low-lying islands will become uninhabitable.

Raven teaches at an elementary school in Reserve, LA, a town in the heart of Cancer Alley. Her daughter, a first grader, has been diagnosed with leukemia. Raven herself suffers from asthma. Cancer Alley, home to numerous petrochemical plants and refineries, has some of the highest

cancer rates and asthma-related emergency room visits in the United States due to industrial air pollution. Moving away isn't financially viable for Raven; affordable housing keeps her tethered to a toxic environment.



A grim reality of climate change, flooding in Pakistan takes its toll on human lives.

Farham, Aishath, and Raven are fictional, but their struggles are real. Their stories illustrate how environmental degradation and climate change affect people differently based on their socioeconomic status.

And Bob? Bob is a fictional representation of us. Bob is not a villain. His success is built on hard work and education. He donates to environmental causes and has taken steps to make his home more sustainable. Yet, people like Bob—those with higher incomes—are disproportionately responsible for environmental destruction, while those with fewer resources, like Farham, Aishath, and Raven, bear the brunt of the consequences.

Bob may pursue his desired lifestyle, but with awareness of its broader impacts and

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Environmental Justice (cont'd)

a commitment to supporting systemic change. This isn't about personal blame but about acknowledging that individual choices operate within structures that distribute environmental burdens unequally. His obligation stems not from culpability but from capability—his position affords him influence that others lack.

By joining SSAFE, we have already taken an important step toward systemic change — advocating for sustainability in our communities and leading by example. But what more can we do?

- Advocacy and policy influence—Support and pressure policymakers to enact strong environmental laws and regulations that protect vulnerable communities.
- Corporate influence—Demand sustainability from businesses, advocate for greener workplaces, and support ethical companies.
- Financial leverage—Invest in sustainable funds, support green businesses, and divest from fossil fuels.

Environmental justice isn't charity; it's a fundamental principle of sustainability. A world where environmental quality depends on wealth is not only unjust but also unsustainable. The suffering of the most vulnerable today becomes the crisis of tomorrow for everyone.

The question isn't whether we can afford environmental justice. The question is whether we can afford to ignore it.

Advocacy Corner

"I'm not hearing much from constituents about that."

Our elected representatives pay attention to the issues important to those who elected them. With limited time, resources, and clout, each decides where to bring serious pressure to bear. SSAFE members can influence those decisions—acting on the emails the revitalized Advocacy Team will be sending you!

Our summer and fall activity will focus on the federal budget. Under the reconciliation process (<https://tinyurl.com/recon-budget>), the House of Representatives passed a bill by a one-vote margin—215 to 214—and sent it to the Senate. Now SSAFE members have a chance to encourage their members of Congress to stand strong for budget-conscious Americans. Which elected officials, you ask? Those members of Congress...

- Who are up for re-election.
- Whose constituents are counting on funding from the IRA to complete plants, solar installations, and the like.
- Who believe the final bill is too restrictive or not restrictive enough.

Watch for emails from your Advocacy Team member or Michelle Goodwin. *Every* action you take, combined with the voices of concerned citizens around the country, makes a difference.

Find contact information for your members of Congress here: www.congress.gov/members/

By Mary Burton, Kendal at Hanover

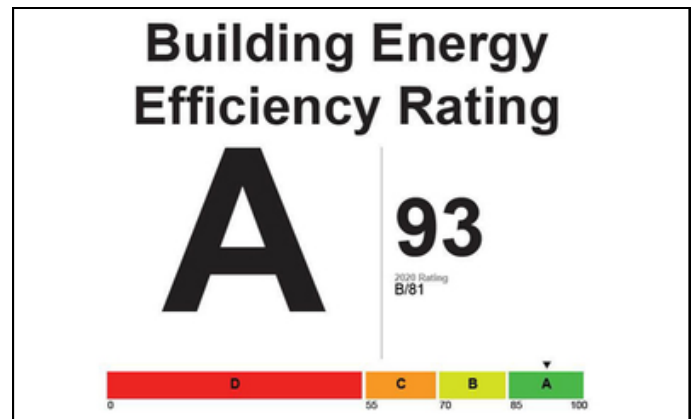
GREEN BUILDING CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

By Stu White, Kendal at Hanover

“Are we going to be LEED-certified?” I am often asked, and the answer is always, “Good question!” However, the question raises another compelling question—why should elder communities seek green building certification anyway?

Greenhouse gas emissions from the construction and operation of buildings account for the largest segment of global emissions. LEED, which stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is perhaps the best known certification program, but it is far from the only one. A SSAFE working group decided that the certification issue needed to be explored further, resulting in the “Green Building Certifications Review & Matrix,” posted to the website in April. The group reasoned that if chapters are serious about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, a commitment to a robust program would ensure a big step in that direction. Certification could also provide a marketing advantage and help in attracting green funding.

Critics often point to the costs of certification and say, “We can avoid the cost and just follow the LEED checklist.” But as one member of the group notes, “Without third-party oversight, self-assessment bias becomes a concern,” raising the specter of greenwashing. Furthermore, strict adherence to a program’s requirements has been shown to save enough money over the long term to more than pay for the cost of certification.



One example of a green building certification system is New York City's certification for buildings.

So yes, objective oversight of green building certification through a formal program can result in distinct advantages for senior communities. There are cost savings long term, resulting in a favorable return on investment. Moreover, the certification program could attract residents and draw funding.

Nine of the most commonly used programs are reviewed on the SSAFE website in an easy-to-read, illustrated format. These include such well known certifications as the Green Globes program and the Department of Energy's Zero Energy Ready program. Each program's history and focus are clearly explained. The accompanying matrix is packed with information on costs and technical requirements.

The programs provide varying levels of certification, from basic to advanced, offering a wide variety of choices for a given residential retirement community.

For more information, see: <https://ssafe.org/green-building-certifications/>

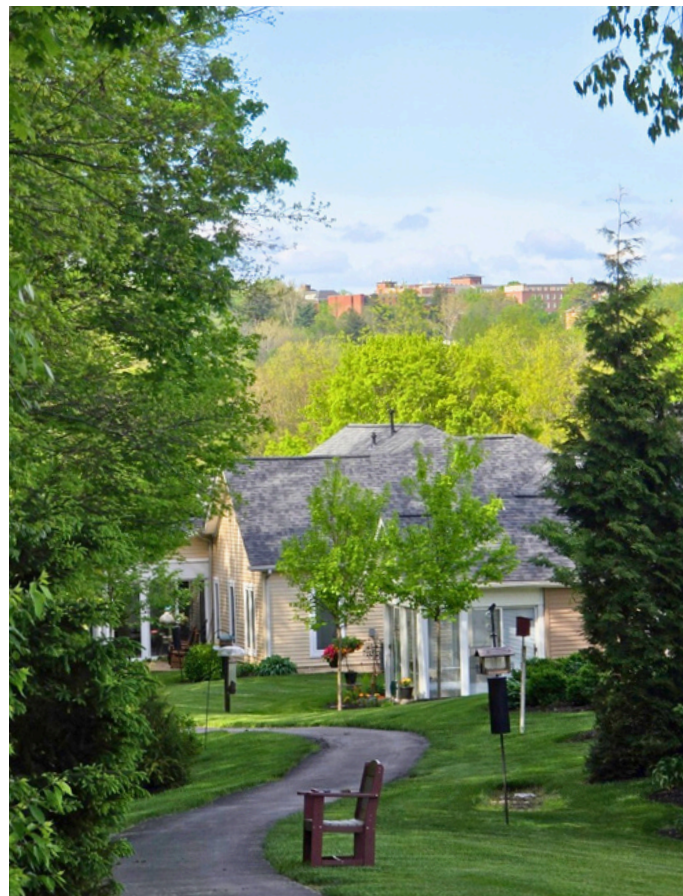
THE RICHNESS OF A UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

By Christie Vargo, Otterbein Granville

The collaboration of Kendal at Granville with our local university, Denison, played a critical role in our founding 20 years ago. That relationship has only evolved and grown stronger, even as we affiliated with Otterbein Senior Life. It began with the sharing of land and financial resources. Since then, it has grown to include student and faculty performances, class audit opportunities for our residents, and summer Artists in Residence programs. It has even resulted in Granville-wide collaborations, such as a three-day series of events featuring entomologist and writer Doug Tallamy, as well as an ongoing partnership with Pollinator Pathway to promote pollinator gardens. These opportunities reflect the intangible, co-generational relationships that often last beyond the moment.

One of the most exciting outgrowths of our collaboration with Denison University was a sustainability study and plan conducted by junior-level environmental studies students in their spring quarter of 2024. The Otterbein Granville (OG) Go Green Committee worked with students and their professor to facilitate their access to information and OG staff. The resulting plan detailed short- and long-term actions, including improving lighting (e.g., with timers, dimmers, and LEDs), installing rain barrels, investing in renewable energy, managing invasive species, reducing single-use plastics, composting food, improving recycling, identifying potential funding sources, invigorating resident education and

engagement, and fine-tuning signage (recycling, arboretum tagging with QR codes to provide more information than was available previously).



Nearby Denison University beckons in the skyline of the Otterbein Granville campus.

As a bonus, the students coordinated an Earth Day event in which they gathered bird feeders from residents, cleaned and sanitized them, and returned them to their respective owners. Go Green and Nest Box Monitoring committee members worked side by side with the students and fully enjoyed a day of co-generational interaction.

The Go Green Committee converted the Sustainability Plan into an action plan

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University (cont'd)

with three goals:

- Lower gas and utility bills, reduce light pollution, and decrease hours of labor.
- Ensure Otterbein Granville remains the model of sustainability for Otterbein Senior Life.
- Motivate Otterbein Granville residents to be invested and engaged in sustainability efforts.

By moving to a digital platform for programs, dining information, and the resident directory, for example, we significantly reduced paper consumption. We used the same platform to link to a virtual tour we initiated of the new Rumpke Recycling and Resource Center in Columbus, OH, the largest Materials Recovery Facility in North America. OG also held preliminary conversations about partnering with Go Green Granville, an initiative in which significant leadership is provided by Denison University and the local community foundation to fund and install solar on existing and future structures.

Through our partnership with Denison, OG has joined sustainability efforts in collaboration with many other local organizations. The OG/Denison partnership and the resulting OG/community-wide partnership around sustainability continue to grow. We are fortunate to be part of an ever-expanding critical mass working toward green solutions in Granville and the surrounding area.

Education Corner **The Carbon Cost of Travel**

How much carbon is released into the atmosphere when you fly on a plane? Many of us will be vacationing far afield this summer, and most are not thinking about their carbon footprint.

But Rick Steves is. This travel host and tour operator has his own way of compensating for carbon pollution from flights. The Rick Steves' Europe Climate Smart Commitment™ uses a self-imposed carbon tax to counteract the environmental damage caused by air travel rather than carbon offsets (see April 2024 issue), which are known to be problematic.

Experts estimate that for each person, it takes a \$30 investment in environmental initiatives in the developing world to mitigate the carbon emissions created by one round-trip flight between the U.S. and Europe. So Steves supports carefully selected nonprofits in developing countries that have practical carbon mitigation initiatives in place. These include such well known groups as the Rainforest Alliance and Citizens' Climate Education.

His grants to these organizations ensure that the per person carbon toll of a flight to Europe is offset by a verifiable activity that helps fight climate change.

You, too, can mitigate the carbon cost of your flight—make a tax-deductible donation to your own worthy enterprise!

For more information:

<https://www.ricksteves.com/about-us/climate-smart/>

GO NATIVE!

By Paula Wiiken, RoseVilla

There's a powerful climate change movement that infuses the term "go native" with new meaning: landscaping with native plants rather than those from other parts of the world. Native plants and trees attract local wildlife, adapt well to our climate, use less water over time, provide summer shade, and don't need to be mowed!

At RoseVilla we're proud advocates of this movement, with two busy Green Team resident landscape committees—one dedicated to trees, one to plants.

As part of our "Flower Power" project, committee members advise residents on design; buy and dig in the native plants; and strategize about how to maintain the new garden. The committee planted about 100 new native plants on campus last year. Together with the RoseVilla Grounds Team, we added beautiful Oregon natives to parking strips in 2024.



A RoseVilla resident volunteer, Eric Shawn, planting a native white oak tree.

The tree committee also collaborates with our Grounds Team, removing invasive plants and adding native trees to the common areas. We map out appropriate locations and find, buy, and plant the trees. Our tree advocates planted 13 native trees in 2024 and five so far in 2025. Many of us serve as stewards, encouraging the new trees to thrive.



A resident's yard is enlivened with native plants, including lady fern and goat's beard.

Our goal is to add more biodiverse native habitat on campus, mainly through our active plantings initiatives, but education is also an important part of our mission. We give presentations on topics such as promoting pollinator habitat and increasing tree canopy. At the May tree walk, we introduced residents to special trees on campus, including our new natives.

Affording native plants can be challenging, so fundraising events are essential. The annual Earth Day Bake Sale for residents and staff raised over \$1,000 in 2025! Now we have money for future projects to make our campus come alive with natives. Best of all, we have fun planting.

THE HOPE OF A GREEN FUND

By Stu Graves, Wake Robin

From its founding, Wake Robin (WR) has sought to be an environmentally friendly community. Thus, we are exploring ways to reduce our contribution to climate change by lowering carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Despite early adoption of heat pumps, some buildings are gas-powered; overall we emit nearly 2,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO₂e) annually. To comply with the Paris Accords, half of that emitted CO₂e will need to be eliminated in the next five years.

It is untenable to raise everyone's fees to meet this target. However, if each WR household could afford to contribute an extra two months' fees, that would raise around \$4.6 million/year—an extra one month's fee, \$2.3 million. Other potential sources of funds include WR investments, the WR annual budget, federal/state grants/loans, private sector grants/loans, and donations from residents and other sources.

To bolster hopes of reaching our target, a resident presented the idea of a Green Fund to the Climate Action Task Force (a resident committee), a meeting at which the CEO of WR was in attendance. The Climate Action Task Force then authorized the formation of the Green Fund Task Force to think through issues related to the formation of a donor-supported fund.

The Green Fund Task Force met many times to determine the mission and



A donor-supported Green Fund can be used to mitigate climate change.

purpose of the Green Fund, address the securing and managing of assets, determine the structure of the Green Fund Committee, outline committee procedures, and develop a priority list of goals for projects to be supported. The Director of Development was also brought in to help create a fund-raising campaign utilizing ongoing education and involvement of the community.

Four priorities were outlined to help qualify projects for Green Fund support:

- Promotes elimination of campus emissions of greenhouse gases.
- Procures/produces energy not derived from fossil fuels.
- Uses construction materials with low amounts of greenhouse gas emissions associated with their life cycle (low embodied carbon).
- Maintains/increases campus carbon sinks.

By December 2024, the Green Fund was established, and the Green Fund Committee Guidelines were completed

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Fund (cont'd)

and made public. In January 2025 committee members were selected: six residents and the CEO as voting members. The Green Fund Committee met for the first time on January 30, 2025. As of February 2025, residents had donated \$105,000 to the fund prior to any intentional fund raising!

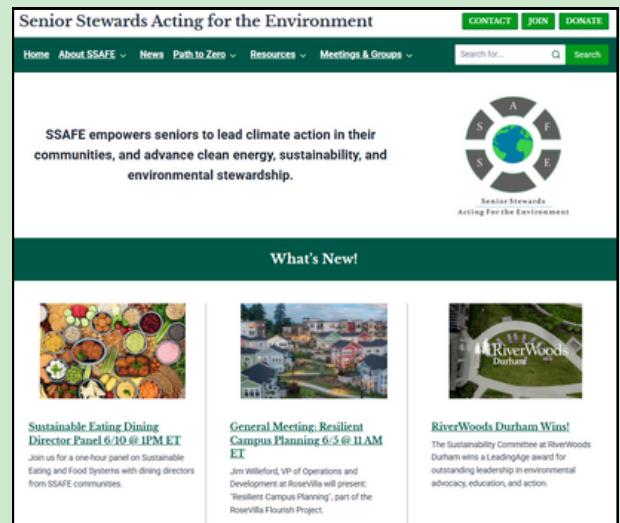
Will we get there? It's hard to raise money to reduce the amount of an invisible, odorless substance. Few people give generously right away, most people wait to see what others are doing, and some may not agree it is an advantageous common good. Despite that, the more imminently life-threatening or destructive something is, the more people will work for the common good. The cost, morbidity, and mortality of climate warming are now hard to ignore.

Our founders established Wake Robin as a Life Plan Community dedicated to fostering an environmentally friendly and sustainable living environment. The Green Fund will supplement the resources of the Wake Robin Corporation to achieve significant decarbonization within the constraints of technical and financial feasibility.

See the full case study at: <https://tinyurl.com/WRgreenfund>



Discover SSAFE's New and Improved Website!



We're excited to unveil SSAFE's redesigned website at www.SSAFE.org.

The new site features a clean layout, improved organization, and easier navigation—making it simpler than ever to find what you need.

Information is now clearly categorized, with updated pages for our meetings and groups, case studies, presentation videos, book and film recommendations, net zero guides, and sustainability resources.

A new search function helps you quickly locate specific content, and expanded sections make more information available at your fingertips.

Whether you're looking to learn, connect, or take action, the site is built to support your journey. Visit today and explore the enhancements that make our work more accessible to all!

A STAFF POSITION DEDICATED TO SUSTAINABILITY

By Larry Litten, Piper Shores

In 2017, the Piper Shores Board of Directors created a five-year strategic plan that included developing a plan to address environmental sustainability measures. In 2020, the CEO at the time appointed the precursor of what eventually became the Piper Shores Sustainability Collaborative (SC). Its mission was to create and oversee the plan. The group's name reflects its distinctive character. It consists of members of senior leadership, residents, Board members, and community members; it is co-chaired by our Chief Operating Officer and a resident.

The first meeting of the SC was called for the week we locked down for the COVID pandemic. Activity on the sustainability front was suspended, although the Board had upped the ante by instructing Piper Shores to “implement an organizational environment sustainability plan.” By the time management had sufficient post-pandemic bandwidth to attend to a new, non-pandemic priority, Piper Shores had a new CEO, Phil Jean. Phil elected to engage professional expertise in order to ensure that our plan was comprehensive and practical.

An international engineering firm that has its sustainability practice in Portland, ME, was selected to produce a plan; they worked with members of the SC to develop it and presented it to the community in December 2023. In presenting the plan to the community, CEO Phil Jean noted that “Our



Jen Rowland, the new Sustainability Coordinator at Piper Shores.

commitment to aiming for a sustainable future goes to the core of our culture and strategy—and is part of our aspirational goals for a better future.”

The top priority in the plan (viewable at <https://www.pipershores.org/about-us/sustainability/>) is to “appoint a sustainability coordinator . . . by the end of 2025.” A job description was created by senior leadership, and the position was advertised in various venues, including the Piper Shores website, job posting websites such as Indeed and LinkedIn, Maine Association of Nonprofits, LeadingAge Maine/New Hampshire, and the University of New Hampshire job board. This generated approximately 50 qualified applicants.

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Sustainability Position (cont'd)

Key elements of the job description were:

- Develops and tracks progress toward sustainability goals as outlined within the Sustainability Plan.
- Evaluates and revises the Sustainability Plan.
- Prepares and presents sustainability reports detailing achievements, challenges, and future objectives to management and stakeholders.
- Engages with external stakeholders, such as vendors, government agencies, community organizations, and the public, to promote sustainability initiatives.
- Tracks resident issues and suggestions related to sustainability.
- Works closely with departments across the organization to integrate sustainability practices into the day-to-day operations of residents and staff.

The position is funded in the operating budget and reports to the Director of Plant Operations.

Jen Rowland learned about the position from a friend who worked at Piper Shores, and in March 2025, she was hired as the Sustainability and Landscape Coordinator. Jen holds a B.S. in Environmental Conservation Studies from the University of New Hampshire and an M.S. in Environmental Studies from Antioch University/New England. Her previous employment was with Wolfe's Neck Center for Agriculture and the Environment, Wild Seed Project, and Maine Audubon. Upon arriving at Piper Shores, her early projects have included meeting with landscape architects

and developing an RFP for landscaping work, considering opportunities for developing a Piper Shores trail system, and assessing the invasive species populations here. Following the growing season, she anticipates turning her attention to the sustainability component of her role and taking a deeper dive into operational shifts that will ultimately reduce the community's carbon footprint. Eventually, she will become the administrative co-chair of the SC.

Only a few months into the job, Jen says "I've received an incredibly warm welcome here at Piper Shores, which has been such a gift to me. I'm delighted to be part of such a wonderful, collaborative group of staff, residents, and community partners who are committed to working together to achieve Piper Shores' sustainability and ecological goals."

RiverWoods Durham Wins LeadingAge Award!



Vicky Barrette and Judy Parks receive the award from LeadingAge representatives.

The RiverWoods Durham Resident Sustainability Committee has been honored with the Standing Ovation Award from LeadingAge for leadership in environmental advocacy, education, and action.

Wrapping Up

SSAFE Welcomes Two New Chapters

SSAFE is expanding once again. With the addition of our two new communities, we now have 17 chapters in 13 states!

RoseVilla, a nonprofit Life Plan Community, is located on 22 acres overlooking the Willamette River in Portland, OR. The community is nationally recognized for its commitment to sustainability, with two net-zero energy neighborhoods: The Oaks and Trillium Townhomes. These neighborhoods are built to Passive House standards, a designation that signifies that the homes produce enough energy to offset their energy use over the course of a year.

Seabury is also a nonprofit Life Plan Community located on a 66-acre campus in Bloomfield, CT, where environmental sustainability is a core value. This commitment is reflected in initiatives such as the installation of solar panels (in use since 2018), the development of a geothermal well system, and the maintenance of extensive walking trails. Notably, Seabury was the first privately owned Life Plan Community in the United States to receive a Green Globes designation for its geothermal system.

Donate Today!

It's tax-deductible!

And it's easy. Just send a check—made out to SSAFE:

Scot Drysdale
32 Penn Road, Apt. 419
Hanover, NH 03755

SSAFE uses these funds to support efforts such as guiding senior living campuses to net zero emissions, climate advocacy, and climate education. Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment (SSAFE) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. EIN: 87-1229514.

Options to Support SSAFE

Consider making a donation to SSAFE in honor of someone meaningful to you. This could be in memory of a loved one who cared deeply about the environment, or in recognition of an individual or team whose sustainability efforts have made a real impact—whether on your campus or within SSAFE. Your tribute not only celebrates their legacy of accomplishments but also helps advance our shared mission of building a more sustainable future through senior leadership.

SSAFE Newsletter

This newsletter is a publication of SSAFE, a non-profit organization started by residents from Kendal senior living communities. SSAFE has no official affiliation with the Kendal Corporation.

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Submissions & Comments

We want your feedback! We're always looking for good stories to provide inspiration to other senior living community residents. Send us your articles, ideas, questions, or comments!

We'd love to hear from you—drop us an email at info@SSAFE.org