

SSAFE Newsletter

Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment



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Hanover dining coordinator, Keely Marie, effectively reduced plastics in the dining area.

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A little serendipity, a lot of intention, but finally... up on the roof.

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Reducing Plastics, Restoring a Feeling of Home

By Cindy Rand and Larry Daloz, Kendal at Hanover

Our chapters suffer from too much plastic everywhere, but perhaps nowhere more so than in their central dining areas. Single-use plastic items such as straws, cutlery, cups, takeout containers, and beverage bottles are the main culprits. These are problematic from a number of perspectives, from risks to our health to damage to the broader environment. Microplastics (tiny plastic particles 5 mm or less) and toxic chemicals from plastics can leach into our food. A lot of plastic and culinary waste ends up in landfills, where it continues to degrade into microplastics and emit methane gas, with damaging long-term environmental consequences.

cont'd p.2

Reducing Plastics (cont'd)

One SSAFE chapter, Kendal at Hanover, offers a helpful example in its efforts to rid itself of unnecessary plastic. Despite the familiar challenges voiced by most of our chapter dining directors, Hanover has been successful in shifting toward plant-based options and reusable alternatives. How did they do it?

Aware of the growing problem, in July 2024 a group of residents at Hanover, calling themselves “The Plastics Group,” teamed up to see what they could do to reduce single-use plastics. Happily, at that very time, the administration asked recently hired Keely Marie to run the cafe. Her background as a health coach with a concern for environmental issues, as well 30 years in the private fitness business, provided a rich foundation for this endeavor. She quickly saw the value of working with the plastics group and took them on a tour of the kitchen and dish room, offering a comprehensive understanding of the realities of food service, including cost, availability, and the physical constraints of the workspace. How can a limited staff prepare the variety of foods needed by this clientele? If the law requires that a dish be kept warm, how can that be done without plastic containers? Everyone seemed to be in their own silos. How could she get so many different stakeholders to agree?

But Keely was undaunted. “I was excited by the challenges,” she said, “and I thought, ‘why don’t we back up and look at what we *can* do?’” Securing approval from the chef, the food service manager, and other staff, she began by targeting the low-hanging fruit.

“We encouraged residents and staff to use the glassware we provided, or to bring their own containers,” she explained, “and we introduced cans for juices, effectively eliminating almost all single-use plastic beverages. We then reduced eight Gatorade® flavors to three, then eliminated them altogether by moving them to the beverage machine, along with flavored seltzer and zero vitamin water.”



More beverages, previously offered in plastic bottles, are now offered in both the juice and soda machines.

Over the following weeks, Keely’s leadership led to a number of changes.

- Eliminating plastic-wrapped disposable utensil kits by installing a single, plant-based utensil dispenser and switching from plastic straws to an agave-based alternative.
- Eliminating small plastic condiment containers; sauces are now included in main takeout containers or put in small paper cups upon request.
- Brewing fresh iced tea daily rather than offering it in single-use plastic bottles.
- Offering glass drinkware, coffee mugs, stainless steel utensils, and cloth napkins for eat-in options, adding to a more pleasant dining environment.

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Reducing Plastics (cont'd)

A few of these changes raised eyebrows among some residents. “Certainly resident satisfaction is a priority,” Keely says, “and we must strike a balance between reducing plastic waste and providing the convenience that’s expected. We therefore placed a high priority on resident and staff education, explaining our commitment to a sustainable dining plan,” adding, “As soon as I explained the reason, the resistance went away. The residents got it.” One of the more successful ideas was presenting reusable drink containers to all staff on Staff Appreciation Day and charging only \$1.00 to refill them when they were used in the cafe.

But perhaps the biggest challenge has been finding an alternative to plastic takeout containers. “While we explored metal,” she explains, “the higher financial investment required, and concern about residents handling hot foods, led us to adopt the reusable green plastic containers that we got through G.E.T. Enterprises. We introduced them in stages, and they are now used 94% of the time by residents.” Two sizes are offered for entrees; small squares for salads, cut fruits, and desserts; and small rounds for soups.

Keely emphasizes that the financial challenge cannot be underestimated. Admittedly, it is cheap and convenient to rely on single-use plastic, and the initial investment required to purchase sustainable alternatives can feel like a hurdle. Yet she points out that while disposable plastics may seem cheap on a per-unit basis, the costs add up. Investing in reusable alternatives can significantly

reduce expenses long-term despite higher costs up front. Alternatives can be reused innumerable times, which eliminates the need to repeatedly purchase single-use plastics.

Not only have these innovations reduced reliance on plastics, she explains, “but they have brought a huge change, a kind of organic camaraderie, into the cafe dining experience itself. We all know that sitting together in a relaxed environment is the healthiest way to eat.” At the end of the day, using china, stainless utensils, cloth napkins, and glassware have brought comfort and a refreshing brightness to the cafe. Keely’s philosophy for recognizing dining as a crucial element in making Kendal at Hanover feel like home, her enthusiasm for listening to residents, and her skill in gently but persistently introducing a sustainable environment have reaped huge rewards for everyone.

Advocacy Corner **Go Beyond Plastics**

Interested in reducing plastics in your own community? Beyond Plastics offers free resources, educational classes, and practical tools to help individuals and organizations advocate for change. They also provide opportunities to host expert speakers, making it easier to engage residents and staff in meaningful conversations about plastic reduction.

For more information go to:
www.beyondplastics.org

OUR MEETING HOUSE GOES SOLAR!

By George Kriebel, Lathrop North

It began when COVID struck in early 2020, and residents used the porches of our Meeting House as a space to safely meet and converse. The daughter of one resident began to use the porch as a rehearsal space for her string quartet, starting a tradition followed by other roving musicians, to the delight of musicians and audience alike.

Our administration then decided to enlarge the performance/audience space by erecting a tent. The following year residents raised money to construct a patio that was friendlier to canes and rollators. The first tent collapsed in a windstorm, beginning a discussion in 2023 of replacing it with a stronger tent, or a more permanent pavilion.

Given the ideal location of the patio, SSAFE members suggested that if Lathrop's budget could not yet accommodate immediate solar installation, the pavilion should at least be "solar-ready." They also obtained the cost, payback period, and eventual savings over 25 years from a local solar installer.

A stronger tent for the patio was chosen over a more permanent structure, but a seed had been planted. In 2024, the roof of the Meeting House was replaced as scheduled, and the Building and Grounds Committee of the Board set aside \$90K in its budget to solarize the new roof. Resident-administration collaboration made this possible—residents make up 25% of the Board of Directors.

In the spring of 2025, we finally installed

solar photovoltaic (PV) panels with a capacity of 27.95 kW DC, at a cost of \$85,650—under budget! The community celebrated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony!



L to R: Facilities staff Tyler Tersavich and Amanda Sergiy; Facilities Manager Paul Kane; Facilities staff Sean Mathers; CEO Patrick Arguin; SSAFE member Myra Gordon. Inset: West-facing roof of the Meeting House (east-facing roof has an equal number of PVs).

In just two months, the panels generated 6,000 kWh of electricity, far exceeding the Meeting House's actual use, resulting in a \$500 credit to its electric bill. Since the PV array was calculated to provide 175% of the Meeting House's annual electricity needs, we're discussing options: adding campus street lights to that circuit, changing the heat system of the Meeting House to air source heat pumps (mini splits), or adding a Level 2 EV charger in the parking lot.

There is an often-meandering path from the inception of an idea to its implementation. For us, the path took five years, but our Meeting House can finally boast new solar panels.

CULINARY COMPOSTING: HOW ARE WE DOING?

By Ed Gellenbeck, Judy Parks, Larry Litten, Carol Jean Suitor, Larry Daloz, Rahima Warren, Dorothy Luciano

Most food waste from central kitchens ends up in the landfill, where it generates dangerous methane—a greenhouse gas over 28 times more potent than CO₂ at trapping heat in the atmosphere. Thus a key goal of SSAFE must be the diversion of food waste to a composting system. Some of our chapters have succeeded in doing just this!

RoseVilla

The central kitchen at RoseVilla has been composting for at least ten years, with the full support of the administration. They contract with Waste Management, a commercial composting company, to pick up and process the food waste. There are compost bins in the kitchen prep areas, the dish room, and in the scrape-down/bussing areas into which staff deposit the waste. These compost bins are transferred to six 96-gallon bins on the loading dock, which Waste Management picks up twice a week—in a sample week, about 2,680 pounds of organic material were collected. Organics and recycling are included in the cost of RoseVilla's trash disposal. Waste Management sells compost to the public and also uses it to generate green energy.

By Ed Gellenbeck

RiverWoods Durham

RiverWoods Durham has been composting kitchen waste since November 2019. Our administration has been very supportive of sustainability efforts in general, and our Director of Culinary Operations has worked with the RiverWoods Durham Sustainability Committee to start new green initiatives. Compostable takeout containers, bones,



Turning kitchen scraps into compost instead of trash helps build a more sustainable future.

shells, fruit pits, even brown napkins and paper towels, brown paper bags, and pizza boxes are collected weekly by Mr. Fox, a commercial composting company. Plated food waste is composted by the staff, though all the waste may not be fully scraped into the compost. All compostable material is collected in four large, kitchen-sized buckets placed near the prep crew. It is then transferred to larger garbage-sized containers strategically placed in a collection area. We create approximately 595 pounds of kitchen waste per week and pay Mr. Fox \$695.95 monthly.

By Judy Parks

Piper Shores

Dining Services at Piper Shores has been composting for about 10 years, collecting vegetable and fruit scraps, meat trim, food waste from plates, and prepared foods that have gone past the window of being usable. Compost collection buckets are placed in all the kitchens near the dishwasher stations, and we generate roughly 1,500 pounds of food waste a month. Once full, these buckets are transported to nine compost bins in the main garage, where

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Composting (cont'd)

Agri-Cycle, a food waste processing company, picks them up. Through a combination of bio-separators and anaerobic digesters, they turn our food waste into solids that are used as animal bedding, field fertilizer, biogas fuel, and electricity. The cost for composting at all of our facilities is approximately \$1,015 a month, which includes rental on containers, pickup costs, and a fuel surcharge.

By Larry Litten

"...Vermont state law banned the disposal of all food scraps in the trash...."

Wake Robin

Five years ago, Vermont state law banned the disposal of all food scraps in the trash or landfills. Wake Robin first responded by using commercial composting. In 2022, because of the high expense of commercial composting and concern about the fuel the collection trucks used, two residents volunteered to help administration find a better solution to reduce the food scraps from food preparation, mainly vegetables and fruit. They gained approval to obtain data from firms that make aerobic biodigesters to inform a possible purchase by the Wake Robin Corporation.

After ruling out several firms, the residents collected extensive data on specifications and cost from four vendors and provided a spreadsheet and narrative report to the Directors of Dining and of

Environmental Services. Administration chose to purchase two Power Knot 25 biodigesters in 2023—one for the main kitchen and one for the residential care kitchen—after verifying with local wastewater management that the grey water produced would be acceptable. Because of space limitations, they bought the smallest size, each at a cost of \$18,000, but a discount including commissioning brought the unit price down to a little over \$16,000. The two biodigesters process a weekly average exceeding 4,000 pounds of food scraps resulting from food preparation. Annual upkeep for both is about \$2,700, paid out of the Dining budget. The cost for pickup of food scraps, which are not itemized separately but included in the cost of all trash removal, is paid for by Environmental Services and has decreased substantially.

The biodigesters are too small to handle all the kitchen's food scraps, and they cannot handle hard items (such as beef bones), grease, and corn cobs. Such food scraps plus plate waste and home kitchen food scraps are still picked up for commercial composting.

By Carol Jean Suitor

Kendal at Hanover

Fortunately, a farmer who picks up and composts all of our kitchen food waste lives right across the river. For over a decade, the waste went through an elaborate pulping system that chopped and drained it. But when the town recently determined that the liquid no longer met their increased standards, the farmer agreed to pick up the raw waste despite

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Composting (cont'd)

the increased weight of the liquid. He comes twice a week and each time hauls off six 35-gallon bins that weigh 125 pounds each, totaling some 70,000 pounds a year. This goes into his own large-scale system to produce finished compost that he sells locally on the open market. Thus, almost 95% of the waste is diverted from the trash stream.

By Larry Daloz



On the farm near Hanover, each separate pile shows the several stages of ripening compost.

Other chapters are also composting. Enso Village composts all food waste through Recology, their local trash/recycling/compost company. Normally the kitchen at Kendal at Oberlin composts 750 pounds of salad bar prep and plate leftovers through Barnes Composting, a commercial composting service; however, they are currently in a hiatus while their kitchen is being completely renovated, after which culinary composting will resume. And Kendal at Longwood has started a small pilot program that composts food scraps through Bennett Compost.

Where there's a will, there's a way. How can you overcome the barriers to culinary composting at your chapter?

No Plastics Treaty for Now

By Barclay Ward, Kendal at Hanover



Delegates at work. Credit: UNEP/Artan Jama.

Score another win for the petrostates.

In August, delegates from over 180 states met at the Palais des Nations in Geneva to negotiate a treaty capping the production of plastics. Opposition from the petroleum-producing states, supported by the United States, succeeded in preventing such an outcome. The Geneva meeting was a continuation of negotiations held last year in Busan, South Korea. These negotiations were also killed by the petroleum states. No date for further negotiations has been set.

These negotiations have taken place in the UN Environmental Assembly, following the customary UN negotiating principle that “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” Given the firm opposition of the petroleum-producing states, it's unlikely that we will ever see a treaty capping the production of plastics unless a negotiating framework can be found outside the UN.

Even without a global treaty, SSAFE chapters can keep moving forward. Email info@ssafe.org to join the *Reducing Waste: Plastics Workgroup*.

A TALE OF TWO LANDSCAPES

By Larry Litten, Piper Shores

Landscapes change over time and need maintenance. Landscape management philosophies and practices also change and need updating. That's why Piper Shores is reinvigorating a 25-year-old landscape at its Oceanside campus, as well as creating a new landscape from scratch at its newer campus, The Meadows.

The Oceanside campus at Piper Shores consists of cottages, apartments, an assisted living facility, and a health center spread over 138 acres. Nearly 70% of that is under conservation and maintained by a contractor. Historically the landscape was highly manicured, with extensive lawns and beds of ornamental perennials, few of which were native to our area.

It was clear that many plants, especially those at building foundations, had outgrown their sites and needed to be revisited. At the same time, recent residents with extensive landscape training and experience brought new sensibilities to campus regarding ecologically appropriate plantings; suitable wildlife habitat; and sustainable upkeep. Management elected to work with these residents to identify and select a consultant who embraced these values.

The consultant worked with a team of staff and residents to develop a master landscape plan for the campus. A contractor who subscribes to the principles of the plan was also hired and is managed by a newly appointed Sustainability and Landscape Coordinator. The plan identifies seven ecological zones



Reduced mowing area.

and recommends appropriate plants and stewardship practices for each. Overall goals include the introduction of native plants—for lower maintenance and better wildlife habitat—and the reduction of mowed lawns.

Key to the implementation of the plan are:

- Pilot projects to ascertain the feasibility and acceptability of changes.
- Educational activities to introduce and explain changes—signage, programs.
- Resident involvement in implementing some of the changes—plantings, nurture.

The first year's pilot project was no mowing on slopes and reduced mowing at lawn/wood interfaces (these practices were continued into the second year). Three other projects were selected for the second year:

- Introducing native plants in beds in the core patio area.
- Native plants and reduced trimming in beds that surround the art center.
- Expanded beds with native plants on the cottage lane.

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Landscapes (cont'd)

These projects will begin in August 2025.

A new Piper Shores campus called The Meadows opened in 2023. It consists of 45 acres, with about 25% under conservation, also maintained by a contractor.

Unfortunately, inappropriate plantings, no meadow-specific maintenance, heavy rains, excessive mowing, and an invasion of geese around a pond did not support a healthy, native meadow as the campus name would suggest.

On a resident's recommendation, management hired a leading consultant in meadow creation and care. The consultant worked with staff and residents to create a landscape plan that will produce a robust native meadow and eliminate invasive species. The plan has four goals:

- Create habitat and a sense of place (native plants)
- Visual cohesion
- Reflect community values
- Economical/sustainable plantings

Following a survey of the property by the consultants, residents were queried on what they value in the landscape and on its problems. This was followed by an all-campus charrette, with a consultant presentation and breakout sessions. At the end of this process, separate scopes of work were created for invasive plant removal and for seeding and nurturing the meadow. The latter specified a three-year regimen that includes site preparation, seeding, and ongoing plant establishment and support. Because it takes several years for a flowering meadow to develop, patience and education are essential.

Work on The Meadows and the next phase of Oceanside will begin in August 2025. Piper Shores has mustered the power of resident-management collaboration to create a landscape development plan that will take them well into the 21st century and beyond.

1,000 SSAFE Members!



SSAFE recently reached an exciting milestone, surpassing 1,000 members. Because membership is limited to residents of our 18 chapter communities, this accomplishment is especially meaningful.

The milestone was reached at Collington during the showing of a climate movie. After the film, SSAFE Chair Joel Brody offered a sign-up sheet for those inspired to join. When the new names were entered into the membership database, it turned out that the 1,000th member was Embry Howell, followed immediately by her husband, Joe Howell. In recognition of this moment, SSAFE honored them together as our 1,000th and 1,001st members. Each received a SSAFE T-shirt and water bottle, along with a reusable shopping bag to share.

DOING WELL BY DOING GOOD

By Carol Jean Suitor, Wake Robin

It only took one resident to spark our continuing care community to become a more socially and environmentally responsible investor. This resident educated us about a local credit union whose mission is to create wealth and promote economic development by bringing affordable capital and financial services to low-income and other traditionally underserved populations. Our residents' association and the Wake Robin Corporation (WRC) each purchased CDs from that credit union. Next, the resident-member of the WRC investment subcommittee investigated, reported on, and arranged for presentations to that subcommittee on additional local socially responsible investment opportunities.

After the presentations, the WRC investment subcommittee unanimously agreed to 1) obtain a second certificate of deposit in the low-income credit union despite exceeding the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) limit and 2) invest in a community loan fund that offered no FDIC insurance. Both the credit union and the loan fund provide services that could benefit Vermonters with lower incomes, which might include current or future Wake Robin work force members.

Following these investments of a modest portion of the WRC portfolio, the investment subcommittee renewed a dormant discussion of strategies for more environmentally and socially responsible investment. To be fiducially responsible, we needed information on ESG (environment, social, governance) investment strategies from our investment advisor,



including long-term performance data. Our chief financial officer arranged for a representative of our investment firm to give a slide presentation on ESG options and address our questions. The data presented on long-term performance was favorable. At a subsequent meeting, the subcommittee discussed the pros and cons of an ESG focus and the value of making gradual changes in the investment portfolio. The subcommittee agreed to recommend to the WRC Board of Directors that they approve the initiation of an investment strategy with an ESG focus. The WRC Board agreed to assume a slightly higher level of risk (and equity exposure) while making investments more sustainable, incorporating ESG principles with a broad perspective.

WRC, as part of a standard periodic process, recently sent requests for proposals (RFPs) to selected investment firms to determine which one would align with our mission and serve us best financially. With our increased commitment to sustainability, the RFPs now prominently request information about ESG integration and screening on all assets. Regardless of which firm we engage, the investment subcommittee will monitor holdings and performance to ensure they are in line with Wake Robin's values.

NURTURING A STRONG ECOSYSTEM

By Kamala Brush, Lathrop East

One of the three pillars of Lathrop's strategic plan is environmental stewardship. In support, we established a quarterly Environmental Forum to address the diverse range of work happening on both campuses. There are already a number of committees working on environmental stewardship and sustainability goals, and there are various ad hoc groups on each campus that address such issues as trees, toxins, pest control, composting, energy, and landscaping practices.

The Environmental Forum does not supersede these existing campus organizations. Rather, it provides an additional way for all those working on environmental stewardship to exchange ideas, and it creates a structure that does not require the CEO and other staff to meet individually with each group at every step. The CEO and the Facilities Manager both attended the most recent meeting, and our discussions with them were captured in the minutes for all to benefit.

One newer two-campus committee in addition to the forum, the Environmental Education and Action Committee, has launched a series of educational programs. These include an exploration of insects and denizens of the dark—a moth-viewing discovery adventure in a resident's back yard; a gathering to view fireflies at our East Campus community garden; a book discussion of *Night Magic*; and a screening of the PBS documentary *Bugs that Rule the World*. We've also created a Google group called Green Neighbors to better able residents to share

announcements, resources, information, and inspiration.

Residents are also active beyond our campus boundaries. Lathrop volunteers joined over 30 community members to pack barley straw into onion bags—part of an ongoing effort to prevent Harmful Cyanobacteria Blooms (HCBs) in area waters. HCBs, fueled by climate change and excess nutrients, pose risks to ecosystems, public health, and especially pets. As barley straw decomposes, it releases compounds that naturally suppress cyanobacteria without harming other aquatic life. Four years in, the project continues to deliver promising results, thanks to community involvement and simple, science-backed solutions.



Susan Garrett and Jane Antonsen, among other residents and volunteers, joined a community effort to bolster the ecosystem.

With a strong culture of resident engagement underlying our new umbrella group—the Environmental Forum—plus all ongoing efforts, Lathrop is well poised to meet its environmental stewardship goals.

Wrapping Up

Step Forward to Support SSAFE

SSAFE's growth and impact are possible only through the commitment of our members. **We are currently seeking individuals to serve as at-large members of the Board of Directors and to take on the vital role of Treasurer.** As our current Treasurer, who has faithfully served for more than four years, put it:

“Serving as Treasurer has been deeply fulfilling. It is gratifying to know that my efforts have made a concrete, measurable impact month after month.”

If Board service isn't the right fit, you can also strengthen SSAFE by making a financial contribution. Every gift, large or small, helps us expand our reach and resources as we mobilize senior living communities nationwide toward a net-zero future.



Ready to step forward? Email michelle@ssafe.org for more details.

Donate Today!

It's tax-deductible!
Just send a check—made out to SSAFE:

SSAFE c/o Linda Graves
119 Hawthorn Drive, #113
Shelburne, VT 05482

Or, go to www.SSAFE.org/donate

SSAFE supports 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.

SSAFE Welcomes Pilgrim Place

Founded in 1915, Pilgrim Place in Claremont, CA, has grown into a vibrant, inclusive, senior community where care for the earth is a defining value. Residents have led sustainability efforts for more than 25 years, as evidenced by three LEED-certified buildings, over 2,000 solar panels, and a 50% reduction in water use since 2000. Their Environmental Concerns Committee spearheads projects from composting to native landscaping, and the newly launched Climate Resilience Initiative is helping to modernize homes to make them more energy efficient.

SSAFE Newsletter

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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