

SSAFE Newsletter

Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment

A Member-Supported Organization



In This Issue

How Green is Your Restaurant?



Resident/Administrator Collaboration

How to smooth those ties and make it work.

Profit Today, Poison Tomorrow

PFAS are everywhere.

Interested in learning more?

Visit [SSAFE.org](https://ssafe.org) online or email us at info@ssafe.org

SSAFE newsletters can always be found at [SSAFE.org/newsletter](https://ssafe.org/newsletter)



Voter turnout is now more important than ever.

Climate Under Attack— Time to Step Up!

By Larry Daloz, Barclay Ward, Kendal at Hanover; David Orr, Ted Wolner, Kendal at Oberlin

When Margaret Powell of Kendal at Hanover first called for an effort by residents to address climate change, she imagined the power of as many as a thousand elder voices urging federal officials to address the crisis at the speed and scale needed to avert catastrophe. Our membership now exceeds her number, and our mission addresses her urgency: “SSAFE empowers seniors to lead climate action in their communities, and advance clean energy, sustainability, and environmental stewardship.” In just six short years, we’ve launched an extraordinary range of concrete climate and

cont'd p.2

Step Up! (cont'd)

advocacy programs across nearly two dozen linked senior communities around the country.

Yet current federal policies undermine efforts at home and abroad to stabilize the climate. Domestically, they have knee-capped the EPA's ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, opened pristine wilderness and waters to fossil-fuel expansion, halted megawatt wind projects in mid construction, and revoked financial incentives to speed the shift to climate-saving electric vehicles, electric heating and cooling, and ramped-up battery storage. If the policies continue unchecked, climate instability will threaten climate chaos.

Globally, federal policies preclude American participation in the Paris Accords and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the world's premier climate science organization. These and other policies increase by a generational order of magnitude China's lead in fabricating, installing, selling, and exporting all-electric everything (panels, turbines, batteries, cars, buses, trucks, trains, heat pumps, stoves) everywhere in the world but here.

So what more can we do besides pressing doggedly ahead to maximize energy efficiency in our campus buildings and switch out the fossil fuels that power them for renewable sources?

This year, the single most effective actions in our struggle to reduce global heating

depend on voter turnout. That means getting to the polls the two thirds of Americans who are worried about global warming, who think it will harm us, and who support shifting to 100% clean energy by 2050. Even more than federal elections since 2016, the 2026 midterms are a five-alarm alert to question political candidates about climate change, educate our fellow residents, canvas for climate progressives, write postcards and phone-bank for these individuals, and drive disabled environmentalists to the polls.

“...the 2026 midterms are a five-alarm alert...”

This is not a partisan fight of left versus right, conservative versus liberal. We founded SSAFE as an intensely collaborative environmental advocacy organization irrespective of political affiliation. This year every one of us can choose whether to advocate for government action on climate change in the primary and general elections. Given the compounding disasters now destabilizing the climate, we are engaged in a struggle for a livable democratic future. We have no time for half measures, procrastination, moral equivocation, or abandoning the science necessary to a more durable energy future. That's our challenge in all of its complexity, uncertainty, and imperative to act.

See [SSAFE.org/vote](https://ssafe.org/vote) for a list of organizations focused on voter turnout.

The logo for VOTE! features the word "VOTE!" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. A red checkmark is superimposed over the letter "O".

GOOD NEWS ON THE CLIMATE FRONT

By Vicky Barrette, RiverWoods Durham

Although it was frequently overshadowed, there was lots of good climate news in 2025.

Clean energy is growing

Fossil fuel use is flattening or falling in three of the world's largest CO₂ emitters—China, India, and the EU. China now manufactures 70% of renewables, which have overtaken coal as the leading source of electricity. Wind and solar continue to soar as prices decline.



Global warming estimates have declined

Since the Paris Agreement, projections estimated warming to 4°C or more by 2100. Now we're seeing estimates of 2.7°C.

Oceans are being protected

The UN High Seas Treaty was ratified. Now governments can demarcate conservation zones—marine protected areas—for parts of the ocean beyond their national borders.

Rainforests are being preserved

Deforestation in Central and South America has fallen to its lowest level in a decade. Several countries have designated reserves that protect large swaths of land.

As you revel in the good news about the climate, remember, we all share one earth. All gains help everyone. If our current national contributions to improving the environment fall short of making the list, we each need to keep working for local improvements.

We *can* make a difference.

To learn more about these and other good news stories, see:

- <https://tinyurl.com/the-telemetry>
- <https://tinyurl.com/quiet-wins>
- <https://tinyurl.com/50-fixes>

COLLINGTON WINS AWARD

Prince George's County, Department of the Environment, Sustainable Waste Management Division, awarded Collington the Waste Diversion & Recycling Award for their new partnership with a commercial composter, Compost Crew.



Steve Woodbury, SSAFE Member, Joel Brody, SSAFE Chair, Stephanie Tolson, Collington Dining Director, and Dorothy Yuan, SSAFE Member, accept the recycling award.

RESIDENT-ADMINISTRATION PARTNERING: A SUCCESSFUL MODEL

By Christie Vargo, Otterbein Granville

Today, approximately 45 resident-led committees operate at Otterbein Granville. Most committees function independently, while others require partner (employee) involvement due to administrative oversight or operational coordination. Partner participation is essential for initiatives that involve budgeting, facilities, allocation of staff time, or policy decisions.

For example, the Go Green committee, which carries primary responsibility for sustainability efforts, includes the Dining Director as the assigned partner, with regular participation from the Facility Services Director and Maintenance Manager. The Executive Director and Director of Sales and Marketing receive committee communications and attend as needed. Except for the Maintenance Manager, all participating partners are members of the Executive Leadership Team.

To make this work, the importance of relationships and communication cannot be overstated. Everyone needs to be on the same page. While Otterbein Granville has made significant progress, much work still needs to be done to create a critical mass of residents who support sustainability, to help our partners understand sustainability in relationship to their day-to-day tasks, and to convey to our board and corporate leadership the importance of sustainability financially, ethically, and with an eye on the safety of our residents and partners as we face severe climate events now and in the future.

Here, though, are some of my observations and learnings regarding resident-partner relationships and collaboration:

- Don't let anything come as a surprise. As a committee chair, I try to communicate regularly with the assigned staff as well as the Executive Director.
- Be open, listen, offer perspective, and recognize that some things are not possible. Convey any disappointing administrative decisions in one voice with administrators, including reasons, and recognize that sometimes "no" is not "no," but "not now."
- Be persistent and at the same time realistic. Respect the limitations of partners and the Leadership Team. They walk a balancing act and serve many masters. Ask if there are ways residents can help reduce barriers. Recognize that some things are a process and can't happen overnight.
- Offer appreciation, show gratitude, and praise and celebrate achievements with the entire community—residents and partners.
- Be aware of the cadence of workloads. If landscaping is preparing beds with a skeleton crew because kids aren't out of school yet to fill those summer positions, it's probably not a good time to launch a new initiative.
- Make the best use of staff time. Put them at the beginning of the committee meeting agenda, and if they are not really needed for the rest of the meeting, give them an opportunity to leave.

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Collaboration (cont'd)

- Keep committee meetings focused and on topic.
- Follow up with the assigned staff after a meeting to see if they have concerns or questions.
- Make assignments and timelines clear. Remind committee members of assignments a week or so ahead of the next meeting to keep the work of the committee moving forward.
- Establish relationships with the Executive Director and Leadership Team. Analyze your committees and their work to see if operational components warrant assigning a staff member to the committee.
- Provide training opportunities for partners and work with the Executive Leadership Team to allocate time and resources for their attendance.
- Frequently communicate to all, and connect the dots between sustainability initiatives and outcomes.

“...relationships and communication are key.”

Resident-employee collaboration is critical to moving a sustainability agenda forward. Allocation of staff time, staff training and accountability, budgeting, capital improvements—all are determined at a level outside of a resident committee. It's important to make the best use of staff time and recognize that their work is varied; it's not just focused on sustainability, and they have many audiences they need to please. In the end, it is worth it. A greater amount is accomplished, and residents and employees alike are more engaged and likely to see results.

A New Model for the SSAFE Board of Directors

SSAFE's continued growth has been both exciting and encouraging. Previously, the Board of Directors included one representative from each chapter. As the number of chapters expanded nationwide, that model was no longer practical. The Board will now consist of five officers and up to 15 at-large directors, allowing SSAFE to remain effective and focused. SSAFE will continue to maintain a roster of Chapter Leaders, many of whom also serve on the Board, to act as the primary point of contact for each chapter and to strengthen communication between local communities and the national organization. Below is a list of the current Board roster.

- Joel Brody, Chair: Collington
- Jim Seif, Vice-Chair:
Kendal-Crosslands Communities
- Liz Barbehenn, Secretary: Collington
- Steven Fellows, Treasurer:
RiverWoods Durham
- Dulaney Bennett, At Large Officer:
Kendal at Hanover
- Vicky Barrette: RiverWoods Durham
- George Blomgren: Kendal at Oberlin
- Davida Foy Crabtree: Seabury
- Ed Gellenbeck: RoseVilla
- Bob Gettings: Kendal at Lexington
- George Kriebel: Lathrop North
- Larry Litten: Piper Shores
- Willa Nehlsen: Kendal-Crosslands
Communities
- Chris Sheppard: Kendal at Ithaca
- Carol Jean Sutor: Wake Robin
- Ann Taves: Pilgrim Place

THE LAWN LIVES ON, THE CHEMICALS DON'T

By Liz Barbehenn, Collington, a Kendal Affiliate

In October 2019, a few residents at Collington, members of the Grounds Committee, spoke up at a meeting stating their concerns about having chemicals spread widely on our lawns. We didn't want to be exposed to toxic chemicals and didn't want our natural world exposed to them either! Four of us met several times with the Grounds Committee chair to put together arguments, pro and con. The chair, at that time, was also acting as our horticulturalist, and in that capacity, was able to discuss the issue directly with our landscaper.

Our little group felt very strongly that we should stop using all chemicals. Although our landscapers had reservations about changing their practice, they agreed to try, and by March 2022, we had stopped using any chemicals on our lawns: pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizer.

We were concerned that Marketing might object, but that hasn't been an issue. This year the horticulturalist says she will experiment with organic herbicides—but only for planting beds and sidewalks and the bricks near the entry to Marketing. At first, a few people complained about dandelions and clover, but that has long since disappeared. Our lawns are green; they are kept mowed and neat at 4 inches in height; and our insects thrive.

“...by March 2022, we had stopped using any chemicals on our lawns: pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizer.”



Initially residents objected to “weeds” in the lawn (foreground), but now they are happy we have green lawns without the toxic chemicals.

Why do we want insects? One of our strongest arguments now is the importance of saving insects, a major source of food for our birds. Where once I would see insect damage, I now get excited thinking of all that bird food available.

We are very involved with our birds here, especially our bluebirds. We have a “bluebird trail”: 18 bird boxes mounted on poles around the periphery of the campus. Residents get very excited about seeing these beautiful birds, and we like to do anything we can to keep them happy.

Lately, the importance of the incredible world of life in the soil has come to our attention. Putting chemicals on the lawns kills the fungi that have been found to be so important to plant growth.

Insects, birds, soil—and humans—all are interconnected. Removing chemicals from our environment keeps the natural world and all of its interconnected parts healthier and more conducive to life.

A NEW COLOR: CULINARY GREEN!

By Davida Foy Crabtree, Seabury

It was the spring of 2020, and Covid was upon us at Seabury. Our CEO had moved to campus to be immediately available for decisions, and we residents were sequestered in our apartments. All meals were being delivered to our doors, and pretty soon we began to post concerns on our listserv about the amount of single-use plastics we were using.

Our mutual decision, management and residents alike, to move to OZZI reusable containers began a dialogue about other initiatives we could take. Our then Culinary VP for Innovation and Excellence researched a number of opportunities and decided to pursue accreditation with the Green Restaurant Association (<https://www.dinegreen.com>). Its established standards helped us define our direction.

First certified in 2022, Seabury did invest administrative and staff time initially and made strategic purchases to align with the standards. Although our then-VP is no longer with us, we were able to learn that the process was not overly burdensome. The initial certification cost \$3,000, and staff received training and feedback in the course of that process.

Recertification is available annually or every five years. Seabury chose to recertify every five years but participates in an annual check-in. We achieved 297.62 points during our most recent recertification, meriting 3 Stars. In our initial certification, we received 4 Stars. In our

most recent one, we missed 4 Stars by less than three points, but we are still proud of our status. Culinary is working to return to 4 Star certification. It simply points to a rigorous process that keeps us on our toes!



OZZI reusable containers provide a sustainable solution to takeout at Seabury's Bistro.

In conversation with our Director of Culinary Services, Andy Smith, we learned that he does not find the expectation burdensome. All reports are done electronically, and there is minimal impact on staff during recertification or yearly check-in. The process includes a visit from the Green Restaurant Association, a tour of our Bistro (the restaurant that is certified), and the assignment of points based on our green (or not) practices. The categories covered by certification are:

- Energy
- Water
- Waste
- Reusables and disposables
- Chemicals and pollution
- Food
- Building and furnishing
- Education and transparency

cont'd p.8

Green Restaurant (cont'd)

Asked about the future, Andy commented that he is eager to have some of the culinary staff take the green restaurant employee training that is offered through this program. He doesn't want it to be solely an administration commitment, but one that permeates their work.



Only 21 restaurants in Connecticut are certified by the Green Restaurant Association, and many of those are on college campuses. Seabury is proud to be among the few senior living facilities that has a dining area designated a Certified Green Restaurant®.

Since our first certification, we have proudly displayed our stars on our website. We commend the process to other SSAFE member campuses!

For more information see:

<https://seaburylife.org/shape-our-environment>

How Will You Celebrate April 22ND—EARTH DAY 2026?

Little known facts...

- The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill made national headlines and was a major trigger for the first Earth Day.
- The same ad man who created the “Think Small” campaign for the Volkswagen Beetle named the original teach-in “Earth Day.”
- Without the major financial backing of organized labor—the UAW—the first Earth Day might have been a mere shadow of itself.
- Gaylord Nelson, the Wisconsin senator who proposed the first nationwide environmental teach-in, was later awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
- Even Pogo was brought into play in an anti-pollution poster to promote the 1970 Earth Day: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”
- On Earth Day 2016, the Paris Agreement was signed by over 120 countries.
- Earth Day is now the world’s largest civic observance, involving about 100 million people worldwide.

...behind a major opportunity for environmental education and activism. What will you do?



FASHION REIMAGINED: A FILM REVIEW

By Jeannette Jones, Collington, a Kendal Affiliate

The textile industry is the second largest polluter globally, just behind the oil industry. It's also a significant consumer and polluter of water. Moreover, the use of synthetics like polyester, nylon, and acrylic results in significant shedding of microplastics into the environment. In fact, 35% of the microplastics in the ocean come from the manufacture and disposal of clothing, and two thirds of all clothing sold now contains synthetic fibers.

In *Fashion Reimagined* we meet Amy Powney, a UK-based activist fashion designer on an 18-month global journey to find places and products that align with her dedication to zero impact fashion. Her first goal is to prove that she can set new clothing standards while still being creative. She ends up in Uruguay, the only place that met her high standards for producing wool. There they treated animals and people ethically. They ran their polluted rain water through multiple carefully designed pools for reuse. They generated their own energy. They produced a compostable product—a very fine wool.

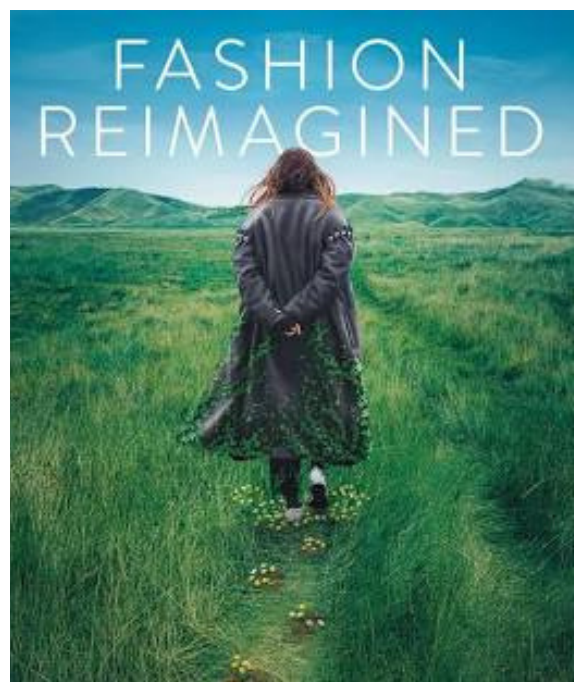
Secondly, she wants to convince us, the consumers, that we must change our clothing habits. One third of new clothes end up in a landfill before they are a year old. By practicing “circular” fashion in which we reuse our clothing, we can avoid sending clothes straight to the landfill (“linear” fashion). Even small shifts in consumer behavior like buying less, buying better, or using longer can

meaningfully reduce environmental and climate impacts.

Powney issues a challenge: “Can you not buy new clothes for one year? She asks you to borrow or rent clothes for special events. She asks that you resell or donate your old clothes. She asks you to renew and repair clothing rather than discarding it.

On her quest to inject sustainability into the fashion industry, Powney proves that she can be successful in setting new standards for creating zero impact fashion. Although she runs into endless obstacles in her search, she ultimately wins one of the most prestigious fashion awards in the industry.

Watch the film at: <https://tinyurl.com/fashion-r-film>



Collective Eye Films

FOREVER CHEMICALS, FOREVER POISONED

By Steven Fellows, RiverWoods Durham

Most of us have never heard of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), yet nearly all of us have been exposed to them. These synthetic chemicals are ominously called "forever chemicals" because they resist breaking down in the environment and the human body. They spread easily through water, bioaccumulate in wildlife, contaminate soil and vegetation, and cycle endlessly through ecosystems. PFAS compounds represent one of the most insidious and widespread pollution crises of our time. Few pollutants are as persistent, pervasive, or difficult to escape.

From their creation in the mid-20th century, the major chemical companies responsible knew that PFAS were toxic and would accumulate in people, yet they deliberately concealed this evidence for decades. Despite internal documentation of birth defects, water contamination, and widespread human exposure by the 1970s, these firms actively downplayed the risks and continued production. Their duplicity was only exposed in the 2000s through litigation, revealing a systemic cover-up of a pollution problem that persists globally.

Since their development, PFAS have been intentionally added to tens of thousands of consumer and industrial products—including apparel, cosmetics, food packaging, medical devices, and construction materials—because of their exceptional performance characteristics. These include friction reduction, resistance to heat and harsh chemicals,



Water-resistant clothing, grease-resistant takeout containers, microwave popcorn bags, stain-resistant carpet, fish, and non-stick cookware often contain PFAS.

and strong water-and oil-repellent properties.

PFAS pollution has far-reaching consequences for both the environment and human health. In nature, these chemicals persist for millennia, moving through waterways into rivers, lakes, and oceans, where they accumulate in fish, birds, and mammals and disrupt reproduction, growth, and immune function. In humans, PFAS exposure has been associated with increased risks of kidney and testicular cancers, thyroid disease, liver damage, developmental harms in children, weakened immune response, and reduced effectiveness of vaccines. Because PFAS compounds build up over time and are present in drinking water, food, household products, and even household dust, nearly everyone carries measurable levels in their body—making long-term, low-dose exposure a widespread public health concern rather than an isolated environmental problem.

cont'd p.11

PFAS (cont'd)

For most people, PFAS exposure comes primarily from food and drinking water, with consumer products contributing to a lesser extent. If your water comes from a public supply, it is required to comply with the EPA's PFAS drinking water standards, but there are no enforceable PFAS "maximum levels" for food. Even organically grown food may be contaminated.

“PFAS compounds represent one of the most insidious and widespread pollution crises of our time. Few pollutants are as persistent, pervasive, or difficult to escape.”

In an effort to reduce plastic waste, many communities are now replacing plastic takeout containers with compostable alternatives. The problem? These containers are often treated with PFAS to make them grease and water resistant. PFAS leach into food—especially when it's hot, greasy, or acidic. When compost containing these containers is applied to farmland, PFAS migrate into crops and ultimately into our bodies.

There's no practical way to know for certain whether PFAS lurk in takeout containers or any consumer product. Communities can reduce risk by selecting products certified as having no intentionally added PFAS, such as those approved by BPI (Biodegradable Products Institute). Yet even BPI's testing threshold far exceeds the EPA's limit for drinking

water—a troubling gap that underscores how inadequate our safeguards truly are.

You can't eliminate PFAS exposure entirely, but you can reduce your personal exposure by checking your local water utility's PFAS testing results and filtering the water if necessary, reducing the use of grease-resistant takeout containers, avoiding nonstick cookware that uses Teflon™-type coatings, limiting the consumption of fish from contaminated water bodies, choosing PFAS-free personal care products, avoiding products marketed as "stain-resistant" or "water-proof," and vacuuming with a HEPA filter.

Ultimately, personal choices are not enough. The most effective response is advocacy. While many states have introduced bills to ban the manufacture and sale of PFAS-containing products, the current EPA has moved in the opposite direction—rolling back drinking water limits for several PFAS and loosening reporting requirements for manufacturers and importers.

The PFAS crisis highlights a fundamental policy flaw in how we regulate commerce. Currently, the burden of proof lies with the government to show a chemical is dangerous after it has already entered the market. This "whack-a-mole" approach allows companies to replace one banned PFAS compound with a slightly different, unstudied version, continuing the perpetual cycle of exposure. The result is a vast, involuntary public experiment in the toxicity of novel chemicals.

Wrapping Up

SSAFE Announcements

2025 SSAFE Annual Report

2025 was a remarkable year for SSAFE. We grew to 18 chapters nationwide and surpassed 1,000 members for the first time. We launched the Pathway to Net Zero, a searchable roadmap to help senior living communities reduce greenhouse gas emissions, redesigned our website, and introduced the ASK SSAFE Listserv to connect members across communities. Five active working groups, monthly expert presentations, quarterly newsletters, and new case studies strengthened the impact of our growing network. We invite you to read the full report here: <https://ssafe.org/2025-annual-report/>

SSAFE to Present at LeadingAge

Former SSAFE Board Member, George Alexander from Kendal at Longwood, will be presenting about SSAFE at LeadingAge conferences in Pennsylvania and Maryland. Learn more at <https://ssafe.org/LeadingAge/>

SSAFE and Piper Shores in the News

Read "Green Buildings Are Good for Business" in *Seniors Housing Business*, featuring SSAFE and Piper Shores: <https://tinyurl.com/ssafe-senior-news>

SSAFE Newsletter

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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.



Did You Know?

If you are 70½ or older, you can make a direct transfer from your IRA to SSAFE that is tax-free and counts toward your Required Minimum Distribution? It's called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD). Read more here: <https://ssafe.org/donate>

Curious About Something Sustainable?

Connect with other SSAFE members through "ASK SSAFE," our email discussion Listserv. Learn how it works and sign up at <https://ssafe.org/listserv/>

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