

Unity Through Service: Honoring 9/11 Day with Resilience Sewa Day of Service by Central Jersey Sewa An AmeriCorps & Sewa International Environmental Justice Initiative

The events of September 11, 2001 are an unforgettable chapter in American history. Even now, more than two decades later, we reflect on the lives lost on that fateful day and continue to pay tribute to their memories. The courage displayed by first responders and the selfless acts of service witnessed on 9/11 is an inspiration for countless individuals, prompting them to embrace a life of service.

With the September 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance, Americans of all ages and backgrounds renew their commitment to honoring the fallen. They express the same spirit of service seen over two decades ago, partnering and engaging in community projects and strengthening the bonds within their communities.

Sewa International received the AmeriCorps September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance grant for Environmental Justice in 2023, with the goal of mobilizing more Americans to participate in service activities that address critical environmental and community needs while paying tribute to those who died on September 11, 2001, or who answered the call to service in the aftermath of that tragic day.

Following the events of 9/11, about 400,000 people suffered not just physical and emotional strain, but also exposure to harmful chemicals. Responders working in rescue, recovery, and relief efforts quickly developed a variety of ailments. Survivors who lived, worked, or studied near the affected zone also began to experience health difficulties.

The understanding of the environmental impact on responders and survivors emphasizes the long-term consequences of the 9/11 attacks, beyond the immediate damage. Sewa International's Award for Environmental Justice is an appropriate tribute, focused not only on mourning the lost but also on meeting the ongoing needs of communities adversely affected by the environmental impacts. Through this funding, Sewa International is encouraging people to participate in service activities that not only honor the past but also contribute to the welfare of society in the present.

Over the years, the Central Jersey Chapter has proactively initiated numerous service projects focused on sustainability, environment preservation, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and environmental education and awareness. The organization's enduring collaborations have led to the creation of the two Day of Service events in April. The meticulous planning and execution of the 9/11 Sewa Day of Service, themed 'Unity Resilience Service' and infused with the spirit of Sewa Bhav, were seamlessly orchestrated by the dedicated karyakartas of Central Jersey Sewa.



A Sewa Environmental Conservation Event

The first AmeriCorps & Sewa International Environmental Justice Initiative, carried out by Central Jersey in collaboration with the Edison Memorial Tower Corporation, involved a comprehensive cleanup and beautification effort at Thomas Edison State Park, as well as an awareness campaign about its historical significance.



A Sewa Eco-Tour for Environmental Preservation

The second initiative, carried out by Central Jersey in collaboration with the Edison Greenways Group, aimed at Wildlife Preservation and responsible hiking Eco-Tour of the Barnes Wildlife Preserve. The goal was to preserve the environment, promote sustainability, and provide an educational experience. The focal point of the eco-tour was to minimize ecosystem impact while fostering a deep appreciation for nature and biodiversity.

Chapter Highlights

- ❖ 9/11 Sewa Day of Service Environmental Justice Initiatives
- ❖ Voices of Service: Perspectives from the Young Heart of Sewa
- ❖ Sewa for Sustainable Transportation
- ❖ Sewa Through the Year:
 - Sewa for Environment Conservation - Earth Day Cleanups & Beach Sweeps
 - Sewa for Sustainable Gardening & Climate Change Mitigation
 - Sewa for Biodiversity Conservation
 - SewaMeal Feeding Program Addressing Food Insecurity
 - Sewa Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure
 - Serving Places of Worship
 - Sewa at Community Holi Celebrations

The Edison Memorial Tower, located in Middlesex County and recognized as a historic site by both the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, honors Thomas Alva Edison's innovative and entrepreneurial heritage. This plaque, found in Edison's Menlo Park neighborhood in Middlesex County, New Jersey, honors the legendary inventor and entrepreneur's accomplishments. The tower, which stands on the site of Edison's former Menlo Park laboratory, marks the birthplace of the world's first systematic research and development center. The first functional incandescent light bulb was created at this historic place in October 1879.

On a damp but lovely morning in April, **68** volunteers enthusiastically worked together to clear fallen branches, prune foliage, care for rain gardens, and thoroughly prepare the grounds for the upcoming season.

This day of service also allowed volunteers to learn about this great inventor's long-term legacy and the immense impact his work had on the world. They read the explanatory plaques in the park surrounding the location, which detailed Edison's life and achievements.



This volunteering effort is just the beginning of the Chapter's efforts to prepare the site for the summer, which attracts over 30,000 visitors every year from all over the world to honor the "Wizard of Menlo Park" and learn about his extraordinary life and contributions.

The Barnes Wildlife Preserve, which covers 1,250 acres, is one of the few surviving functioning wetland ecosystems in heavily populated Central New Jersey. It is known as the "Everglades of Central New Jersey," and it has been classified as a priority wetland by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Environmental Protection Agency. It is home to over 175 bird species, 25 mammal species, and 25 amphibian and reptile populations.

This April event, which coincided with Earth Month, aimed to increase awareness and advocate for initiatives focused on environmental conservation and sustainability, as well as to cultivate environmental stewardship via diversification, education, and active participation.

61 volunteers participated in a guided hike through the Barnes Wildlife Preserve Red Trail, enthusiastically engaged in cleanup activities, and enjoyed a bird-watching and educational nature tour. It was a discovery of the beauty of the Preserve while making a meaningful impact on environmental preservation. The Chapter remains dedicated to sustaining these Eco-Tours and Preservation initiatives.





Together We Serve Better!

Unity Through Service: Honoring 9/11 Day with Resilience



This Day of Service initiative by Sewa International Central Jersey aligns with AmeriCorps' fundamental objective of enriching lives, strengthening communities, and encouraging civic involvement through service and volunteerism. The events aim to inspire more community members to participate in service efforts that solve pressing community needs, while also honoring the memories of those who died or devoted themselves to service in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Voices of Service: Perspectives from the Young Heart of Sewa

"At this Sewa volunteering event, the Sewa LEADs were assigned to plant lettuce and romaine vegetables at Temple Beth. We were paired up and given tools such as shovels and gloves to carry out the task. To plant, we first had to dig a hole in the soil and then remove the plant from the container and place it in the hole. Then, we had to maintain a distance of one fist between each plant and plant them on the outer area of the plant bed. This was done so that others could plant different types of plants like tomatoes in the remaining middle area of the bed. My partner and I were able to plant two whole plant beds by ourselves and also assisted others in planting their beds. As we worked, we could feel the damp soil and the fresh scent of the nature all around us. The sun was shining, and the cool breeze made the atmosphere cool. It was a nice experience to be out in nature, planting more plants in the community. After completing our task, we felt accomplished in contributing and working together with people, to help the environment and the community."

- A firsthand account from a Sewa youth volunteer about their involvement in a Sustainable Community Gardening project.



"In this Sewa volunteering event in April, Sewa LEADs had to clean up trash around a preserved area near the John Adams school in Edison. First we got our tools to clean and headed towards the preserved area near the roads and cricket/soccer field. Few people went to the field first to clean that area, meanwhile some volunteers and I went to the roadside area to pick up trash. We had picked up a good amount to help have a better area for the betterment of the earth and our community itself. Me and a few others started looking for other trash near the deeper side of the forest area. There was not a lot of trash to be found. I felt that since we were not finding any trash around, that had meant a good thing due to the fact that since there was less trash, people had been preserving this area nicely. I felt happy that the area was clean. But then, I had seen something in the distance that was shining because of the light reflecting from the sun. As I looked closer, I had found a very huge amount of bottles and soda cans right near the preserved area. There were so many bottles that it was like a mini mountain in front of me. I asked the other volunteers to help me with all the bottles. With the permission of our adult volunteer, we cleaned up as much as we could. Most of the bottles were submerged in the dirt and even had plants growing on them which was the sign that these bottles had been here for a very long time. It was really a terrible sight because there were so many glass bottles and soda cans which could harm the environment, and animals like deer, etc. We have so many bags after cleaning this up. I truly think that this cleaning event has helped our community in a big way."

- A firsthand account from a Sewa youth volunteer about their involvement in an Environment Preservation effort.



"Sewa Central Jersey Chapter has presented me many wonderful opportunities to be able to give back to communities and experience the joy of giving. I can experience various aspects of community service as I participate in multitude of diverse activities. I discovered interest in Boat building and craftsmanship while participating in as Sewa LEAD for event in Lower Raritan Watershed Partnership LWRP. My favorite contribution throughout the year has been gardening and Edison Environmental Commission cleanups where I was commended for my passion and interest. I am thankful for having this platform to build for my community, get sense of belonging and channel my energy to constructive goals."

- A firsthand account from a Sewa youth volunteer about their involvement in a Biodiversity and Environment Conservation efforts.

Sewa for Sustainable Transportation



The “Girls in Gear - Junior Coaches” event marks Sewa’s commitment to promoting Sustainable Transportation, fostering sustainable mobility, and igniting eco-consciousness in the younger generation. The Central Jersey Sewa LEADs assumed the role of junior coaches and worked with adult coaches to guide girls to ride bicycles. They helped girls who were participating in the event to bike and get comfortable on the seat and with peddling. The LEADs helped the girls with balance on the bike and taught them how to prevent themselves from falling. They imparted crucial safety measures such as helmet usage and proper braking techniques. This event helped LEADs understand the importance of sustainable transportation and helped them to impart valuable skills to others.



Sewa Through the Year – Recurring Service Activities by the Central Jersey Chapter

The Central Jersey Chapter has a commitment to Sewa and the dedication to making a positive impact on the local community throughout the year. The volunteers engage in service activities through the year to contribute to the well-being of the community to not only help address immediate needs but also strengthen the bonds within the community and promote a spirit of unity and cooperation.

Sewa for Environment Conservation



There were 2 beach cleanup drives in April 2024 - one in Sadowski Parkway Waterfront Park in Perth Amboy and another in Raritan Bay Waterfront Park in South Amboy. The Central Jersey LEADs participated in these events with gusto despite a cold and windy day at the beach. The LEADs were given trash bags for normal and recyclable items and they went out in groups to clean. They found bottles, food wrappers, small boxes, candy wrappers, food containers and other debris. These beach sweeps were a good way to serve the community and help clean nature.

Central Jersey Sewa LEADs also volunteered at the Seely Brook Cleanup. Here they learned how much trash ends up on the side of the road after being thrown out. They also cleaned up the trash in the area. LEADs had a great time helping the community and set yet another example of how we can bring the community together and lean forward towards a common cause!



Sewa LEADs volunteered at Papaiani Park and helped celebrate Earth Day in April by cleaning the place up. They picked up trash such as plastic cans, glass bottles, wrappers, and other miscellaneous stuff from the park and collected it so that it wouldn’t harm the park ecosystem. The LEADs also set up a stall giving out free trees for people to take and plant. This was a perfect way to give back to the environment and foster our community that we live in.



Sewa volunteers worked in collaboration with the Edison Clean Communities, to restore the beauty of the Edison Boat Basin. Despite the harsh weather the volunteers tackled tasks like weeding, clearing reeds, and picking up trash. Throughout the event, there was a shared sense of pride in working to restore the serenity in the area. Another example of how collective action with a sense of community can achieve meaningful results for the environment.

Central Jersey Sewa contributed to the local community as part of Edison's Community Environmental Cleanups. Sewa LEADs participated in the renovation of Charles Shaughnessy Park in Colonia. The group brought shovels and tools required for the cleanup. The Sewa team removed weeds, planted flowers, and added a fresh layer of mulch. Without collaboration, generosity, and hard work, this project would not have been as impactful. This opportunity helped in giving back to the community and understanding the importance of teamwork.



Sewa volunteers showed a great team effort to clean up the debris in South Amboy Beach, the third beach cleanup in April. Even through the cold weather, more than 300 bags were picked up. The beach was cleaned, and the trash was disposed of properly. The volunteers enjoyed themselves and the group felt a great sense of accomplishment.

Central Jersey LEADs and parent volunteers participated in a spring cleanup in South Plainfield, NJ. This event aimed to go into the woods and pick up trash or recyclables to save wildlife and the environment. Because pollution plays a detrimental role in keeping the environment clean, Sewa decided to act by signing up for this cleanup event to help the cause. Studies have shown that pollution is increasing at an alarming rate. Central Jersey Sewa LEADs and volunteers picked up about 5 to 6 bags of trash. Through activities like this Sewa continues to foster community development.



Sewa Beneficiaries:

- Edison Township
- Perth Amboy Township
- South Amboy Township
- Woodbridge Township
- South River Borough
- Middlesex County
- Somerset County

Sewa for Sustainable Gardening & Climate Change Mitigation



This month the Central Jersey Sewa LEADs volunteered at the North Brunswick Pulda Farms Community Garden organized by the township. They enthusiastically assisted in organizing stands and pamphlets, warmly welcoming visitors and guiding them to their destinations. The group also enjoyed hayrides, making it a memorable and enjoyable experience for all involved.



The Central Jersey Sewa LEADs have contributed to the upkeep of the Marlboro Community Garden in Morganville for many years. In April, the Central Jersey LEADs worked over several weekends in the garden. On one of the weekends, the garden celebrated Arbor Day.

The Assistant Mayor, Council President and other Council members visited the garden, addressed the people there and opened the sign for 'Marlboro Gardens Arboretum'.

The LEADs and other volunteers planted the Magnolia Tree for Arbor Day. The LEADs were also involved in regular garden cleanups, weed removal, card boarding and wood chipping for the trees. The LEADs learned about different types of leaves and their vocabulary. The mornings of work at the garden are fun, full of learning and meaningful for Central Jersey LEADs.

Our community gardens are great examples to showcase the core framework of Sewa that is dedicated towards environmental conservation and sustainability.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

- Marlboro Community Garden
- Pulda Farms, North Brunswick

Sewa for Biodiversity Conservation

The month of April saw Watershed Institute's 18th annual Watershed Cleanup. Central Jersey Sewa LEADs participated enthusiastically in these events at various locations. The LEADs cleaned up along the sides of multiple streams. They collected trash and segregated them into normal trash and recyclable trash.

The LEADs reported that these drives collected close to **200** lbs. of garbage. Service events such as these, motivate LEADs to be involved in community events and care about the environment.

Sewa Beneficiaries:

Watershed Institute, Pennington



SewaMeal Program to Address Food Insecurity

The Central Jersey Sewa volunteers dedicated themselves to preparing **200+** meals, finding it enlightening to assist those less fortunate. They delivered meals to the less fortunate as part of the SewaMeal program.

Meal Items: Gallo Pinto rice, Channa/Rajma Masala, Jeera Peas Pulav, and Pita bread.

Meals' Sponsors: LEAD families of Monroe

Meals' Recipients:

New Brunswick United Methodist Church



Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure



Central Jersey Sewa LEADs volunteered at the Franklin Township Food Bank where they sorted food items from crates in the storage. These food items included dairy, pastries, bread, produce, and many more. LEADs also helped in restocking shelves in the market and helped navigate people who came to shop at the market. Through this experience, they were able to learn what happens behind the scenes of the market.

Sewa LEADs also attended Rutgers Day for Rows for the Hungry, aiding in closing the stand and engaging with attendees. They assisted with the movement of belongings to designated trucks. The event provided a fulfilling experience of community engagement and collaboration.

The Central Jersey LEADs volunteered at the Rise Pantry in Hightstown to provide non-perishable groceries to a more than a **100** qualified families per month. In addition to non-perishable groceries the pantry also distributes fresh produce, personal products, baby and household items. The LEADs sorted and disposed of empty fruit boxes and helped in the packing and placing of strawberries into the carts. They took these carts to the front, so the local community could pick up from there. It was a good opportunity for the LEADs to see how their work directly helps communities.



Central Jersey Sewa LEADs showed great team effort and dedication while volunteering at the Hands of Hope Food Pantry in Edison on April 6th and 20th, 2024. Volunteers spent a great deal of time organizing the food bags and aiding in the donation process, delivering meals to individuals and families in need. The team worked well in tandem and with strong compassionate spirit to help further Sewa's cause for food insecurity within communities.

Chapter LEADs also served at the Community Food Bank of New Jersey distribution center in Hillside, NJ. They were tasked with organizing and packing around **1200** pounds of snacks, trail mix, and assorted nuts. These packed boxes were then loaded onto pallets and organized in the warehouse, which will be sent to various shelters and food pantries throughout the state.



Sewa Beneficiaries:

- Franklin Township Food Bank
- Rows for the Hungry
- Community Food Bank, Hillside
- RISE Food Pantry, Hightstown
- Hands Of Hope Food Pantry, Edison

Sewa at Community Holi Celebrations

Central Jersey volunteers helped at multiple Holi events across townships in Central Jersey.

At the HAS - Rang Barse Holi in South Brunswick, volunteers helped direct the traffic at the event, they also helped with parking at the Senior Center and handmade bracelets were displayed for sale at the event at the Sewa booth to help promote Sewa.



At the New Brunswick Holi event the LEADs worked alongside local organizations to ensure its smooth operation. They contributed to food service, attendee guidance, and parking management, while also taking pleasure in the delectable cuisine offered. The event proved to be a rewarding experience and enjoyable moments for all involved.

Sewa LEADs also volunteered at the North Brunswick Holi Festival as well where there were also many activities, food, and performances to watch. LEADs had a great time decorating and helping around!

Newsletter LEADS

- ❖ Aditi Umesh
- ❖ Adwait Jhunjhunwala
- ❖ Arjun Vernekar
- ❖ Atharv Pillai
- ❖ Dhairya Sarvaiya
- ❖ Gargee Wavhal
- ❖ Ishan Brahma
- ❖ Ishitreddy Mulay
- ❖ Neerav Gupta
- ❖ Thulasi Nambiar

Upcoming Events

- ❖ 9/11 Sewa Day of Service Environmental Justice Initiatives Continue
- ❖ Rain barrel workshops for Sustainability & Environment Conservation
- ❖ Sewa in Support for Medical & Healthcare Needs – Om 5K Run
- ❖ Sewa Environment Conservation Cleanups
- ❖ Sewa Boat Building for Biodiversity Conservation
- ❖ SewaMeal Feeding Program for Hunger Relief
- ❖ Food Packing and Food Distribution Service for the Food Insecure
- ❖ Serving Places of Worship
- ❖ Sewa Community Memorial Day Events

REGISTRATION

- **Central Jersey SewaMeal Sponsorship**
Donation Towards SewaMeal Sponsorship
- **Central NJ Chapter General Donation**
General Donation to Central NJ Chapter of Sewa International

[Register](#)

Please use below QR Code or link and proceed to click '**Register**' to donate



Click → <https://sewausea.org/event-5084580> and fill the information

Communication Channels

Please visit our Chapter website and Follow us on Twitter, Facebook & Instagram

Web: <https://Sewausea.org/centraljersey>

X (Formerly Twitter): @JerseySewa

FB: @JerseySewa or Sewa Central Jersey

Instagram:
sewainternationalcentraljersey

Email: centraljersey@sewausea.org

Helpline: 702. 900.SEWA

*'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' – The World Is One Family
Together We Serve Better*

