

Introducing Plastic Bag Drive and Keep My Street Green!

This month of March 2022, Sewa International Central Jersey Chapter raised the ante in their efforts on environmental protection via two new initiatives – Plastic Bag Drive and Keep My Street Green!

Plastic Bag Drive

In a few weeks New Jersey will ban single-use plastic bags in most instances, and paper bags at larger grocery stores. The bill to ban bags and other single-use plastic items was signed into law in November 2020, but allowed for an 18-month lead time for stores and consumers to prepare. The ban will likely be the strictest in the nation when it goes into effect on May 4, banning all single-use bags at grocery stores and limiting the types of bags non-grocery stores can use.

To help residents discard their plastic bags & wraps/films, the Central Jersey Sewa team has kick started the Plastic bag drive across all centers. As part of the effort, the Sewa team has partnered with their township Green Teams, Schools and Libraries and even across neighborhoods and have set up numerous drop off locations to make it convenient for residents to drop off their plastic bags. The Chapter plans to continue this sincere effort till the ban goes into effect on May 4th.

Chapter Highlights

- ❖ Plastic Bag Drive
- ❖ 'Keep My Street Green' Program
- ❖ Ramblin' Sol Farm Spring Cleanup
- ❖ Neshaminy State Park Reforestation
- ❖ Sewa Meals and Food donation
- ❖ Balaji Temple Sewa Projects
- ❖ AttachAvi Autism Foundation Program
- ❖ Manavi - Support for Domestic Violence Survivors

Center Highlights

- ❖ Green Brook and Swales Park Spring Cleanup
- ❖ Freehold and Marlboro Garden Spring Cleanup
- ❖ Backyard Composting Workshops
- ❖ World Water Day at Watershed Institute
- ❖ Sewa at West Windsor Art Council
- ❖ Volunteering at Radha Gopinath and Sai Pariwar Temple

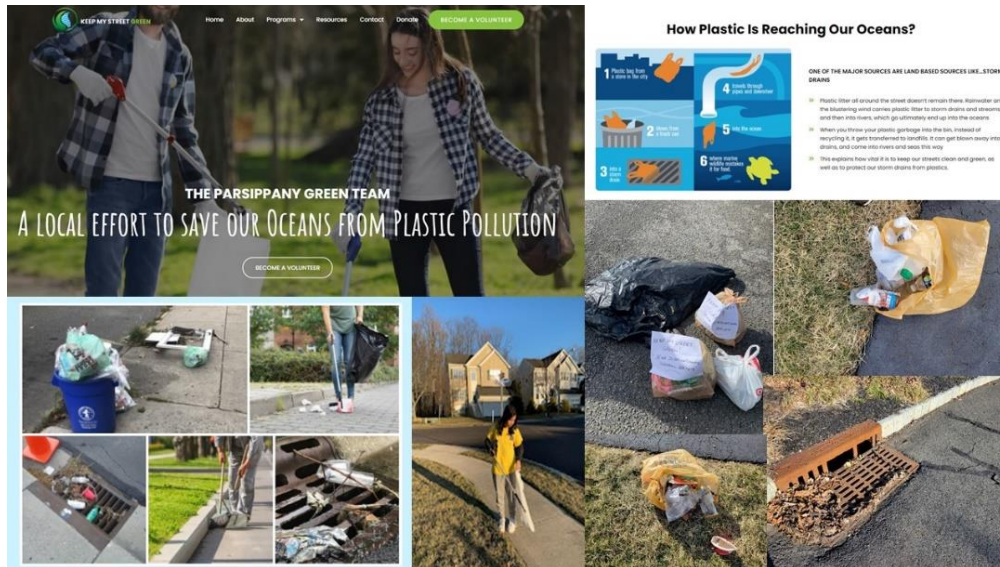
Volunteer Spotlight



Sripriya Gopalan Ji has been a part of Sewa International Central Jersey Chapter since 2020, and for the past 2 years has been involved in many volunteering activities with her daughter. She is always ready to help the Sewa Edison center as a parent volunteer, when needed for the LEADs. She participates in the Sewa Meals program by volunteering to help with buying items for food preparations and also stepped up to manage the Edison LEADs with Sewa social media posts as well as for the monthly newsletter articles. Outside of Sewa, she enjoys learning bhajans and art. Sripriya Ji has worked at Bank of America for over 12 years as a consultant and employee, working as a Software Quality Assurance Engineer. She is from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, and currently lives in Edison, New Jersey with her two kids and husband.

Keep My Street Green

'Keep My Street Green', the second project initiated this month by the Central Jersey Chapter is to support townships in their environmental sustainability initiatives. This project was started as an innovative community project in Parsippany, NJ, by its Green Team, as part of the Sustainable Jersey goals commitment and is expanding into more towns in NJ. It is a simple concept of keeping local streets free from plastic pollution and stopping run-off plastics infiltrating into storm drains, thus forming large ocean garbage patches and causing damage to the aquatic ecosystem. This effort to save our oceans from plastic pollution is being done through an "Adopt A Street – Keep My Street Green" Program where the cleanup activities of the LEADs are being logged through an 'iVolunteer' app.



Sewa International's Central Jersey Chapter rolled out this program for their LEADs this March. Currently, Chesterfield & Monroe centers are closely working with their township Green Team & Environment Commission to expand this program in their respective towns. Our LEADs across the Central Jersey Chapter, have taken on the admirable responsibility of adopting streets in their townships and keeping it clean through the coming months.

We appreciate and laud our LEADs on their efforts of diverting plastics fill from landfills thus leading to conserving resources and protecting the environment for future generations!

Spring Cleanups, Organic Farming commence and Reforestation Efforts continue!

Spring Cleanup volunteering effort has commenced by the Central Jersey Chapter in parks, farms and community gardens across various townships in NJ.

Green Brook and Swales Park Cleanup

Edison LEADs traveled to Green Brook Park – an important tributary of the Raritan River - and teamed up with local volunteers to help clear litter and debris from the park and restore the park to its natural green state.

LEADs in this volunteering effort managed to fill upwards of 20 trash bags of items like glass jars, containers, plastic wrappers, plastic bags, soda cans that are harmful to the environment. In addition, the LEADs also cleaned accessible areas of the brook that runs through the entire park, and managed to fish out trash such as cans and plastic.

Somerset and Edison LEADs also cleaned Swales Park, a municipal park consisting of a kids' playground, basketball court and a pavilion where families from local communities come together.

Much like other Sewa cleanups, LEADs ensured that they did their best towards a healthy environment by improving water quality and enabling natural open spaces to support more biodiversity.



Ramblin' Sol Farms Spring Cleanup and Organic Farming



“Rolling along with sunshine on our backs, calluses on our hands, and Jersey soil at our feet!”

In March, Cherry Hill and Chesterfield LEADs continued with their volunteering effort at the Ramblin' Sol Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organic farm in Cream Ridge, NJ. At the farm, the volunteers helped with spring cleaning and painting as well as seeding and harvesting the produce. This opportunity gave the LEADs a lot of insight into organic farming, very beneficial in our current society!

Freehold Community Garden Spring Cleanup

This March, Monroe LEADs visited the Freehold Community Garden for a spring cleanup. The Freehold Community Garden grows their own fresh produce that are donated to local organizations and individuals in need.

Our LEADs weeded and spread wood chips throughout the garden and subsequently learnt how to plant cabbages. Volunteering at this garden has provided LEADs with an opportunity to learn about gardening, sustainability, and wellness!



Marlboro Garden Spring Cleanup



Monroe LEADs resumed volunteering this spring at the Marlboro Community Garden after the winter season. LEADs helped with the disposal of invasive species of mountain mint by dumping the weeded out plants and placing wood chips on a cardboard bed in order to help smother them. An additional takeaway from this volunteering experience was to learn about soil readiness for planting and some simple kitchen tricks from the master gardeners!

Neshaminy State Park Reforestation Effort

This month too, the Central Jersey Chapter LEAD volunteers continued with their annual volunteering effort of reforestation at Neshaminy State Park, Pennsylvania. The LEADs continued with clearing invasive plants and went onto to plant trees. Invasive plants such as Mile a minute and reeds harm the local ecosystem and by removing them, the LEADs ensure the survival of the new trees and shrubs in the area. The LEADs reforested this area by extending the existing canopy of trees and also by planting native shrubs that will grow berries for the wildlife. Planting the trees would help spruce up the park, manage storm water, and provide habitats for different sorts of wildlife.

The LEADs had a great time and learnt different skills associated with planting trees and their maintenance which will be especially helpful when starting their own gardens.



Backyard Composting Workshop with Green Team and Environment Commission



Compost, an essential tool in the organic farmer or gardener's toolkit, is made from organic wastes like kitchen scraps, paper and yard clippings. It is an effective way to recycle while creating a valuable byproduct that feeds plants for their healthy growth.

Chesterfield Sewa team in partnership with Township Green Team & Environment Commission organized a Backyard composting workshop to educate & encourage residents to recycle their kitchen waste by creating compost for their backyard vegetable/flower garden. Sewa LEADs were involved in designing the flyer & registration form and also took care of publishing it on local WhatsApp groups, and social media platforms. On the workshop day, the LEADs also took care of setting up the workshop hall, arranging the tables & chairs & checking in the registered workshop participants. Sewa for a good cause indeed!

Sewa for World Water Day at Watershed Institute

Monroe LEADs volunteered at the Watershed Institute where they helped at various games and activities for visitors at the institute on World Water Day. Their games and activities on groundwater theme included explaining the process of industrialization to visiting kids, demonstrating a game of how a water droplet goes through a water cycle, helping at games like matching different body parts of small macro-organisms to their functions, difference between a typical water stream and a runoff water stream, acquiring and imparting the knowledge on water surface tension and volume and the different tastes in water that comes from different regions in NJ. The LEADs also helped in managing crowds, setting up tables, distributing snacks and even singing songs!

The LEADs got an opportunity to see the different species that the institute sheltered such as cockroaches, turtles, snakes, fish and got to see frog trails. They also learned about water pollution and how much plastic we all intake in our lifetime. They walked away from this with an enriching experience of knowing more about the importance of preserving the environment.



Sewa at West Windsor Arts Council



In 2021, Sewa Monroe LEADs volunteered at West Windsor Arts Council to maintain their garden over the seasons of Spring, Summer and Fall. The Arts Council appreciated the LEADs' efforts and reached out again this year for help when the need arose to move artwork, files and storage boxes to meet fire safety regulations and to reorganize the items in the process.

Our Monroe LEAD started out by moving files and boxes from the attic, which were then sorted per final storage location. The LEAD then further sorted art display table cloths based on color scheme. The LEAD then moved on to package some of the artworks that had already been sold and got it ready for delivery. Lastly, the art wall was arranged by numerical order. Overall, it was a new experience of learning for the LEAD on what's involved in the functioning of an arts center as well as having the wonderful opportunity to see the variety of art!

Sewa Meals and Food Donation Drives

Central Jersey Chapter LEADs once again prepared meals for the homeless and aided food donation drives for those in need.

Edison LEADs volunteered two weekends this March to prepare food for The Ozanam Family Shelter. They prepared a variety of food which included salad, bean soup, cheese sandwiches, who once again worked efficiently as a team!

We also give a heartfelt thanks to Edison's Shanta Ji for organizing the Sewa effort for those women and children in distress and residing at the shelter!



Edison LEADs again on two weekends this month, helped in the organization and donation of food for the Hands Of Hope food pantry and soup kitchen in Edison, New Jersey. The LEADs sorted the food, made individual food packages and helped in taking them to the transportation vehicles for delivery. Once again the LEADs did good with stepping up to help out the community!



Somerset LEADs prepared and delivered 60 adult meals to the United Methodist Church in New Brunswick. This meal consisted of potato salad, cold sandwiches and pasta with broccoli. For a sweet dessert, the LEADs also made muffins. The meals were delivered neatly and punctually by the LEADs and we appreciate their efforts for preparing these healthy and delicious meals for the community!



Chesterfield LEADs made 151 meals this month & delivered them to the meal distribution hub at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Trenton, with whom Sewa International, USA has partnered with to feed those in need. The meals included a vegetable burrito bowl, chips and brownies.

The meals were kindly sponsored by:
 Trupti & Jagadishwar Jannapureddy
 Anjali & Anuj Gupta
 Suchitra & Sai Krishna Potluri
 Poonam Lalwani & Sunil Kapil
 Shilpa Rathi & Mukul Rathi (State Farm)

Monroe LEADs continued preparing meals for the homeless regularly on two Sundays every month. This month's meals included cold sandwiches, pasta, caesar salad, muffins, and kids' meals. Sanitary precautions were followed, as all LEADs wore gloves, masks, and hairnets. The prepared meals were then delivered to the United Methodist Church in New Brunswick.

Thanks to this month's meals sponsors LEAD Shantanu's family and LEAD Sanika's family.



Sewa at Temples

Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple Projects

The Central Jersey Chapter has started multiple initiatives at the Om Sri Sai Balaji Temple and Cultural Center in Monroe, NJ. The initial projects started by the LEADs are the 3D Temple Model, the Kitchen Project, Digital Storage, 'How To' document for quick books, Email templates, FAQ List and the Temple Operating Instructions manuals.

Volunteering efforts at the Balaji Temple and Cultural Center has been growing exponentially as LEADs start to pour their time working on their designated projects to get the temple ready for next year where it will soon become a spiritual meeting place for all.

For the past month on a weekly basis, Chapter LEADs have been working on creating a physical 3D model of the exterior temple building. The LEADs have worked in groups creating a prototype of a part of the building using foam boards. This required learning new skills such as using cutting tools and making accurate measurements according to the dimensions of the temple. The LEADs were also able to hone their engineering skills by using software such as CAD and Autodesk Fusion to create virtual models of the building. In the following weeks the LEADs will begin creating the final product of the model using balsa wood. "

This project is a fantastic learning experience for the Sewa LEADs and a unique opportunity to enhance their creativity, problem solving skills, as well as teamwork! We give a sincere thanks to all adult volunteers for their guidance and help with this project!



The Kitchen project is regarding kitchen safety and how to use the equipment for new employees and volunteers. Primarily, the project is about cataloging the various equipment that are set up in the kitchen and writing a quick safety manual about each equipment and an instruction sheet for each equipment usage. Additionally, videos will be made detailing the procedures of handling and cleaning the equipment after use, videos on safety measures to follow for all temple employees and volunteers and videos on hygiene and neatness to be maintained in the temple kitchen.

For the Digital Storage project there is a need to collate all the files across multiple google drives and WhatsApp accounts, further categorize and sort them for easy access.

An additional project is the documenting of the Temple Operating Instructions for opening and closing of the temple, prayers rooms and the kitchen.

Sai Pariwar Temple Sewa

Throughout the month of March, the Somerset LEADs have volunteered at the Sai Pariwar Temple in North Brunswick, NJ by helping with tasks around the temple. The LEADs helped with maintaining the neat environment of the temple through cleaning the premises and filing prayer books. They also worked together to put together various decorations, restock and organize storage, and distribute 'prasadam' to the devotees. This weekly activity has been a great learning and enjoyable experience for our Somerset LEADs!



Sri Radha Gopinath Temple Sewa



Edison LEADs volunteered at The Sri Radha Gopinath Temple in Edison to help prepare food and serve it to the devotees present at the temple. The LEADs also helped in the cleaning up of the kitchen and arranging the flower for the prasadam and it was all done in an orderly and timely manner. The efforts of our LEADs and adult volunteers helped ensure the pooja and maha prasadam went smoothly.



Diaper Donation Drive

This month too, the donation of adult diapers by Ram Malladi Ji was dropped off to Elijah Promise for distribution to senior centers. We are very grateful to Malladi Ji and our adult volunteers Shanta Ji and Sripriya Ji for always stepping up for the Edison center and ensuring the the delivery of the diapers.



AttachAvi Autism Foundation Program



In the AttachAvi Autism Foundation Program, a collaborative effort by Sewa Central Jersey Chapter with the Foundation, Edison LEADs hosted weekly social classes with the special needs children in order to help them communicate effectively. LEADs engaged with the children through various activities that involved teaching and singing to help them to work on their social skills. It was also a way of familiarizing them to cope with and do well in a classroom environment.

Manavi – Sewa Support for Domestic Violence Survivors

In 2021, our Central Jersey Chapter Family Services group got into a partnership with Manavi, an organization in New Brunswick, NJ that addresses the needs of South Asian women who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Our Chapter has continued with this partnership into 2022. Our volunteers grocery shop and deliver these groceries and any other essential necessities to these survivors. This is an ongoing service being done by our adult volunteers throughout the year and our Edison adult volunteers have continued with this Sewa this month too!

Newsletter Team



Sanika Bane
Grade: 10
Interests: Art, Dance, Singing, Science
Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



Anoushka Banerjee
Grade: 10
Interests: Music, Swim
Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



Aniketh Chadive
Grade: 9
Interests: Outdoor activities, Tennis
Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals



Heet Chauhan
Grade: 11
Interests: Hands on projects and outdoor activities
Favorite Sewa Project: Boat Building



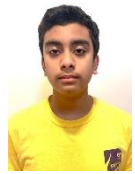
Disha Garg
Grade: 11
Interests: Reading & Basketball
Favorite Sewa Project: Ozanam food shelter meals



Navya Goel
Grade: 10
Interests: Reading, hanging out with friends and family
Favorite Sewa Project: Hands of Hope



Sowmya Hemadri
Grade: 9
Interests: Music, Tennis, Writing
Favorite Sewa Project: Balaji Temple Cleaning



Rishi Horaginamani
Grade: 8
Interests: Swimming, Boys Scout's
Favorite Sewa Project: Sewa Meals, Balaji Temple 3D project



Advait Koli
Grade: 10
Interests: Polo, Volleyball
Favorite Sewa Project: Vadthal Dham Project



Aditi Mahendran
Grade: 12
Interests: Music
Favorite Sewa Project: Marlboro Community Garden



Pranav Palle
Grade: 12
Interests: Reading, Biking, Coding
Favorite Sewa Project: Online Science Summer Camps



Suja Sudhakar
Grade: 10
Interests: Music, Art
Favorite Sewa Project: AttachAvi Autism Foundation

Upcoming Events

- ❖ AttachAvi Autism Foundation Program
- ❖ Balaji Temple Projects
- ❖ Book Collection Drive for Underprivileged Kids
- ❖ Chesterfield Environment Fun Day
- ❖ Community and Beach Cleanups
- ❖ Community Food Bank Volunteering
- ❖ Freehold Garden Spring Cleanup
- ❖ 'Keep My Street Green' Project
- ❖ Manavi - Support for Domestic Violence Survivors
- ❖ Marlboro Garden
- ❖ Neshaminy State Park Reforestation
- ❖ Plastic Bag Drive
- ❖ Ramblin' Sol Farm Spring Cleanup and Seeding
- ❖ Sai Pariwar Temple Volunteering
- ❖ Sewa Earth Day Conference
- ❖ Sewa Meals for the homeless
- ❖ Sewa 'Save Soil' Awareness Campaign
- ❖ Volunteering at Farms

Communication Channels

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