

Newsletter of the **Center for Sustainability and the Environment** at Wells College.



We continue to assess multiple aspects of our campus sustainability efforts using the *Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System* (STARS) developed by the Association for the Advancement for Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). One key aspect we measure are the number of courses we offer that are either sustainability-focused or include significant content related to sustainability. In 2017, we reported 127 such courses or 20% of our catalog. This Fall, we identified 52 sustainability-focused courses and 112 sustainability-inclusive courses, or a total of **28%** of our catalog. This jump is a testament to faculty who care about enhancing our students' understanding of sustainability.

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Fall Sustainability Activities

This Fall semester is fast approaching its end and we are starting to catch our breath. It's been a busy semester for sure with all the events and activities the Center either hosted, collaborated on or supported. These activities were all **in addition to** the six *Sustainability Perspectives* series talks, two *Sustainable Business* series speakers, and two *Sustainability Film* screenings we hosted. Yowza!



August 29—Sustainability Special: Plant Potting Activity The Center provided dozens of colorful planting pots and bags of potting soil. Science lab coordinator Jim Babcock, manager of the college greenhouses, and members of the *Southern Cayuga Garden Club* donated dozens of plants and cuttings for students (and several staffers!) to plant to decorate their spaces. The Center offered houseplant care instruction handouts. We estimate we provided new homes for more than 90 plants!

September 1—Sustainability Special: Community Eco-Cruise The Center underwrote the cost of this free lake cruise opportunity departing from the Wells campus dock. Around 50 campus and community members enjoyed an autumn excursion, learning more about lake ecology while observing the fall colors on the hillsides. *Photo: Discover Cayuga Lake's vessel, the Teal, leaving our Wells dock*



September 15—Science Colloquium: Community Forestry on a Burning Earth In this weekly speaker series, organized by the faculty of the Division of Natural and Mathematical Sciences, invited speakers talk about STEM career opportunities and applied research work they are undertaking. The Center director is sometimes allowed to host STEM-relevant speakers that also have sustainability elements. We hosted area forester Walt Aikman who detailed his work to address climate-related environmental stress conditions—like urban heat-islands - through the planting of significant numbers of trees in the nearby city of Auburn.

September 23—Sustainability Special: Wild Pigment Workshop with Daniela Molnar We partnered with the *Visiting Writers Series* and the *String Room Gallery* to host Ms. Molnar's residency. She gave a talk about her artwork and poetry in the gallery before leading this fascinating workshop where attendees went on a foraging trek for pigment materials and then learned how to transform those natural plants into pigments and dyes.



September 29—Peachtown Peach Tree Planting Students in the Fall Gardening class helped prepare the hole for the ceremonial planting of the newest tree in the developing peach grove on the President's lawn. The Center director provided logistical support for this indigenous cultural event (including reserving space and listing the planting on the campus events calendar, and developing promotional materials) although we were unable to actually attend because at the same time we were...



September 29—Hosting the SCCS 7th Grade Field Trip Science teacher Simone Lanning and Art teacher Tim Amory from Southern Cayuga Central School brought their combined 7th grade classes to Wells for a field trip focused on learning about our freshwater resources. The class split into three sections, rotating through three activities. Tim taught an art lesson on the Wells College dock about how the world can be seen in different perspectives. Each group went on an excursion aboard *Discover Cayuga Lake's Floating Classroom*, where students used scientific equipment to collect data on Cayuga Lake and its watershed system. The Center for Sustainability set up six interactive water-related activities for students to work through. One was our blind water taste test (see more pg 3). Other activity stations had students look at the human and environmental hazards posed by ingredients in personal care products, mapping where the students' homes are within either the Cayuga or Owasco Lake watershed (photo), and examining uses (and overuses!) of fresh water resources including embedded water in common food items. In the *Fall Rambling Reporter* issue (the school's newsletter), Simone provided a writeup of the students' experience. One student wrote: "In the science lab, I learned that some body washes and shampoos aren't very healthy. We also learned about watersheds. My favorite part of the field trip was the science lab because there was water and cookies". Do we know the way to a 7th grader's heart or what?



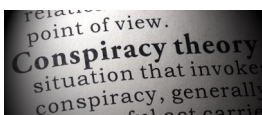
Fall Sustainability Activities continued on page 4

Faculty Accomplishments



Visiting assistant professor of Sustainability **Jen Myers** and professor of Anthropology and Religion **Ernie Olson**, along with psychology major and sustainability minor **Clara Lima '24**, led a discussion titled "Decolonizing Place-Based Education on Indigenous Lands" for the virtual conference of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). The team's session explored the roles environmental educators can play addressing the complex socio-ecological histories of the lands where they teach and their responsibilities to move beyond a land acknowledgment and discuss efforts to decolonize place-based education and foreground Indigenous knowledge, with a focus on higher education.

Marian Brown, director of the Center for Sustainability, was elected to another two-year term on the Advisory Council of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), the professional organization for collegiate sustainability practitioners. Marian was invited to present to the September meeting of the Southern Cayuga Garden Club, informing them about the multifaceted work of our Center in the areas of academics, campus operations, and community outreach. Garden Club members were involved in our late August Plant Potting activity, donating numerous small plants and cuttings to the effort (see more pg 1).



New Sustainability Courses for Spring

These new courses were approved for Spring 2024 delivery (dependent upon sufficient class enrollment):

ANTH 385/SUS 385 Topic: **Culture, Conspiracy, and Climate Change**

Instructor: Ernie Olson

The course offers an anthropological and religious studies framework for the critical examination of culture change in relation to climate change. In this examination, there will be critical analysis of the role of conspiracy and conspiracy theories as found in cross-cultural responses to global climate change as it manifests itself locally. (3 credits)

CRIM 300 **Human Rights and International Law**

Instructor: Chelsea Hipkens

This course provides a comprehensive overview of the principles and practices of human rights and international law. It explores the development of human rights, their legal foundations, and the mechanisms for their protection at the international level. Students will gain an understanding of the interplay between state sovereignty and global human rights norms, the role of international organizations, and contemporary challenges in the field. (Note: Among the contemporary issues we noted in Chelsea's syllabus are *Climate Change* and *Environmental Rights*). (3 credits)

SUS 385 **Sustainability Education**

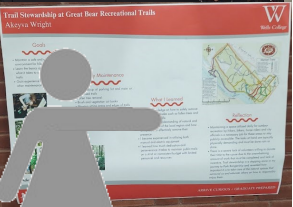
Instructor: Jen Myers

This course introduces teaching strategies and curricula for engaging learners in sustainability topics. Students will observe and practice experiential education models focused on human relationships with the natural world. Topics include place-based education, traditional ecological knowledge, integrating sustainability themes across the curriculum, environmental and sustainability education certificates, and teaching opportunities in non-school settings. (3 credits)



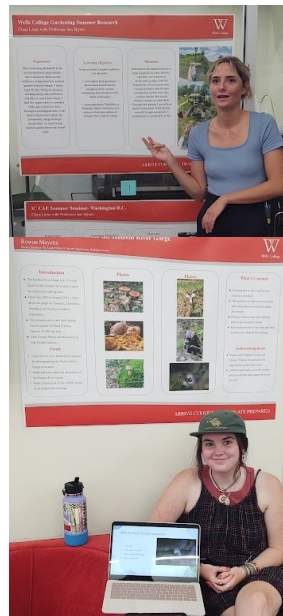
Student Sustainability-Related Presentations

During the Fall internship poster session, we noted these presentations by Wells students. Psychology major **Clara Lima '24** (right) explained her summer gardening research project, working with assistant professor of Sustainability Jen Myers, to continue interviewing area gardeners about their practices, especially as they note changing growing conditions due to climate change. Health Science major **Isabella Ciano '24** (left) detailed her spring study abroad experience in Tanzania; Izzy also presented her experience with the School for Field Studies as a *Science Colloquium* talk. Biology major **Rowan Mayette '24** (lower right) showed off the field guide she created for the Hudson Gorge Wildness, located within the Adirondack Forest Preserve, helping visitors identify plants and fungi along the hiking trails.



Akeyva Wright '25, Environmental science major and sustainability minor, submitted her poster on her summer internship as a trail steward, detailing what she learned and skills she gained maintaining over nine miles of hiking trails at *Great Bear Recreational Trails*. (Akeyva had to work during the internship poster fair and by the time we could chase her down to try to get a photo of her with her poster, it had unfortunately been removed and recycled).

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Recent Grad Shares What They Learned

Sabrina Burns '23, science teacher at *Thousand Islands Central School*, reached back for guidance on how to have students in her Human Anatomy class do the same *Sustain-a-Cell* activity that she did in her *Biology of Organisms* lab here at Wells. In this activity, students make cell models using recycled and "found" materials with the best efforts earning prizes. Sabrina sent photos of the winning results and reported that her students really enjoyed this opportunity. We were very impressed with the grand prize entry (right), which was as good as many we have seen from Wells students.



Sabrina Burns, at far right, with her winning students.



Art Exhibition Demonstrates Links to Place

The first String Room Gallery show, "Landing," was a group art exhibition exploring reparative links between place, ecology, and identity. The exhibit featured projects both inside and outside of the gallery. One of the artists, Diane Schenandoah, a Faithkeeper of the Oneida Nation, invited attendees outside for a ceremonial planting of *The Great Tree of Peace*. Diane expressed her feeling that it is her duty and traditional responsibility to share and promote the use of a "Good Mind," which are ancestral principles of peace and the methods of conduct and responsibilities to the natural world. To start the ceremony, Diane lit a white sage bunch and offered this to the assembled audience to breathe in and help center their thinking. She also passed around a page titled "words of war" for audience members to fill in with phrases and words they feel convey conflict and discord. This page was placed in the hole that was prepared to receive a white pine tree sapling, to symbolize the ritual burying of those negative thoughts. The audience was invited to help place and fill in the soil around this newest "tree of peace" on the Wells college grounds near Cleveland Hall.

Artist Ben Altman had several pieces inside the gallery and one "feral" art piece, the words "CUT HERE" incised into a dead ash tree along the walkway between Macmillan and Woods Lot. This tree was just one of the many thousands of ash trees lost so far to the invasive Emerald Ash Borer. (Ironically, our Grounds crew followed the artistic direction and cut down that dead tree shortly after the gallery show ended). Two of Altman's gallery photographs were framed with wood harvested from other lost white ash trees, vividly showing the damage to a keystone tree species by this voracious invasive insect.



Trick or Trash collection

Again this year, we participated in a national effort to keep Halloween candy wrappers out of landfill waste streams and diverted into a recycling process. We put out a special "Trick or Trash" collection box in the 1st floor hallway of Zabriskie and invited the campus community to "fill 'er up." Candy wrappers are not recyclable in regular systems but can be specially processed back into plastic pellets, to be melted down and extruded into new items. This collection program is a partnership between the *National Wildlife Federation* and recycling company *Rubicon*. One student project team in WLLS 100 also assisted with putting out additional hand-made *Trick or Trash* boxes around campus. Between us, we returned a nice collection of wrappers.



Coming Out Day T-Shirts



Bookstore Manager Rich Kloster laid in a nice array of pride-related gear for the college observance of *Coming Out Day* on October 11th. We liked the welcoming and colorful design of the special T-shirt made available, but what we really liked was the information about the

L2 Blue manufacturer. The fabric of this shirt was made with rPET, material derived from recycled plastic water bottles. The manufacturer also uses water-based inks in an ink recirculation system - a process which reduces ink consumption by 20% and waste by 90%. Inks are disposed of using a third-party environmental service - not put down a drain to pollute waterways.

Wells Water wins... by a tongue...



...or a bunch of tongues, in this case. During the field trip we hosted for the Southern Cayuga Central School 7th grade (see more page 1), one of the interactive activities offered was our ever-popular Water Challenge, a blind drinking water taste test pitting Wells' tap water against *Aquafina* bottled "purified drinking water" and *Poland Spring* spring water. We asked the 7th graders to taste-test each water and guess which water they thought was which and say which drinking water they preferred the taste of. Only two out of 38 respondents correctly identified all three drinking water products. We pointed out to the class that

Aquafina, a Pepsico product bottled at the unappetizingly-named *Clinton's Ditch Cooperative* bottling plant in Cicero NY, is simply another community's tap water that has been additionally purified. Wells tap water, which is filtered and treated for safety and additionally filtered through our water bottle fill stations, was preferred by 47% of respondents with the two bottled water products trailing (*Poland Spring*: 29% and *Aquafina*: 24%). One respondent offered the comment that "*Sample Z [Aquafina] tastes plasticity [sic]*". All the waters tasted were served ice-cold, with the ice in each separate serving container pre-made from the same drinking water being sampled. We also pointed out to the classes that serving liquids ice-cold is a strategy for improving the taste of any drinking water as human taste buds cannot easily differentiate flavors when beverages are served very cold. We also pointed out the vast difference in cost for these drinking water products, with tap water costing far less than a penny an ounce.

LED Lighting Donation

Karlye Gill Pillai '68 gifted funds for LED lighting for our buildings and solar lights for the Wells dock. The difference is like night and day! As for sustainability, the annual electric consumption of the campus is estimated to be reduced by 391,415 kilowatts per year and the cost savings per month are estimated to be \$2,293, with a lifetime projected savings over 24 years at \$1.290M! You can see for yourself how amazing the dock looks!



(submitted by Pam Sheradin, VP for Advancement)



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Wells Center for
Sustainability and
the Environment



The Center for Sustainability was asked to donate a "Green Goodie Basket" for the silent auction fundraiser for the Book Lover's Ball, the annual "fancy" event that raises funds to support the *Aurora Free Library*. These popular baskets contain various sustainable cleaning and personal care products. This time out, we included woolen dryer balls and natural fertilizer pellets made with wool from Icelandic sheep, locally raised on *Trinity Farm*, operated by retired biology professor Margaret Flowers. Other sustainable products tucked into this basket—which had a retail value of \$140—included several useful *Seventh Generation* and *ECOS* brand items.

Sustainability is a decision-making framework for continuous improvement that mindfully takes into account the social, environmental, and economic impacts of our choices.

Fall Sustainability Activities, continued from page 1



October 5—Sustainability Special: Silver Tree Forest Farm Dinner The Center for Sustainability director collaborated with *Cayuga Community College's* Community Education program and a guest chef to host a special sustainability-themed dinner at the community college's state-of-the-art culinary center in downtown Auburn. This dinner featured a talk by Erin Humphrey Schey, co-founder of *Silver Tree Forest Farm* in Owasco NY, about their permaculture farm operation. Chef Luke Szabo from *Scratch Farm-*

house Catering took over and demonstrated how he used Silver Tree farm products to prepare the dishes served during the dinner. The Center director covered the cost of the dinner seating and transportation for our Wells contingent which included Dr. Laura McClusky, students from her *Anthropology of Food* class, another Wells student, and assistant professor of Biology Dr. Leah Elliott. The photo includes our Wellsians with chef Luke Szabo and his assistant, Thomas Andrews, Erin Humphrey Schey, and Emily Cameron, Cayuga's Community Education director.

October 26—Sustainability Special: Campus Crunch This was our 10th annual observance of *National Food Day*, which has become a state-wide event among higher education campuses. *Hallmark Dining* partnered with us to offer house-made apple orchard dessert bars, apple cider and a colorful assortment of hand apples to take to "crunch into", all sourced from local apple orchards.



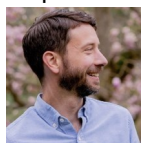
October 27—Sustainability Special: Clothing and Costume Swap The Center for Sustainability and Wells Campus Greens offered this free opportunity for campus members to get rid of unwanted but still usable clothing and to pick out new items. Untaken items were donated to area reuse outlets after the swap.

November 1—This Sustainability Special: "Day of the Dead" Edible Insect Tasting event in the Dining Hall during lunch was a "qualified success". 75 adventuresome tasters who would actually TRY the savory flavored insect snacks, the dark chocolate-covered crickets, or the brownies made with insect protein flour said they *LIKED* them! Thanks to *Hallmark Dining* baker, Tracey, who turned out delicious brownies using cricket protein to replace 1/3 of the flour in the batter—everyone who tried them could not taste any difference from "normal" brownies. We passed on some unopened packets of cricket snacks to faculty to offer tastings in relevant classes: *Intro to Anthropology*; *Humans, Animals and Interaction*; and *Sustainable Agriculture*.



November 11—Sustainability Special: Campus-Community Harvest Dinner Those who attended this successful event - and more than 60 students and community members did! - all had fun and got a delicious meal, thanks to over a dozen community members who came and brought homemade food. Thanks to alumna Rev. Barb Blom from *United Ministry of Aurora* for co-sponsoring this event and spreading the word. *Hallmark Dining's* team supplied two big pans of harvest tortellini salad. Collegiate members set up the room and provided the decorations and tableware and also provided opportunities for folks to express their gratitude, either as thank-you letters to specific individuals or generally thankful messages on *Post-Its* used to decorate the giant *W* in Sommer Center.

November 16—Sustainability Special: On-site Compost Workshop The Center partnered with *Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cayuga County* and the *Cornell Waste Management Institute* to host a workshop on the science and benefits of composting as a food waste strategy. The workshop included a how-to on building a wire compost bin for home use. Assistant professor of Biology Leah Elliott brought her Microbiology lab class because the workshop content fit perfectly in her lab syllabus for the day exploring real-world uses for microbes.



November 17—Science Colloquium: "Opportunities with AmeriCorps". The Center director hosted Dave Harker with *Partnerships for Campus and Community Engagement* to educate our community about this program. See September 15 (page 1) for more about *Science Colloquium* and how the Center director sometimes helps science faculty fill open presentation slots. We will help fill several *Colloquium* slots for Spring!