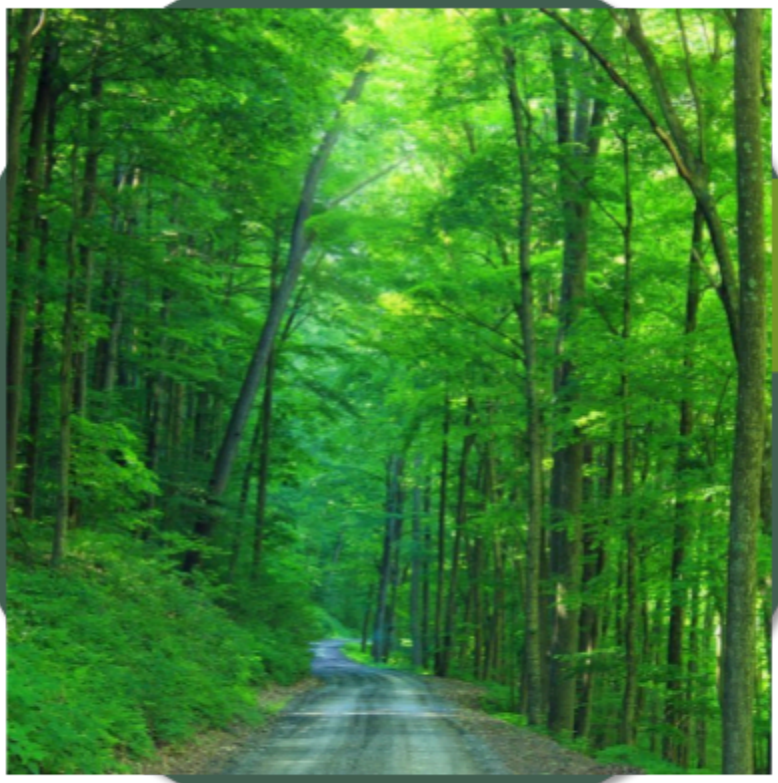


WEST CHESTER GREEN TEAM NEWS

November 2024

Mission: The West Chester Green Team is a civic organization in West Chester, PA, that works to educate the local public and to establish and nourish green initiatives in the community in harmony with nature and each other, promoting the health of all living things and of planet Earth.

Inside:

WCGT Calendar of Upcoming Events

When – What – Where.

November 27: WCGT's Season's Greenings online auction begins. Details on page 5.

For details on other November and later events, see listings beginning page 3.

Related groups and committees:

4th Monday of every month: East Bradford Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), 7 – 8:30pm, East Bradford Township Bldg, 676 Copeland School Rd.

4th Monday of every month: East Goshen Sustainability Advisory Committee, 7 – 8:30pm, East Goshen Township Bldg, 1580 Paoli Pike

4th Tuesday of every month: West Goshen Sustainability Advisory Committee, 6 – 8 pm, West Goshen Township Bldg., 1025 Paoli Pike

4th Tuesday of every month: Westtown Environmental Advisory Council, 7 – 8:30pm, Westtown Township Bldg., 1039 Wilmington Pike (Rt. 202)

4th Thursday of every month: West Chester Sustainability Advisory Committee, 6:30 – 8 pm, Room 240, Borough Hall, 401 E. Gay St.

Be sure to visit our Web site at https://wcgreenteam.com/ and our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/WCGTeam/ (all are welcome to post environment- and sustainability-related items there). If you wish to support our work, please donate here: https://wcgreenteam.com/contact-2/

NOTE: Deadline for the December 2024 issue is November 30! We welcome contributions and suggestions from our readers for possible inclusion in a future issue. E-mail your ideas to Dianne Walsh at LDwalsh318@gmail.com.

This and That

WEST CHESTER GREEN TEAM PRESENTS

Season's Greenings!

A VIRTUAL FUNDRAISER AUCTION

NOVEMBER 27 - DECEMBER 7

Items on Offer

- *A house in the French Alps*
- *Tallamy style garden planning*
- *International dinners*
- *Restaurant gift cards*
- *Catering for your party*
- *Weeks at a variety of camps*
- *A day picnicking and swimming at the Quarry*
- *Art by Denise Vitollo and Vaughn Stadtmiller*
- *Pottery by Suzanne Kent*

Pickup at West Chester Friends Meeting or delivery possible

SUPPORT THE GREEN TEAM'S EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Visit wcgreenteam.com for more info

We have a lot of great items, experiences, vacation homes and baskets up for grabs! Some prizes to be bid on are a vacation house in the French Alps, a fresh produce and farm to table basket, handmade pottery and coffee, and baking classes with a local chef! Stay tuned to our Facebook page to get in depth details! Auction goes live on Nov. 27th at 5pm!

More Coming Attractions

November 9: 10:30 AM-11:30 AM

Residents & Healthy Streams

Focusing on the Darby Creek Watershed with information applicable to all local watersheds

Learn more about rain gardens, rain barrels, road salt, and more!

An Easttown Township Environmental Advisory Council Workshop

November 9, 2024 10:30 AM-11:30 AM

The Carriage House at the Upper Main Line YMCA

Presented by Lauren McGrath

Director of Watershed Protection,
The Willistown Conservation Trust &
Darby Creek Valley Association Board Member

November 10:

The Borough of West Chester in collaboration with West Chester University is sponsoring a Borough Clean Up on Sunday, November 10th from 11:00am to 1:00pm. We will be meeting at Rustin Park, located

at 740 South Walnut Street, to disperse supplies. There will be coffee and doughnuts to kick off the event. No registration is needed, and you may choose the area or block you would like clean up in the borough.

Various November dates:

Vote for…Campaign Sign Recycling!

It's easy!

1. **Bring your old or no-longer-needed signs to one of the sites listed.**
2. **Put your sign parts in the appropriate labeled bins.**
3. **That's it!**

Everhart Park

Fall Clean Up

Saturday, November 23, 2024

9:00 AM to 12:00 PM OR 1:00 to 4:00 PM

Please join the Friends of Everhart Park in our annual Fall Clean Up at Everhart Park. There will be tasks for all members of the family, so you can bring your children to participate in preparing our park for the winter.

Please bring your own gloves and, if you have them, wheel barrow & rakes. Rakes will be available, if you do not have them.

Everhart Park Fall Clean-Up

Volunteers are needed for a fall clean-up of Everhart Park on Saturday, November 23rd, 2024. You can volunteer from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Please bring your gloves, wheelbarrows, and rakes if you have them!

NEW RUX 110 Class:

Environmental, Food, Land Justice, & Community Change!

Join WCU's Exciting NEW 5-Week Course in Spring 2025

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Share community organizing best practices & environmental justice storytelling in retreat format.

INTERACTIVE LEARNING

Convene at local farms and environmental justice organizations with mission of social change.

REAL-WORLD CHANGE

Community fellows/students partner to take environmental justice projects to community stakeholders.

We are still looking for Environmental Justice Community Fellows to participate in the course! If you know an organization or person who might be a good candidate, please reach out to Megan Schraedley at mschraedle@wcupa.edu.

Environmental Progress in Chester County

by Dawn Mazzone

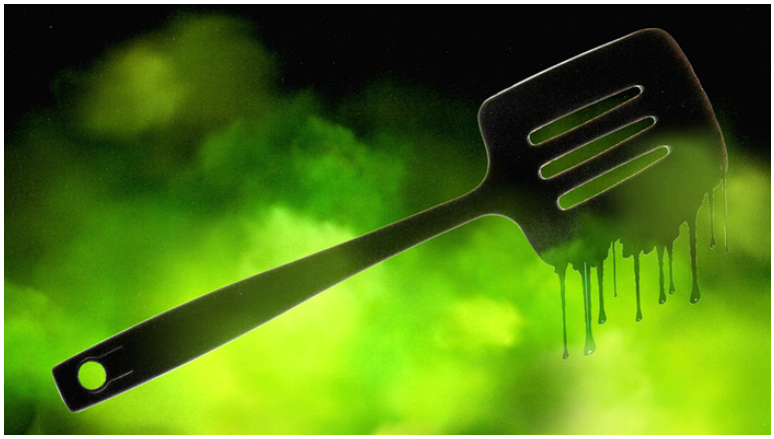
The third annual presentation on environmental progress in Chester County--initiated by Josh Maxwell three years ago and co-sponsored by the WC Green Team and the WCU Office of Sustainability--was a recent huge success. The Green Team's Megan Schradley, Ph.D., welcomed the panel and audience. Gary Coutu, Ph.D., of the Geography & Planning Department, moderated the event.

There are great reasons to feel Chester County proud! On October 28th, an outstanding analysis of the accomplishments in Environmental Progress in our county in 2024 was reported by a panel of seasoned change-makers: Josh Maxwell, Chester County Commissioner Chair, Marian Moskowitz, Chester County Commissioner, vice-chair, Eric Roe, Chester County Commissioner and Rachel Griffith, Chester County Sustainability Director. Topics included: expansion of walking trails, collaborative efforts between municipalities and other counties for public transportation access, assisted housing, flooding control, support for the 600 farms in Chester County, plastic use and so much more.

Given our economic resources are equivalent to the entire state of Wyoming, and Chester County is the fastest growing county in PA, the future is hopeful in continuing to be an environmentally secure area.

Throw Out Those Black Spatulas!

By Zoe Schlanger, *Weekly Planet, October 30, 2024*



For the past several years, I've been telling my friends what I'm going to tell you: Throw out your black plastic spatula. In a world of plastic consumer goods, avoiding the material entirely requires the fervor of a religious conversion. But getting rid of black plastic kitchen utensils is a low-stakes move, and worth it. Cooking with any plastic is a dubious enterprise, because heat encourages potentially harmful plastic compounds to migrate out of the polymers and potentially into the food. But, as Andrew Turner, a biochemist at the University of Plymouth recently told me, black plastic is particularly crucial to avoid.

In 2018, Turner published one of the earliest papers positing that black plastic products were likely regularly being made from recycled electronic waste. The clue was the plastic's concerning levels of flame retardants. In some cases, the mix of chemicals matched the profile of those commonly found in computer and television housing, many of which are treated with flame retardants to prevent them from catching fire.

Because optical sensors in recycling facilities can't detect them, black-colored plastics are largely rejected from domestic-waste streams, resulting in a shortage of black base material for recycled plastic. So the demand for black plastic appears to be met "in no insignificant part" via recycled e-waste, according to Turner's research. TV and computer casings, like the majority of the world's plastic waste, tend to be recycled in informal waste economies with few regulations and end up remolded into consumer products, including ones, such as spatulas and slotted spoons, that come into contact with food.

You simply do not want flame retardants anywhere near your stir-fry. Flame retardants are typically not bound to the polymers to which they are added, making them a particular flight risk: They dislodge easily and make their way into the surrounding environment. And, indeed, another paper from 2018 found that flame retardants in black kitchen utensils readily migrate into hot cooking oil. The health concerns associated with those chemicals are well established: Some flame retardants are endocrine disruptors, which can interfere with the body's hormonal system, and scientific literature suggests that they may be associated with a range of ailments, including thyroid disease, diabetes, and cancer. People with the highest blood levels of PBDEs, a class of flame retardants found in black plastic, had about a 300 percent increase in their risk of dying from cancer compared with people who had the lowest levels, according to a study released this year. In a separate study, published in a peer-reviewed journal this month, researchers from the advocacy group Toxic-Free Future and from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam found that, out of all of the consumer products they tested, kitchen utensils had some of the highest levels of flame retardants.

Another food product, black plastic sushi trays, had the highest level of flame retardants in the

study. Children's toys also ranked high: A single pirate-themed plastic children's necklace was almost 3 percent flame retardant by weight. "When you're using black plastic items, there's going to be a risk that they could be contaminated," Megan Liu, the science and policy manager at Toxic-Free Future and the first author on the study, told me. Those flame retardants migrate into toddlers' saliva and into the dust in our homes and, thus, in the air we breathe. Last year, Toxic-Free Future tested breast milk taken from 50 women in the U.S. and found flame-retardant compounds in each sample.

Many of the flame-retardant compounds that showed up in the tests that Liu and her co-authors conducted should no longer be in the product stream. Brominated flame retardants have mostly been phased out of products in the U.S. and Europe, including from many electronics. In the U.S. and elsewhere, some of the most harmful flame-retardant compounds are now illegal for use in most consumer goods. Massachusetts banned a list of 11 flame retardants in 2021. Starting this year, a New York bill restricts the use of organohalogen flame retardants—one large class of the compounds—in electronic casings, and a similar Washington State ban will go into effect in 2025.

But these compounds keep coming back. The sushi tray tested in Liu's study contained 11,900 parts per million of decaBDE, also called BDE-209, which she described as a "really alarming" level of a chemical that was banned from most U.S. commerce in 2022 and largely phased out of production long before that. Because plastic recycling is a global economy with scant oversight, patchwork legislation may do little to keep these compounds out of the supply chain. "You send your electronic waste abroad, and you just haven't got a clue what happens to it," Turner told me. "I think the assumption is that it gets handled safely and it's disposed of properly. But, you know, it comes back in the form of things that we don't want."

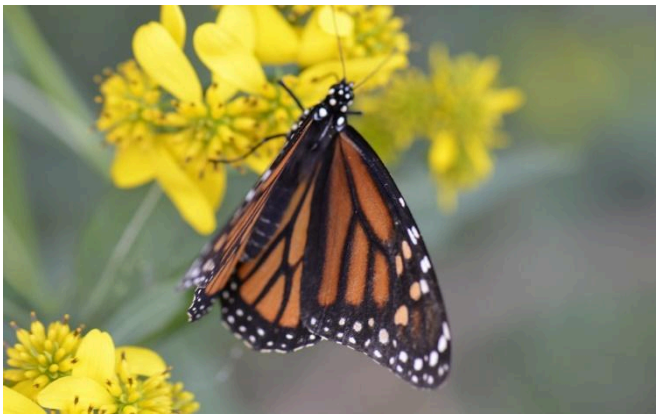
For a consumer, this problem would be simpler to handle if it was clear that only certain black plastic products posed a risk, or that all of them did. But Turner found that products were contaminated with flame retardants at random. Not all of the black plastic he tested in his 2018 study contained the compounds, and in those that did, "the amount of chemicals in the black plastic varied hugely," he said. Some items would have the same chemical profile of what you'd expect from, say, the flame-retardant plastic housing of a television or a cellphone. Other objects would have just a trace of flame retardant, or none at all. Of the more than 200 black plastic products Liu bought at retail stores for her study, hardly any were labeled as being made from recycled materials, she said. Consumers have no way to tell which black plastics might be recycled e-waste and which aren't. "It's just a minefield, really," Turner said.

Putting your black plastic in the recycling bin might seem like the right thing to do, but recycling isn't a solution to the most noxious qualities of plastics. "I personally have been throwing out my black plastic takeout containers," Liu told me, because if they are contaminated, "it's scary to think that those might be reentering other products with the same flame retardants." Until flame retardants and any dubious compounds that arise to replace banned ones are eliminated from the supply chain, reusing black plastic will perpetuate a potential health hazard. In her view, "the onus shouldn't fall on consumers to have to make these daily changes in their lives." Ultimately, federal bans or more ubiquitous state laws that go beyond single-compound phaseouts are the only way to keep flame retardants out of takeout containers and other black plastic intended for use in things such as foodware and toys. Until manufacturers use safer flame-retardant compounds and laws effectively prohibit recycled electronics material from entering consumer products, these chemicals will continue circulating through our kitchens, arising and re-arising like toxic zombies.

But that doesn't mean we need to consume them by way of our kitchen utensils. Replacing a black plastic spatula with a steel or silicone option is an easy way to cut down on at least part of one's daily dose of hormone disruptors. I've also taken this news as a reason to coax myself into carrying a reusable coffee mug more often, if only to avoid the black plastic lids on disposable cups—heat plus plastic equals chemical migration, after all. It's a minefield of random hazards out there, as Turner said. Most of the time we're trying to navigate without a map. But in at least some areas, we can trace a safer path for ourselves.

Five Easy Ways to Support Pollinators in the Fall

By Erica Browne Grivas*, Better Homes & Gardens*, published October 4, 2024. (Condensed from the original)



Gardeners are realizing the increasing importance of supporting pollinators as shrinking habitats and other environmental pressures reduce their populations. In fact, in a recent Monrovia poll of 1400 gardeners nationwide, over a quarter, 26%, said they were gardening primarily for pollinators—that's up six percent from last year's poll.

While most efforts tend to be focused on spring and summer gardening, birds, bees, and other wildlife still need support in the garden's quieter seasons. Here are 5 ways you can help pollinators in your garden in fall as they migrate or prepare to overwinter.

1. Get Planting

By planting flowers, shrubs, and trees that supply nectar, seeds, and berries, you're offering food during a season when fewer plants bloom. It's also a great time to plant generally, as typically milder temperatures and regular rainfall help plants establish readily and get a jump start on spring growing.

"Fall is an important time to provide forage and nectar plants with fall blooms, along with berrying shrubs and trees for wildlife," says Mary Phillips, head of the National Wildlife Federation's Garden for Wildlife and Certified Wildlife Habitat programs. "Hundreds of native bees, birds, and the monarch butterfly rely on these food and energy sources," she adds. "Sow seeds directly into your garden beds before the soil freezes to increase germination success next spring."

2. Include a Diverse Mix of Plants

Your strongest strategy, experts agree, is to choose a mix of pollinator plants combining different colors, shapes, and bloom times that are native to your area. Keystone species are foundational to the local ecosystem, supporting scores of species. Plants in the aster *(Asteraceae)* and mint *(Lamiaciae)* are often cited as being very attractive to pollinators.

Some summer annuals, like sunflowers *(Helianthus annuus)* and zinnias welcome a number of generalist pollinators, from bees to birds and butterflies. A later sowing of these plants will encourage flowers into the fall.

“Focus on adding a variety of native plants that have a variety of flower shapes, sizes, and colors. Diverse native plantings can support a vibrant ecosystem,” says Laura Rost, National Coordinator for Bee City USA and Bee Campus USA at The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. She also recommends making space for a tree or two. “One native tree can provide a meadow’s worth of flowers!” she says.

3. Add a Water Source

In addition to nectar and other food sources, pollinators need fresh water to help fuel them for migration or to get through the winter.

“Beyond planting a diversity of flowering species attractive to a wide variety of pollinators, gardeners can offer support by keeping fresh water sources available throughout the year,” says Schmeichel. Phillips suggests a maintained birdbath, circulating fountain, or butterfly puddling dish.

4. Leave the Leaves

The next tip gives gardeners permission to be lazy for a change and join the "Leave the Leaves" movement. "A leaf layer several inches deep is a natural occurrence in any area where trees naturally grow,” says Phillips. “Many wildlife species live in or rely on the leaf layer to find food. For example, butterflies, like the red-banded hairstreak butterflies lay their eggs on fallen oak leaves, which become the first food for their caterpillars. The layer also provides other habitat, for salamanders, chipmunks, box turtles, toads, shrews, earthworms, and many insects species.”

“Leave the leaves either in place or raked up and left in a back corner for overwintering nesting sites,” Schmeichel says. “Leaving stalks, stems, and seedheads provides high-fat seed sources for birds, nesting sites inside stems, and other nesting materials wildlife can use to build their winter

5. Don't Over-Mulch

Phillips also recommends taking care not to over-mulch. “Repeated layers of hardwood mulch in both spring and fall seasons has the potential to impact the natural ecosystem between naturally falling leaves and organic debris and soil health.” Stick to no more than 2 inches of bark chip mulch, or shred up fallen leaves and let them serve as your mulch.

These Fashion Waste Facts Might Surprise You!

By Faye Park*, Public Interest Research Group*, published November 8, 2024.

If we stopped manufacturing or disposing of clothing today, you wouldn't run out of things to wear in your lifetime. In fact, nobody would. Neither would your children, or your childrens' children.

Fashion waste experts have suggested that the sheer excess of clothes in existence right now could clothe the next *six generations* of humanity.

If you want to learn more about the problem with fast fashion, how we got here, and tips to help you be a part of the solution, this read has you covered!

To get you started, here are just a few of the most surprising facts about the problems with fast fashion:

1. **More clothes are made and sold today than ever before!**

Manufacturers are producing a lot more clothes than they used to. The amount of garments produced across the globe since the 1950s has ballooned to at least six times the volume. Globally, it's over 100 billion pieces of clothing per year.

And consumers are buying more clothes, too. The ratio of clothing Americans buy nowadays compared to how many they bought in 2000 is 4 to 1.

2. **Nearly a third of clothing that we produce is thrown away or destroyed**

You can walk into any mall or clothing store and see racks and racks of clothing -- far more than anyone will ever wear. It's far more than these companies can even hope to sell. A big portion of the clothes that become waste were never even worn or used in the first place. A massive 30% of all clothes manufactured globally are never sold.

And in part, that's intentional. The offerings at these "fast fashion" stores cycle with changing trends, not waiting until a previous stock is sold out. When the season or the fashion changes, retailers may destroy their old stock to make room for the new.

3. **Textile waste is the fasting growing waste stream in America**

You might think plastic is the fastest growing type of waste in the country, considering all the packaging on our food and the other things we buy.

But plastic waste is actually a distant second to textile waste. According to one study, textile waste is the fastest growing waste stream in America.

A big part of the reason is fast fashion companies' practice of overstocking their stores and then destroying unsold garments. And it all adds up fast. In the US alone, we generate enough textile waste to fill the Mall of America -- the largest shopping mall in the country -- every six days.

If the problem of fashion waste is so enormous, how can we stop it?

It starts with the fashion brands manufacturing so many clothes in the first place -- but you can be a part of the solution too.

Learn more about the problem with fast fashion and how you can get involved today.

West Chester Green Team Honors Two WCU Sustainability Stewards

***University Communications & Marketing*, published November 6, 2024.**

Two West Chester University employees were recently honored by the West Chester Green Team (WCGT). WCGT recognized Josh Braid ’00, manager of Grounds Maintenance and Moving Services, and Nur Ritter, stewardship manager of the Robert B. Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies, with male gardener honors as it celebrated the region’s outstanding gardeners.

Both Braid and Ritter are members of the University’s Sustainability Council and serve on several of its subcommittees as well as on other University committees.

Braid is manager of WCU’s grounds maintenance and moving services, where he leads dynamic teams in landscaping and heavy equipment operations, committed to creating a safe and beautiful campus for students, educators, and visitors. He has worked at the University since 2010.

“I would like to share this recognition with the 20 people in our department who do the hard work in making campus look great,” he said.

Braid has more than 20 years of experience in professional landscaping and 13 years in management and has cultivated a diverse skill set in facilities maintenance and operations at the University.

He earned his bachelor’s degree in philosophy and holds post-baccalaureate credits in general science and secondary education from West Chester University and is currently pursuing a master’s in public administration here.

Ritter became the second stewardship manager for the University’s Robert B. Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies (GNA) in 2016. He is part of the team in the University’s Office of Sustainability (OoS).

He is responsible for implementing the GNA’s strategic plan; designing and implementing restoration activities and invasive species control measures at the GNA; supervising student workers and volunteers; establishing a native plant nursery; seed collecting and processing; and conducting general botanical surveys. His additional responsibilities include budget management, facility maintenance, coordination of research and education activities within the GNA, coordinating outreach, and contributing to the GNA’s web and social media presence.

He earned his bachelor's in botany and a doctorate in natural resources, both from the University of New Hampshire.

The WCU Office of Sustainability has partnered with WCGT for a number of years and expanded the collaboration by co-hosting four events this fall. WCGT is a non-governmental civic organization in Chester County that works to educate the public and establish and nourish local green initiatives.

Meet the newest member of the Green Team: Yasir Kundi!

Hello, I'm Yasir Kundi, currently pursuing a master's in applied Statistics with a focus on Data Science at West Chester University. My journey began in the social service sector, where I worked as a Research Analyst for two years. During that time, I worked on impactful projects, including using spatial analysis and ArcGIS to study urban economic development trends. With a strong technical skill set in Python, R, and ArcGIS, my recent projects have included analyzing air quality for pollution trends, conducting crime rate spatial analysis, and optimizing data management functions to enhance decision-making processes.

One of the projects I contributed to was with the Clean Air Alliance, where I gathered air quality data to assess pollution levels. I used air quality monitors to map pollution hotspots and created visualizations in Tableau to track trends over time. I also developed a data management function in Python to streamline the handling of this air pollution data. This analysis was presented to government officials to help inform regulatory action on pollution control.

I also worked with the United Nations Development Program, where I helped collect weather data through river discharge sensors and Automated Weather Stations (AWS). This data provided valuable insights on river flooding patterns, helping to alert the public and guide necessary precautions for community safety.

Currently, I'm focused on an environmental project to increase tree coverage in West Chester's SE quadrant. By analyzing data and involving community support, I hope to contribute to the growth of green spaces and promote sustainability in the area.