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Hampton Bays Professor Founds Nonprofit Dedicated To Improving Environment



Marc Fasanella at the home – office of the Ecological Culture Initiative • Photo • Dana Shaw

After years of attending community meetings to discuss what can be done to improve the (*cultural*) environment in Hampton Bays—and not seeing much progress—Marc Fasanella decided to take matters into his own hands.

Dr. Fasanella spends most of his week at Stony Brook University teaching students about the environment as a visiting professor of ecological art, architecture, and design in the Sustainability Studies Program of the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, so it only made sense to him that he should start taking a proactive approach to helping his local ecosystem. Brainstorming in the historically preserved 1858 Victorian where he lives, which sits on a conservation easement in the middle of Hampton Bays, an idea struck him: He would create a nonprofit that would put the environment and its needs first.

Dr. Fasanella founded The Ecological Culture Initiative earlier this year and already has a volunteer staff of seven people—including his wife, Anne Moyer, the treasurer and wellness director, and his daughter, Mia Fasanella, the secretary (*as well as*) culture, food-way, and historic resource analyst.

“No one was addressing the issues here,” (*because they neither had the funding or support to develop a historical food curriculum and organic garden program, or engage in teaching restoration carpentry and permaculture design*) Dr. Fasanella said, pointing to a couple of local community groups including the Hampton Bays Civic Association and the Hampton Bays Historical Society. “So I said, ‘Let me make an organization that can be the glue between these other organizations.’”

The goal of the nonprofit, Dr. Fasanella explained, is to “think globally, act locally.” To accomplish that, he plans to push for residents and businesses in Hampton Bays to completely stop using pesticides and for homeowners to start incorporating old agriculture practices into their landscaping as some of the first steps to improving the local environment.

As the food-way analyst, Ms. Fasanella’s role is to study everything food, from how its grown to what crops are native to Hampton Bays. She said one of her favorite summer activities, when she is home from college at SUNY Oswego, is growing an assortment of vegetables in the garden boxes behind the house, which for the time being doubles as the headquarters for The Ecological Culture Initiative. Every day her family would use the vegetables, including tomatoes and summer squash... to make (*organic vegan lunches*) “They were good,” Ms. Fasanella said of the vegetables she helped grow, noting that they were often served, salad bar-style, at Ecological Culture Initiative meetings.

RJ Theofield of Sayville, who has been working as the nonprofit’s land analyst in charge of permaculture design since May, added that one of the goals is to set up a hub somewhere near Main Street in Hampton Bays where they can teach locals how to grow native plants at their homes. Other native plants that could be grown include huckleberries, blueberries, prickly pears...

“We are really trying to just engage the community and teach them how to do these things,” said Mr. Theofield, who is currently a senior at Stony Brook University and has taken a few of Dr. Fasanella’s classes. “The average person can do this—not just professionals.”

Written Amanda Bernocco • September 26, 2016 • the corrections in italics were added by the ecological culture initiative.

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