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## CNU AND NEWPORT NEWS' TOWN & GOWN PARTNERSHIP GARNERS STATE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD

**GOVERNOR'S BRONZE AWARD GIVEN FOR SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT SUCCESSES.**

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | May 11, 2023

*Read time: about 4 min*

A partnership between Christopher Newport and the City of Newport News focused on increasing sustainability practices both on campus and throughout the community has received the Governor's Environmental Excellence Bronze Award.

"This award makes me think of an African proverb that says, 'If you want to go faster, go alone; if you want to go far, go together,'" said Dr. Linda Manning, director of CNU's [Center for Sustainability in Education](#). "The 'wicked problem' of sustainability requires collaboration and shared values. I believe this award recognizes important (and often behind-the-scenes work) that members of the CNU and Newport News communities are doing."

Called the "Town and Gown Partnership: Solving Sustainability Together," the collaboration between the City of Newport News and Christopher Newport creates environmental programs aimed at making the world a better, cleaner and more sustainable place. Students help initiate various programs that they believe will bring positive environmental results to campus and the city.

For example, as part of the sustainability effort, one student focused on increasing solar energy use in the city. Another worked on reducing waste and pollution at the One City Marathon. A third project involved the creation of a Food Forest in an impoverished area of the city. On campus, a student started an initiative called "Give It Up," which encourages the students to donate items at the end of year that they may otherwise throw away. And other students have turned their focus to studying the effects of sea-level rise on native trees.

The alliance between Newport News and Christopher Newport was one of several programs in the state to receive a Governor's Environmental Excellence Award for successful and innovative ideas that improve Virginia's environment.

"The Town and Gown partnership has acted as a living laboratory through which community stakeholders, local government leaders, faculty, students, and university staff can all work together to better understand, explore and address their shared environmental challenges and opportunities," the Department of Environmental Quality said about the program. "The partnership has resulted in numerous programs that have reduced the environmental footprint of CNU and the city."

The relationship between the two entities empowers students who are [Ferguson Fellows](#) to think outside of the box and launch sustainability efforts that promote a more environmentally-sound campus and city.

"This partnership has yielded tangible results," Manning said. "It is easier to apply for solar panels, a food forest now exists in Newport News. Hundreds of ninth and tenth-grade students in Hampton Roads have engaged in authentic research that has provided important data for scientists concerned with mitigating climate issues for endangered wetland species. And, I think this partnership has increased a sense of agency for students. They know that they will make a difference in the future because they have already made a difference.

"They have increased their confidence and their skills- making them even more equipped to truly lead lives of significance," she said.

Davis Pillow, '21 [finance](#), was the Ferguson Fellow behind the solar panel project, which was conducted in collaboration with [SolSmart](#). His goal was to streamline the permitting process to make it easier for residents and businesses to install solar panels.

"The project was really meaningful to me because I was able to build a continued partnership between CNU and the City of Newport News. The foundation of this partnership was built upon a mutual interest and understanding of the importance of sustainable practices within our local community," he said. "At the time, CNU's sustainability efforts were growing quickly and they were constantly improving on ways to promote awareness. Along with this, there was a general transformation occurring within the program- efforts were being directed to projects which promoted awareness, but brought about actual, definable changes in sustainability practices."

The Town and Gown partnership, which began in 2020, has been a huge boon to the city, said Newport News Sustainability Manager Jennifer Privette, '96 [business management](#). It has set in motion projects that have increased the city's sustainability abilities and reach, and has fostered a strong relationship with young adults who have an interest in advancing the city's environmental and sustainability endeavors.

"Students provide the desire to push the sustainability envelope forward," Privette said. "It's been a great partnership. It's been very rewarding for me personally and professionally."

The city works off the blueprints of two types of plans: strategic and comprehensive. Both call for more sustainability initiatives. By having the help of the CNU community, the city has been able to maximize on having more help by way of students and faculty. And this, more has been accomplished on the environmental front than expected.

"It gives talented, interested young people and faculty a way to advance sustainability in a way that I can't do alone," Privette said. "It really has been so rewarding for the city and the University.

"The influence young people have on the community can be very positive," she said. "And the practical experience the city provides the students is invaluable."

By being a living laboratory for sustainability, the program provides a way for the students to learn from the city and the city to learn from the students.

"We support and benefit each other," Privette said. "It's very important for the city. It gives us hope."

The real-world experience that is gleaned from students being involved in community environmental projects tends to make a substantial difference in their lives and in the places in which they live and learn. To serve with purpose and to better the world for future generations is a key element of their Christopher Newport education, Manning said.

"I think it is easy for college and university campuses to exist in bubbles where students are tourists and faculty critique the status quo from the vantage point of a campus office," she said. "Community-engaged learning and research projects make the college experience far more authentic and meaningful."

Pillow said the program set him on a path to success, both in the classroom and in the workforce. After graduating, Pillow got a job at Ferguson Enterprises as a supply chain analyst. His experience working on a sustainability project made for a much smaller learning curve once he was in the workforce.

"Ferguson's business strategy includes important environmental, social and governance practices," Pillow said. "Through CNU's sustainability program, I was able to broaden my perspective and understanding of the implementation of these practices. Having a background and previous experience in the sustainability sphere has been a huge advantage early in my career. I better understand how my role fits into our organizational goals."

"Having a foundational understanding of sustainability and how it can be implemented within existing business strategies/models will help me excel in my career at Ferguson. It is really exciting to experience the evolution of sustainability and see, firsthand, the role it plays in large business."

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