



**Season 7, Episode 2: Driving Sustainable Change at ESF**

**Host:** ESF President Joanie Mahoney

**Guest:** Sue Fassler, Director of Sustainability  
at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry

[MUSIC]

**Sue**

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It's welcoming a lifestyle shift and also realizing that you're not going to be perfect, and that one thing that works for you might not work for me. And there's no shame in that. It's okay. It's just changing the mindset to not buzz through life and just keep doing things the way you've been doing them, but just rethinking your interaction with people, with your community, and with the things that you bring into your home.

We are here as a college to make mistakes. And to teach some of the external world it's okay to make mistakes, but be we made these mistakes and these are the ways that you can learn from us.

**Joanie**

Welcome to season seven of Campus Conversations, the podcast. I'm Joanie Mahoney, and I have the honor of serving as Suny ESF president. This season will be speaking with students, staff, faculty, and members of the ESF community at large, all of whom are working to better establish the connections between what we do and how we do it better. Today, I'm excited to welcome ESF Director of Sustainability Sue Fassler.

Welcome.

**Sue**

Thank you so much for having me.

**Joanie**

In addition to the many places her role as director brings her, Sue also focuses on closed loop responsible purchasing efforts and reuse at the center for Sustainable Materials Management. Sits on the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust board of directors. Co-Chairs the United University profession's UUP Statewide Environmental Issues and Advocacy Committee, and serves with Me on SUNY's Sustainability Advisory Council.

So you are busy indeed. But I would say that people that are here at ESF that know you are not surprised because you seem like one of those people that is everywhere, has a lot of energy and has your hands in a lot of what we do here.

**Sue**

My mom always said even when I was like a little toddler, I'd pop up out of bed immediately and want a project. So I think I'm just blessed with having a lot of energy.

**Joanie**

That's fantastic. So let's start at the beginning. Where was home? Are you from the North Country? Is that what brings you to the Tug Hill?

**Sue**

Yeah. So I live 45 minutes north of Syracuse, and I grew up there, and I never thought I would live within two miles of my childhood home, but I do. It's really rural. My parents owned a few hundred acres when I was growing up, and we were allowed to watch one hour of TV a day, and the rest of the time we were reading books, we were outside, we were playing sports.

They didn't even really have to talk about the environment. I feel like it was just so much part of our life. And what brought me to ESF as a student. And now again as an employee. It was really the only college letter that I wrote that I feel like I didn't have to fake when I was writing my, like, admissions letter.

**Joanie**

You didn't need to come up with some fillers.

**Sue**

Yeah, just flowed naturally. And now my parents just keep adding to the land and it's under conservation easement. What, the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust. So that's my connection with the board because my parents, the land that's across the street from us, they own and it's all under easement, so it's just forever protected.

**Joanie**

That's great. Just real briefly. What does that mean when your family does that?

**Sue**

They work with an organization like the Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, and they basically give up development rights for big portions of the land. And you can put in building envelopes, little pockets where if something were to change in the future and we wanted like a commercial space or like an AG field that's

built into the easement. But really, what you agree upon when you set up the easement, it's really hard to change in the future.

So if our family land were ever to get sold, you can designate saying you have to sell X number of acres when it's sold, and then the new buyer has to maintain the integrity of that easement. And if they don't, that's where the land trust comes in. And they have a stewardship fund where they, if litigation were necessary, would take that on to protect the value of the land into the future.

**Joanie**

And the value to all of us is in keeping. It is close to natural, and that serves us with water quality and anti-sprawl.

**Sue**

Yeah, and the birds. My dad really did it for the birds.

**Joanie**

Really? Isn't that wonderful. Yeah. So you grew up, up there? Sounds like an ideal childhood. It was. And then you came as a freshman first year student here to ESF? Yep. Did you live in Centennial Hall?

**Sue**

I was pre-Centennial Hall. I actually lived up in Flint Hall, Syracuse University, up on the Mount. So Centennial Hall was built towards the sunset of my very long ESF career as a student.

**Joanie**

Okay, because I know you stayed here for grad school too. So, I will say that I was a Syracuse University student and I shared an apartment out at South Campus with two women who were ESF students and were up and out and spending weekends up in the Adirondacks, and they just seemed like they were having the time of their lives as ESF students.

So. All right, so you came here. What did you major in?

**Sue**

I did my Bachelor of Science and Environmental Studies. I kept it really broad. My original focus was I wanted to be like a wildlife scientist. I wanted to be outside. Then I kind of realized how much I liked policy. And so I switched to environmental studies. And then right from there, I played soccer to ESF. So a big reason I wanted to stay at ESF was because a lot of the friends I made were a few years younger than me, and I wanted to keep playing soccer with.

**Joanie**

Well, you know, whatever gets you into grad school.

**Sue**

So yeah, ESF was a draw regardless. But I got some extra years of eligibility and then my graduate degree at ESF, I focused on environmental science with a focus on environmental policy and democratic processes. So, folding in the engagement piece, the behavior change, a little bit of psychology, sociology. And I was lucky enough to do the dual degree master's program with SU's Maxwell School.

I was able to get my public administration degree from Maxwell, and then my MPS from ESF and two and a half years, and it was awesome.

**Joanie**

That's fantastic. And that program is wonderful. And I know that some changes have been made in the recent past, and we're trying to put that program back together, because you're an ideal example of somebody that used both that Maxwell degree and the degrees that you earned here at ESF.

**Sue**

And it was really different. And it was interesting because at ESF there is a lot of diversity of thought and opinion, but there's even it's just different at SU because if you've taken all these courses at ESF, sometimes you're in an ESF bubble a little bit and it's a beautiful place to be. But it was really nice to go over to Syracuse as well and get the perspectives.

There were so many people had come to grad school after doing some professional work. I was not one of them. So I got to benefit from all these international students who are coming with five, ten, 15 years of work experience. And then I got to bring that back to ESF. And there were, I think, six of us in our cohort from ESF, it was just a really, really cool experience.

**Joanie**

It sounds like it.

**Sue**

And I learned how to write a tight memo over at SU. So like an implementation memo. And that is something to this day that is so useful.

**Joanie**

I know, and I sometimes am on the receiving end of writing, and I think people need to understand how little time folks have. And you have to lead with what's important and get just the facts. And it's compelling to read the things that you write, because you do do that. And I want to get into the sustainability plan that ESF just launched under your tutelage.

And that is really well organized and well-written. And I know you've given a lot of credit to the communications and marketing team as well, but I can see your stamp in there, so I don't know if people listening probably aren't aware that you and I worked for a time together at Onondaga County. You were the director of the Save the Rain program.

**Sue**

After I had graduated from ESF in Syracuse, I moved down to South Florida and I spent three years as the Green Initiatives Coordinator for the City of Hallandale Beach. But I really missed home. I just did. So, I started reaching out to contacts and folks led me to Travis Glazier at Onondaga County, working in the Office of Environment.

Yes. So I was able to start there.

**Joanie**

I must have known that at the time because I worked very closely with Travis. But yeah. Okay. So I just put you out, Save the Rain.

**Sue**

And that's where I put myself, because originally I said yes to your question, but then I realized I started in the Office of Environment, and then the position became open in Save The Rain.

**Joanie**

Was it right after Madison Quinn? And she went on to anyway?

**Sue**

Yeah, yeah. So much good work had been done already. So it really was a very mature program to be able to walk into. I felt very, very lucky at that. And then, yeah, I transitioned over to Save the Rain, and I worked there for a period of time, but it was always kind of my goal to come to ESF.

I just didn't think it would happen so quickly. And then I saw a position posted with the word compost and the job description and yeah.

**Joanie**

They had you at Hello Compost. I can imagine that or waste or something to really entice you just briefly to tell people about what that Save the Rain program was.

**Sue**

Syracuse, like so many other cities, is plagued by what's called a combined sewer overflow. So our sewer system manages rainwater and what comes from our houses in the same set of pipes, which, of course, you

know, and when it rains, they can overflow and you get diluted sewage running into our water bodies. And the traditional way of managing that is through a wastewater treatment plant in what's called grey infrastructure.

So, things built by humans are often concrete. And the county was able to convince the federal government to try something really new and innovative. And I think it's really the first program in the country that was able to do this. You all convinced them, basically to let us use green infrastructure so plants to slow down rain, let it soak in and let it spread out on the ground and slowly infiltrate back into the ground and out of these combined sewer systems.

That way we were just reduced the water going in there and reduced the overflow. So there were just hundreds of projects spread throughout the county of this green infrastructure, and it really set the precedent for the rest of the country to say, wow, this can actually work. And that is low impact development. And I think that was probably happening before that term was really thrown around a lot in the public. That's what was happening in the county.

**Joanie**

And, you know, I took the fact that the county was first I took that responsibility really seriously. And I used to tell people, we have to succeed because, yeah, we have the opportunity to really change how everybody does it, but we also have the opportunity to blow it because this federal judge took a chance on us and put green infrastructure in our consent order. And having you and Madison and the others, we had.

**Sue**

A great team.

**Joanie**

At at Save the Rain and the metrics that we had to meet. We met four years early and you showed that that could work. And the Save the Rain team literally changed how this country deals with stormwater. And now looking where we are and all of the issues with stormwater, it's really wonderful to know that here in this community and with you and with the team, you really made that mark.

I went to San Francisco, I went to Philadelphia, I went to New York City, and we would throw a thumb drive into a laptop and show them some of the projects that you all had done. They modeled their programs after hours. And I have a lot of gratitude for the work that you did at the county. And then it was pure coincidence.

But the timing for you and me was almost simultaneously all of a sudden, I'm here at ESF in November of 2018, and there's Sue Fassler in the hall. So when did you start here?

**Sue**

It was March of 2019.

**Joanie**

Okay. So I got here just shortly before you. I bet you people thought we were in cahoots, but I had no idea. And I'm sure you had no idea.

**Sue**

No, my life plan to come back to ESF would have happened no matter what.

**Joanie**

Exactly. So you came back here to work at ESF? In what capacity?

**Sue**

And the capacity of the sustainable facilities manager, which was terrifying because it was in facilities operations, and I was originally managing a large part of our operations crew. So it was the custodial, grounds, mailroom, stockroom, shipping, receiving, and the fleet garage. And it was a staff of about 30 or 35 people. And I had only ever supervised two people before.

But again, the word compost was in the job description because it was a member of the sustainability team. And I really like people, and I really like advocating for people, especially people who traditionally are marginalized, which our operations staff, they're the lowest paid people who are in the background who work so hard. So I was like, I want to apply at ESF. It's people, it's compost.

**Joanie**

And you know what else? It's you understanding that it's the people on the ground that affect the most change.

**Sue**

Oh yeah,

**Joanie**

it's not the people at the top, it's the people doing the work. And so I'm sure you saw the opportunity to really move the needle with a team of 30 people that are actually doing the work.

**Sue**

Yeah. And with my obsession with reduced consumption and reuse, I mean, who touches the things we throw away more than the custodial and grounds teams? No one. They are critical. So I didn't really think that through at the time. But once I got here, I was like, oh my goodness. I have somehow fluttered down to a perfect position.

**Joanie**

Exactly, exactly. That's great. Well, good things happen, right? You put yourself in a position and good things happen to good people. My first experience with trash audits was here at ESF, and I think you were one of the people that was managing that. So I think we use a lot of terms here, and probably all the people at ESF know what we're talking about.

But for people out in the public, what actually were you doing when you were doing trash audits?

**Sue**

Yeah, this is something that students were doing even before I got here. And I was like, this is amazing. So there was a student club once a month who was doing an audit, which I will describe. And then we decided to formalize it as an institution. So we would keep this going after students who graduated, who maybe had different interests coming into the school.

So an audit is basically where you get all of your trash or all of your recycling, and you weigh it unsorted so you weigh your unsorted trash, and then you open up the bags, you empty them out and you sort into three piles what was actually trash, what should have been recycling and what should have been compost. And then you weigh those missed sorted items so you can start to get a percentage and say, okay, 40% of our trash should have actually been recycled or composted, and we break it down to the building level.

So we would oftentimes see, oh, there's a lot of food coming out of Gateway. And it looks like it's leftover food from events. So that tells us we need to add campuswide composting. We need to make sure there's compost bins in the catering space. And everyone is trained and we need to find a way to get this excess food after an event into people's stomachs rather than the compost.

So looking at all of this data really can change how your programs are implemented. And a lot of the reasons we were able to change our programs is because we had this data to fall back on. No one can say, oh, we don't we don't have a food waste problem here. We don't really anymore. But we sure did.

**Joanie**

Right.

**Sue**

And you can't dispute it.

**Joanie**

Like you, I love data and I admire how careful you have been to make sure that all of the decisions are data driven, and it really does help move the needle when you say, okay, this is where we are, here's our baseline. Now here's the goals that we're going to set as a result. And here's the things we're going to implement.

And then you have moved us further and further and further along the spectrum. So I think you were responsible for the sets of three trash cans and even hanging the containers and gateway above them so



people could see what goes where. It's funny because I think people would probably be surprised, but I'll be walking down the hall and I'll see a plastic bottle and I'll text you.

**Sue**

Oh, I like that.

**Joanie**

It's like, "in room 104 there's now a plastic bottle on the table."

**Sue**

Okay.

**Joanie**

Yeah, but the sets of three trash cans and then our trash cans in our office became tiny. The liners disappeared. I mean, all of that. And it is so ingrained here, and it's kind of horrifying when I go to conferences or I go to meetings and I see how much further behind people are. And so I am driven to do what we can at ESF to take that information out into the world.

And I think we have super smart people here doing incredible research. But when it comes to laypeople, I think they need really clear every day direction about what it is they can do in their lives to be helping, and they want to, you know, you and I just talked about Save the Rain. People used to stop me in the grocery store and say, oh, I love that program.

Like, what can I do? And I would say, well, take the downspout off your house and instead of hitting the driveway, have it hit your landscaping, you know, so that that granular level of action items I really want ESF to take advantage of its knowledge. The incredible staff we have here and our brand people will listen.

If it's ESF that's saying, here's the kinds of things you should be doing in your own life. So what would you tell leaders of institutions like ESF who don't have sustainability as one of their core missions? What do you wish they would do?

**Sue**

We talked about waste. That's already because it's my favorite thing to do. We hear so often about green buildings, renewable energy and electric cars and those things are important. They are a climate solution. But we still need more electric cars, more green buildings. And all of this is really expensive. And that might not be accessible to the average person or the average place of work.

And you can look up the data that's only going to cover about 50% of our climate emissions. The other 50% is all related to consumption and the materials that we use. So I would encourage everyone, even at home, do a waste audit, understand what you're purchasing. Are you continually wasting the same things? Like, I was just talking with my husband last night.

We are still always, every time we buy the basil from Wegmans and that little plastic sheet A we're buying plastic, be we waste it like 85% of the time. So I was like, okay, we're going to try to find a used indoor little grow garden. So we do kind of audits of what we're throwing away and for always throwing away carrots.

Maybe we buy fewer carrots even if we really think we want to eat them or not really. So let's change our behavior. So it's kind of just welcoming yourself. Life is busy. Life is fast. It's taking a deliberate beat to slow down, assess where you're at, what you're bringing into your home. Can you decorate with dried goldenrod or dried birch bark?

Those are some of the things we have on our walls. Instead of buying things from Amazon or any other fast place to purchase something, we are really deliberate and what we bring into our house. We have a lot of empty wall space so we can save that for really cool, natural things that we find. So it's welcoming a lifestyle shift and also realizing that you're not going to be perfect, and that one thing that works for you might not work for me.

And there's no shame in that. It's okay. It's just changing the mindset to not buzz through life and just keep doing things the way you've been doing them, but just rethinking your interaction with people, with your community, and with the things that you bring into your home. Something I did over the pandemic as I, I worked with our family and we built a greenhouse, and I did some experimentation with extending the seasons because I was really sick of buying like bagged spinach, bagged kale, lettuce that would go bad in three days.

So I was like, I really want to challenge ourselves to grow it. And then I was like, what do we do in the winter? And then I did some research and I realized, we have our high hoop greenhouse. We have raised beds we can do, like a hoop tunnel on the raised bed to put another layer of plastic.

So it's two layers of plastic. And if we can plant our plants at the right time, I now, right now have full grown kale, bok choy and chard. And it's going to stay there all winter because I have it protected against frost and wind, and it's a little warmer. So all winter, even through February and the Tug Hill plateau,

**Joanie**

Amazing.

**Sue**

We're going to have fresh greens. So it's it's just experimenting.

**Joanie**

Amazing. And you know, I'm really encouraged by how young people are tuned in and not buying things in the first place.

**Sue**

Yeah, is so important.

**Joanie**

It is so important. And the proliferation of thrifting and second hand and here at ESF, the fact that we're going to ask people to bring their gently used Halloween costumes and, and have a and have a switch, like, those are things that people can do in their own lives, you know, with your neighborhood, just get together with some cider and donuts and switch Halloween costumes.

There's a lot we can do to just tamp down the consumption in the first place.

**Sue**

And we have this amazing program, which I know you're a big champion and supporter of. So thank you, our sustainability Ambassadors, where we have peer educators within many of our departments, where they meet with our office. And Rochelle Strssner and or my amazing colleague leads a monthly discussion of the topic at hand. And then they are tasked with going back to share, with their home unit and bring back ideas.

And one of the ideas that an ambassador brought back last year, the same mind behind the Halloween gift swap was can we do gift wrap and bags? So we had like a gift wrap swap as well. So it's fantastic.

**Joanie**

Fantastic, fantastic. I just bought brown cardboard plain boxes, and I just tie a little piece of yarn on them. And that's my wrap.

**Sue**

Yeah, and I've seen people just stamp if you want to do some color.

**Joanie**

That's a good idea. Yeah, it's a good idea. And you can think of all the waste right after the holidays are over, both food waste and packaging. And there's, there's a lot we can do.

**Sue**

Yeah. And it's also finding the courage to ask people not to get you things, which can be really hard because people's hearts are always in the right place. And we've been kind of conditioned as a society to think if you care about someone, you have to get them things. If you go on vacation, you have to bring them back something. If you have a child, you have to shower them with things. So I've I'm very lucky that the people in my life are accepting of me saying, please don't, please ask, is there anything you need? Then it's hard for me to say yes because I don't want someone to spend their money. But if I'm asking people to ask, then I have to meet them halfway and say if we actually need something.

And I'll also say, I am not going to get you a gift, please don't expect it. I will take you somewhere. I will make you dinner. I will do something for you. But I'm not going to get you a gift unless you tell me there's something you need. I'm not going to guess.

**Joanie**

Just for the sake of giving you something to unwrap.

**Sue**

Yeah, like I will ask. I know sometimes the surprise is glorious, but I don't want it to be wasted. So what do you need?

**Joanie**

That's a really good tip. And my niece's and ESF alum and her gifts are always wonderful. And they are things that she's made. She cans food.

**Sue**

That's awesome.

**Joanie**

She shares it. Oh, it's the best. It's the best. Okay, so let's go back then. You did not stay in that role that you came in forever. How did your role change when you were promoted to your current role?

**Sue**

It's a lot of work working in operations as it should be, because the more people you are quote unquote, responsible for, the more work you have to do to make sure that they're well, and that they're being listened to. So I had this whole huge side of my job and that had my heart. But my heart also was in sustainability.

So I was a member of the sustainability team. I'm a really in the weeds, structure oriented person, and we were doing so many good things and we needed some more structure. So I slowly got more and more involved with sustainability, and I found myself having really two jobs and I was working hours that was were not going to be sustainable long term.

Like I was really starting to burn out, to be honest. And this is where you need advocates throughout every level of the organization and the safety to be able to talk about how you're actually feeling. So I talked to my supervisor, Mark, and I said, look, like I love both things that I'm doing, but something has to give.

And I really, really want to be doing sustainability full time. I still need to be working closely with these people I care for and frankly, I need. But for me to stay at ESF and for me to be me, because my philosophy is I don't want to take on more than what I can do. Well, yeah, I don't want to disappoint people.

I have a certain standard for a work product. I don't want to undercut that. So luckily Mark and the institution listened. And I think that's that's pretty rare. And a lot of places and it took some time, but I believed it would happen and it did happen. And now I still have a really nice relationship with the Ops staff.

And I'm leading sustainability. And I hate to say I'm leading cause it's really the whole college working together. And Rochelle is right there by my side. And it's just I feel really grateful that we were able to find a path for me to stay at a place where I love so, so much.

**Joanie**

And I hope people listening know that Mark is great, right? He he is a very, empathetic leader. But given some of the financial issues that we have at ESF, that we have a plan to correct, things don't happen instantly.

**Sue**

No, it took a long time.

**Joanie**

And we have some fabulous staff here. Fabulous. And we want to keep them. And we say we will work to make this better. But, you are a perfect example for us to hold up to, say, see if you're just patient. You can land in what gives you that balance that you need.

Now in that role, you ushered the college through its first sustainability master plan.

So how I mean, that was the most collaborative exercise I've seen. And it was fun. And as you said, people showed up because you made it a really fun atmosphere. You listened to people, the pictures of the sticky notes all over the Gateway culminated in this really well organized plan that if we succeed in implementing this plan, will be among the best institutions in the world.

So how did that all come about?

**Sue**

Yeah, well, something we really realized we needed. So we, like hundreds of other schools, participate in the AASHE stars reporting process. And that's a voluntary self-reporting process where you kind of go through the wringer. You have to give real data and real proof that you're doing sustainable.

**Joanie**

No Greenwashing.

**Sue**

No. And academics, research engagement, DEIA, community engagement operations. There's just this whole really robust suite of activities. And we for so long use that as our guiding light. And we've done really, really well in it. And one of the things and that ranking was what's kind of your guiding light for sustainability like beyond stars, like do you have a formalized plan?

And we we really didn't. So we didn't have to do this. But we all thought as a team like we've really we need to.

**Joanie**

I think it's really healthy for the institution. You would think I mean, I can understand why people thought maybe we don't need it because everyone is tuned in. But it's such a healthy exercise to go through and stop and talk about what our goals are and what our priorities are.

**Sue**

Yeah, and it was really refreshing. So my colleague Delaney Demro, who now is at the Center for Sustainable Materials Management, housed at ESF, really led the bulk of this planning process. She, like normally you hire a consultant to do this work. Delaney interviewed over 85 people throughout the course of an academic year and didn't just say, what do you want in this plan?

It was, what are you planning on doing? So we can understand what your goals are X, Y, Z department and where does it make sense for us to fold in sustainability? Where does it not make sense? What would be a bad thing for you? What would be stressful? So we started with those conversations and then we looked at industry standards like the AASHE Stars framework, our New York State regulations, and we started making a draft of a plan, which was then shared with the people that Delaney interviewed.

And with you and some members of the leadership team for feedback. And then after that, we brought it to our Sustainability Action Plan social, which is that fun event you mentioned. And we knew that it's hard to get people to come to events, especially for a document with like 245 actions. And it was a lot.

**Joanie**

So you made it a party.

**Sue**

We made it a party. So we had a few hours where people could drop and come and go as they pleased. We had the action plan printed off on big whiteboards with sticky notes so people could help prioritize. And we also made space for. Does this concern you? We genuinely want to know. We also had food and alumni sponsored a happy hour at the end, which was really cool and really special.

And so we have an amazing student employee, Eden, who then went through and digitized all of that feedback and helped us pass through it and make sense. Then we did our final draft of the document, and we handed a spreadsheet and a word document of text to our amazing communications and marketing team, and they made something so beautiful.

**Joanie**

And they organized it to connect those goals back to whether it was stars, whether it was executive orders from the government. And so people could see where some of these things fell in. And Eden is sort of cut

from the same cloth as you. And he's our president of MOSA and just accomplishes so much in a day he's incredible.

**Sue**

It's rather unfair. But sometimes I feel like I rely on him almost as a staff member, and I'm like, he is a student, but he brings that level of just.

**Joanie**

Responsibility, and if he says he's going to do it, he does it, and he has a way he can bring to me concerns from students that aren't like judgmental or indictments. But he will have difficult conversations. No problem. He advocates on behalf of students really well.

**Sue**

And it's funny you said that phrase because that was one of the most popular items voted by our campus, and the Sustainability Action plan was creating a space and teaching people how to have these difficult conversations, because college campuses at their heart are supposed to be that space. But it is hard to have difficult conversations. We don't have the skill set.

It feels scary. So I think it's really important that you welcome that and that we build that as a culture on this campus.

**Joanie**

I love that, and part of that, you know, you were talking about concerns with the plan and you might remember early on, like you, I don't want to say I'm going to do something if I'm not going to do it. And AASHE has, if you want 100% of the points, they have some pretty clear metrics. And committing to staffing in the sustainability office was just one of the examples that I pointed out that I said, if we're going to write down on paper that that's what we're going to do.

And I know that given our situation right now, we can't do that. That was the kind of conversation that was going on that culminated in this plan. And then we rolled the plan out. The Board of Trustees put a stamp of approval on it after you presented to them earlier in this semester. And then what's the next steps then, now that we have this plan.

**Sue**

Next step, we already got an email from a student saying, this plan is great, but there is something that I would like to suggest. Can it be added? And it's about bird strikes. How do we really make sure that our campus buildings aren't contributing to bird mortality when there is new construction or a major renovation? So next steps are we're going to meet with the student and figure out how do we incorporate this.

And we're going to get right to implementation. The beauty of it is because a big chunk of our plan is related to the AASHE Stars framework. We will be reporting on that in early 2026. So as we are working through our star's process, we're also working through our SAP implementation process. So every year we will issue an annual update report where for every 245 actions we say has the started has this not and just a few sentences on where we're at, why things haven't moved forward.

**Joanie**

Some real accountability. You will be able to see what we're doing.

**Sue**

Exactly. And we're going to be adding at the annual report time new actions like the bird strike suggestions. So every year will add, will change, will tweak and sometimes we'll get things wrong. Sometimes we'll be overly ambitious or under ambitious. And that's okay. That's the point. We are here as a college to make mistakes. And like you said, to teach some of the external world it's okay to make mistakes, but be we made these mistakes and these are the ways that you can learn from us.

**Joanie**

You know, it's a coincidence, but I was at the county when we built the amphitheater on the lake, and the person that reached out to me about birds was an ESF alum, Frank Moses, who at that time led the Audubon, the local chapter of the Audubon Society. He has now moved on to the director of the Skaneateles Lake Association, I believe.

But he's been an active alum here at ESF, and they brought the issue to us. And then also what the possible solutions are for.

**Sue**

Bird student did this as well.

**Joanie**

Okay, okay. Isn't that amazing. And there's a lot of intersections when you talk about things that were made better environmentally. There's so many intersections with ESF. You guys pop up everywhere. It's great.

**Sue**

And it also seems like sustainability is so wide ranging. And it's implementation is to like it's really easy to have a really nice plan or a nice policy and be like, someone else will implement it. But we are the implementers and there is no magic wand. It is a messy, it is hard. I feel like I spent a lot of my job being like a pleasantly persistent pest.

I was like, people expect you to go away.



**Joanie**

You should write a children's book, *The Pleasantly Persistent Pest*.

**Sue**

Maybe I will.

**Joanie**

All right. Sue let's demonstrate these conversations that we're hoping everybody will be having. If you could snap your fingers and become the president of ESF. Like what is it that you wish I would be doing to further the goals that we have here at the college?

**Sue**

That is a really good question.

**Joanie**

I'll give you a second to think and just ask you, like, what do you hope our community does next? Like you're leading from the front when you're already leading the institution in the SUNY system that's furthest ahead. You don't rest on your laurels. You keep pulling everybody forward. What do you hope our community does next? Like you're leading from the front when you're already leading the institution in the SUNY system that's furthest ahead. You don't rest on your laurels. You keep pulling everybody forward. What are you hoping that the community will do now? Should SUNY campuses save all their time and effort and take your draft and start from there for the sustainability action plan?

**Sue**

No, I think it's really contextual, and our plan has a lot of notes to what our campus is. So, I think there was a lot of trust put into building the SAP process that I hope maintains. So, we need to not break that trust. We need to actually follow up. And when it comes time to implement, we have to reach out to departments.

We need those collaborators, but we need them to respond. And we also need them to feel comfortable saying, I really want to do this, but I don't have capacity, or we can do this, but it's going to look a little bit different. So, we just need to all be very honest about what is possible. And then when we have events to engage, folks come to events and something Rochelle does so well as she goes to other departments events because she thinks it's important, but she wants to support the people putting them on.

It is hard. Like you can feel like you never have time to go to an event or to network with people because you always have emails, you always have projects. But I want us to really realize supporting each other as part of our work, going to each other's events. That is part of the job.

**Joanie**

Learning from each other. I completely agree.

**Sue**

And that goes back maybe to your question, like the college leadership, we want to see you all. We all are so busy. We know that we respect that. But like, it adds a different kick of like, if you come to this event, you're really going to get what we're trying to get across. And when we have our Quality of Work Life Committee events, which thank you for helping us reactivate our committee that's really designed to bring more fun and some joy to campus.

Like, we want to see you all there too. You're part of our campus. We, I have a relationship with you where I feel comfortable talking to you. If I had a problem, I would feel more comfortable talking to you about it. Because we know each other as people, like we've had the opportunity to interact and meetings, and maybe not everyone feels that way with the college leadership. So I think.

**Joanie**

That as such. Well said. That is such a good reminder because we do work better when we have that relationship. And I subscribe to the same philosophy of honesty, transparency. You know, I've had to tell people some really difficult things here, but everybody comes along when you explain it. If you're on the right side and you have good reasons behind what you're saying and you're telling people everything that you know on a topic, it really brings that collaboration and people looking for solutions together and not so much of the wall building us in them.

So I think that's really good advice for me and for the rest of the executive team. And I'm going to bring that back to our cabinet and just remind people that we can't be too busy to do what's most important. Yeah.

**Sue**

Yeah. And also just really the openness to hearing difficult things like it goes back to the space for difficult conversations. We all need to work on that. It kind of runs counter because like, anyone's going to go into defense mode. That's part of I feel like our biology, like we're here to protect ourselves, our interests, our people.

But really working beyond. I think counterpoint is really, really important. And I've learned a lot, and sometimes it's hard and I prickle. If I really believe something should be done a certain way, I can be kind of robotic. And I've received that feedback from people like, Sue you don't just have to jump right into the agenda of a meeting.

It's okay to chit chat, it's okay to have some fun. And like, that was really hard. I was like, no, I don't have time. I have so much work. But then I was like, no, I will get more work done if the people I work with are more comfortable with me, and I also feel happier. So I'm going to work harder when I'm happier.

So I've had to make some tough changes to not be little Sue-bot.

**Joanie**

It's very funny because you oftentimes say it out loud, you're like, I know how I'm being. You are self-aware.

**Sue**

I've really had to work on it. So, you know, it keeps coming up.

**Joanie**

You know, if I had any problem with it, you would know. And that's the thing that I would tell people is, you know, people don't have to guess whether I like them or whether I'm supportive of them. Like, I kind of wear my heart on my sleeve.

**Sue**

So easier that way.

**Joanie**

You have done incredible work here at ESF and keep it up and thank you for stopping in your busy day. You know, so I can have an opportunity to introduce you to people on a deeper level on the campus. That's what we're trying to do with these podcasts, is furthering that, getting to know each other. And so keep up the good work. Thank you and I will see you by the trash bins. Yes.

**Sue**

Yes, I so appreciate the opportunity. Thank you.