

## Teen is 'solving problems, one stitch at a time'

By Kristine Coulter

Gabriella Rado is a teen and the founder of the nonprofit Sew Kind. It was during 2020, when the 16-year-old student, at John F. Preparatory School in Westchester County, began sewing masks for healthcare workers, frontline workers, seniors and the medically compromised as the COVID-19 pandemic was raging across the world. During that time, the Town of Beekman resident made nearly a thousand masks to donate and give away.

Gabriella explained that her mother, Jeanine Agnolet-Rado, suggested "I sew for charity and make it official, so I created Sew Kind this past fall."

Gabriella stated, "I love the name Sew Kind, and I think it's pretty clear to people that our mission is to show kindness by sewing items that not only bring people joy and let them know we care but hopefully by making their lives a little bit easier with a clever design." The nonprofit's tagline is: "Solving Problems, One Stitch at a Time."

Agnolet-Rado said, "Gabriella has always helped people—hemming pants for an elderly neighbor or mending something for someone who couldn't afford to replace a piece of clothing—but she always refused to accept money. My daughter is very kind, which is how we came up with the name."

As the need for masks diminished, Gabriella decided to concentrate on sewing items that would make people happy. That is how Sew Kind was formed.

Sew Kind had donated fleece blankets to patients undergoing chemotherapy at Hudson Valley Cancer Center last week, said Agnolet-Rado. According to Gabriella and her mother, infusion centers are typically kept cool, and the chemotherapy that patients receive is

colder than their body temperature, so they get chilly. Cozy blankets were with a ribbon attached. This way each patient can tie them up easily and bring them back for return visits.

Gabriella said, "People are so thrilled when you give them something you've sewn with all your heart...it's really special to them, and it makes me feel great as well."

Sew Kind has another mission — to teach.

"Sewing is really a lost art, and many people think that young people of our generation have no interest, but I don't believe that's true. I think many children would love to learn to sew but don't have the opportunity. They either don't have someone in their family to teach them or have the money to take lessons," Gabriella stated.

Gabriella will be holding sewing classes. "I am looking forward to beginning teaching next month at the Boys and Girls Club in Newburgh. Lessons will be weekly on Saturdays," she explained.

The teen, who will be applying to colleges next fall, has an interest in pursuing a career in possibly engineering and law.

"I never realized how much engineering goes into sewing. When people think of engineering, they tend to think of bridges and roadways, high-end cars and smartphones, but the reality is that sewing requires a similar thought process. You have to figure out how to solve a problem, come up with a design and a concept, and then build it. The only difference is you're dealing with fabric. Learning how to sew could really spark an interest in engineering for many children—as it did for me. Girls, in particular, are typically not groomed to think in this way," said Gabriella.

"Kindness is contagious as they say,



Gabriella Rado presents fleece blankets, that she sewed herself, to a chemotherapy patient at Hudson Valley Cancer Center, courtesy of her non-profit, Sew Kind.

—Courtesy photo

and it would be wonderful if, someday, Sew Kind could spread to other communities... but there's only one Gabriella, so she'll need to recruit other sewers to join her," said Agnolet-Rado.

Sew Kind is looking to recruit veteran, experienced sewers to join the effort and step in to host classes on occasion. Sew

Kind accepts monetary donations as well as donations of materials and "like new" machines.

Anyone interested in learning more about Sew Kind, about how to help or donate, can visit [SewKind.org](https://SewKind.org). One may follow Sew Kind on Instagram at [SewKindNY](https://www.instagram.com/SewKindNY).

## Climate action program kicks off in nine municipalities

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because there's so much out there, just looking at it is overwhelming."

"It was a chance for us all to be in the same room together," said Village of Rhinebeck Trustee Vanessa Bertozzi. "The program had been postponed by COVID for a couple of years now. For me it was great, because I was able to get our mayor [Gary Bassett] to come, our treasurer [Karen McLaughlin] and our superintendent of public works [Kyle Eighmy]. It shows we take it very seriously, and shows the [village] team why we're doing it and why it's important."

In addition, Michael Forlenza, who serves on the village's Climate Smart Task Force, was inspired to volunteer for the program.

During the 16-month program, the participants will examine municipal processes, infrastructure and ecosystems; plan ambitious but realistic targets and actions; make data-driven decisions; identify community needs, including those of vulnerable populations; and engage with residents and officials alike, to address the highest priority community issues.

As a starting point, a baseline inventory will be taken of each municipality's greenhouse gas sources and emission levels.

"This program is really focused on the process of municipal greenhouse gas emissions management, creating a target emissions reduction goal and charting a course to reach that goal," Lambert said.

Bertozzi said, "We'll be gathering data from our Central Hudson bills, gas mileage, fuel oil that goes to heat municipal buildings [and more]. The information will be input to a software tool called ClearPath, developed by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), and will be utilized to forecast models for lowering greenhouse gas emissions. This data will be presented to the local boards and residents."

Castillo said the greenhouse gas inventory will be powerful because the municipalities will be able to determine their "energy hogs" and develop a plan to address them.

"It will allow them to prioritize the buildings, the projects [that should take precedence], and many of these projects end up saving municipalities money," she said.

"That's where it gets kind of interesting,"

said Bertozzi, "when you start looking at those visualizations and create a plan on how you're going to achieve your goals."

Lambert noted that "cross collaboration is part of the goal of the program; discussion among cohort participants, comparing their greenhouse gas emissions by sector, will enable them to share learnings, ideas, and best practices."

HVRC will oversee the process and provide support to the participants as needed, along with partner organization ICLEI, Local Governments for Sustainability, a global network of more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable development. The CAPI cohort will meet with Lambert and Castillo 11 more times over the next 15 months; in addition, the municipalities will hold their own meetings, brainstorm solutions, seek input from their boards and the public and, ultimately, create their individual Government Operations Climate Action Plans.

It's ambitious, to say the least, but individuals like Bertozzi have the commitment to follow through. Her personal story highlights the need for action.

"I had been living in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and had a new baby; I was a first-time Mom. Hurricane Sandy hit, we had to evacuate, and that was really terrifying," she said. "I had a moment [where I realized] this is not a fluke, it's the new normal. Once the veils are lifted, you can't un-see what's happening."

When Bertozzi and her family moved to Rhinebeck a few years later, she wanted to be involved in her local community and "really make a difference." She began volunteering on climate-change programs, and then Mayor Gary Bassett encouraged her to run for office, and she was elected as trustee. As the Village's environmental specialist, Bertozzi is the Climate Smart Communities Task Force Coordinator.

"The good news is... you can not only do better for the environment, but it's also a cost savings," Bertozzi said. There will be some up-front costs involved, she said, but those will pay off in the long run. "The other good news is that the federal and state government are earmarking a lot of funding to make this transition."

Castillo said this work model has the potential for "future opportunities

for collaboration."

"[The participants will be] able to see eye-to-eye and be able to learn from each other," she said. "Even a county will invariably have some similarities with a village when you look at energy use data."

Lambert added that there may be "future opportunities for grants and other funding mechanisms based on the work completed. We're constantly thinking about bringing grant opportunities to our members."

Castillo said "CAPI 1.0" was launched in 2017-2018. That NYSEDA-funded pilot program was mostly comprised of Ulster County municipalities along with one from Putnam and one from Dutchess, and focused solely on the greenhouse gas inventory. This led to the DEC-funded grant for Dutchess CAPI from the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Grant Program. The CSC program is aimed at greenhouse gas reductions and savings increases through specific Pledge Element Actions. Communities that complete enough actions can then become

CSC-certified and qualify for potential DEC funding.

"We were finding that a lot of municipalities wanted to [become certified]," Castillo said.

To learn more about CAPI, CSC and other initiatives, visit <https://hudsonvalleyregionalcouncil.org/>.

"We're very excited that CAPI is under way," said Castillo. "The Mid Hudson, as you know, is a hotbed of sustainability, and this work is really valuable." It prompts residents to take notice that their local governments are "maintaining their own house, and it sets a really positive precedent and gets the community to consider their own [energy-saving efforts]."

"The leadership from these municipalities is exciting to see," Lambert said, adding that it "underscores the momentum" in the Hudson Valley for taking action on climate change. "These folks are embarking on some challenging but really important work. I'm truly inspired by them."

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