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No conflict

An organization at Rutgers Business School is out to show that conservation goals do not have to come at the expense of business growth

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Gary Cohen, a 35-year veteran of medical technology company Becton Dickinson & Co., founded the Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation to promote the idea that sustainability does not conflict with economic growth.

“Corporate social innovation integrates a company’s full range of capabilities and assets within innovative business models to achieve positive societal impact while advancing the success and sustainability of society,” Cohen said. “You will find yourself with a purpose-driven life.”

Jeana Wirtenberg, the institute’s associate director, explained at a sustainability conference held March 1 at Rutgers Business School in Newark that the goal is to help the whole world win. The sustainable development goals are about creating a better future for everyone on the planet.

“Unlike the goals that preceded them, those were focused on developing countries,” Cohen said. “There are challenges. These problems are too big for any one sector of society to solve on its own. Any company in any industry can contribute to the global development goals.”

“In order not to leave anyone behind, we want to achieve them by the year 2030,” Wirtenberg said. “Today we are focusing on fostering global development goals through community development in Newark. You are the pioneers locally and internationally. This is all about collaboration across sectors.”

“This is a preview of what the Rutgers Institute is going to do,” Cohen said. “Human rights work is not at odds with businesses.”

‘A vast problem’

Rutgers University students Katie Parrish and Krishna Gotur are part of the Rutgers Sustainability Coalition and helped organize the sustainability conference. Parrish is studying microbiology in New Brunswick and has been helping to create a similar conference on that campus.

“My mantra for the past two years has always been sustainability,” Gotur said. “When it comes to building sustainable solutions, it is about understanding the problem, the people behind the problem, the community you are implementing it in, and the resources available. It requires a holistic top-down view. Sustainability is a vast problem that requires people from a variety of disciplines.”

Sustainability can co-exist with business, Gotur said.

“Business is a vital part of our society today,” Gotur explained. “Much of our society runs around financial businesses. The markets are how resources get moved around. It is important for sustainability to enter the discourse of business.”

Nathaly Agosto-Filion is the chief sustainability officer for the city of Newark. She is tasked with advancing the sustainability agenda.

“A lot of the ideas that are going to play themselves out will have to align with what the city is doing,” Agosto-Filion said.

Her goals for 2020 include making Newark cleaner and better prepared to face climate change, ending a legacy of



Tobias Fox, founder and director of Newark Science and Sustainability Inc., worked in book publishing until October 2011 when the Occupy Wall Street movement began in New York City. - FRED STUCKER

contaminated industrial sites known as brownfields and reducing stormwater run-off.

“Newark is an urban heat island,” Agosto-Filion said. “All our work is founded on improving the quality of life for Newarkers. ... A lot of kids spend more time indoors than outdoors. Indoor air quality is important.”

Tobias Fox said he worked in book publishing until October 2011 when the Occupy Wall Street movement began in New York. He then founded Newark Science and Sustainability Inc., a nonprofit organization that aims to increase awareness of environmental, ecological and wellness issues. “The word sustainability is often defined as the development of social systems to exist within the capacity of earth,” Fox said. “Most food grown in Newark is unfortunately wasted.”

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates more food is brought to landfills than any other type of trash, Fox said. Yet more than 42 million Americans live in food insecure households.

“There are a wide range of other organizations that are being presented today,” Fox said. “Get involved.”

Walking the walk

Jens Molbak founded WinWin, a nonprofit funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. WinWin uses a data-driven approach to align the resources available in the private, social, and public sectors to generate better societal and financial outcomes for everyone.

“We all contribute to all the sectors,” said Molbak, who also founded CoinStar. “Our philosophy is we need the best resources from all three sectors: nonprofit, government, and private sectors.”

“With all the problems out there, funding is a problem,” Molbak said.

Rutgers student Joyce Jones, who is earning an MBA with a concentration in leadership and strategy, said she has been a dedicated consumer of sustain-



Gary Cohen, founder of the Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation and an executive vice president at medical technology company Becton Dickinson, discusses sustainability at Rutgers University in Newark. - FRED STUCKER

able products. She patronizes businesses that align their strategies toward sustainable development goals.

“I am proud to say now my participation toward achieving a better and healthier environment will include teaching local business owners how they can also become a business that supports the [sustainable development] goals,” Jones said via email. “As an MBA student at Rutgers Business School, I was introduced to the Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation by the ever-passionate and dedicated Professor Jeana Wirtenberg.”

In February, Jones volunteered to be a part of the Collective Impact for the Global Goals in Newark. She is on one of the 12 teams that will work collaboratively across sectors on a seven-week project within the Newark community to help create a model that will build a more sustainable future for Newark.

“I am excited to be a part of this great initiative and personally thankful to Professor Wirtenberg and Gary Cohen for making this opportunity possible at Rutgers Business School,” Joyce said.

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