

## 2015 Sustainable Communities Workshop speaker information

### *Keynote speakers*

#### **F. KAID BENFIELD**

Kaid Benfield is one of the nation's foremost authorities on how to make cities, towns, and neighborhoods work better for both people and the environment. Kaid serves as senior counsel for environmental strategies at [PlaceMakers LLC](#), a city and town planning consultancy working across the United States and Canada.

Based in Washington, DC, Kaid is also a senior adviser to the Natural Resources Defense Council, where he served as a program director for over 20 years. And he teaches law, policy, and best practices for sustainable communities at the George Washington University School of Law. Kaid's latest book is *People Habitat: 25 Ways to Think About Greener, Healthier Cities*, distributed by Island Press.

A longtime leader of the smart growth movement, Kaid co-founded LEED for Neighborhood Development, a national process for defining and certifying smart, green land development under the auspices of the US Green Building Council. Kaid is also a founder and board member of Smart Growth America, a nationwide coalition working on revitalizing cities, building better neighborhoods, and stopping the spread of suburban sprawl.

Kaid was named one of "the most influential people in sustainable planning and development" by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, voted one of the "top urban thinkers" on the leading city planning website, Planetizen.com, and named "one of the top 100 city innovators worldwide" by the website Future Cities.

Kaid is a prolific writer whose portfolio spans several books and frequent articles for The Huffington Post, Sustainable Cities, Better Cities & Towns, Atlantic Cities, and NRDC websites.

Blog: [kaidbenfield.com](#)

Twitter: [@Kaid\\_in\\_DC](#)

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#### **JON THAXTON**

Former Sarasota County Commissioner Jon Thaxton joined the [Gulf Coast Community Foundation](#) staff as Director of Community Investment in September 2012 while completing his 12th year serving on the county commission. Jon came on full-time at Gulf Coast when his term ended in November 2012.

In his new role, Jon works with nonprofit organizations, donors, and other community partners to invest Gulf Coast grants and resources in projects that will transform our region and improve public policies. He currently leads Gulf Coast's Feeding Hungry Families initiative, an unprecedented effort to transform our region's charitable hunger-relief system. Jon's knowledge of the Gulf Coast region and the relationships he built as a public servant are tremendous assets to his work.

Before and during his career in elected office, Jon earned great respect for crossing traditional boundaries and listening to all sides of an issue before making a decision. His active involvement in both business and environmental issues ultimately contributed to his first successful campaign for the Sarasota County Commission in 2000 and his reelection in 2004 and 2008.

Jon is recognized throughout Florida as a leading advocate for protecting the natural environment.

He is a fourth-generation Floridian who was born near Osprey and began working at his family's real estate company at 14. He began his environmental advocacy at Venice High School in 1974 as a founding member of the Ecology Club.

Jon is an acknowledged leader in growth management, environmental preservation, water conservation, and transportation planning. His commission appointments included the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Manasota Water Supply Authority, and National Association of Counties Growth and Land Use Committee. Jon has been awarded the 1,000 Friends of Florida State Growth Management Award and was twice named the Nature Conservancy's Grassroots Activist of the Year. In 1996, he was featured in National Geographic for his work in preserving endangered species.

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### *Featured speakers*

**KRISTIAN BLESSINGTON, MPH, MSP**

Kristian is a Community Planner with the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County. Kristian's work is concentrated in the nexus between urban planning and public health. In this capacity he coordinates planning and public health policy development and implementation of strategies relating to land use, the built environment, climate change and community environmental health assessments.

Kristian works with the full spectrum of community stakeholders, including residents, elected officials, non-profits and local government to ensure decision, policy making and implementation in the areas of land use and the built environment consider equity and social justice concerns. This work involves identifying opportunities where public health can be involved in policy and plan development on issues relating to land use, the built environment and transportation. His works utilizes a systems based approach to ensure that community health improvement initiatives take into account the full spectrum of health considerations that need be evaluated.

Kristian graduated Cum Laude from the University of Florida with a Bachelor's in Environmental Science, and Florida State University where he received a Master in Public Health and a Master of Science in Planning.

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**LEE HAYES BYRON**

Lee Hayes Byron is the Sustainability Manager for Sarasota County, overseeing sustainability improvements within government operations and the efforts to create a sustainable community across Sarasota County. Among her responsibilities are promoting energy efficiency to residents and businesses, ensuring sustainability improvements in county facilities and fleet, employee education and legislative review.

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**JOHN A. FREEMAN**

John received his bachelors at Wake Forest University and masters at Louisiana State University. He is completing his Doctorate in Environmental Science at the University of South Florida (USF) and is an Adjunct Professor in Environmental Science & Policy. He is responsible for teaching Environmental Science, Ethics, Law, and Policy courses at the USF Sarasota-Manatee campus.

John was a Financial Advisor at Raymond James and Morgan Stanley Smith Barney for over 11 years. Prior to his current USF position and a decade in financial planning, he held various positions with IBM and Archer Daniels Midland Company while working both domestically and overseas in South America and Asia-Pacific.

John is active in local and international leadership and community service initiatives. He is a past Board member for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Association and VP of Business Development for the Sarasota Sister Cities Association. John is a 2006 graduate of the Leadership Sarasota County program and a recent 2014 graduate of the Manatee County Leadership program. He recently served as a Lakewood Ranch Community Fund Grants Committee member and participates on the ShelterBox USA Finance Committee. John is a ShelterBox Response Team member, having responded to a flooding disaster in Niger, Africa, a humanitarian mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and flooding and landslides in Peru, South America. When not working, volunteering and family time, he enjoys travel, reading, fishing, boating, and playing tennis.

John resides in Lakewood Ranch, Florida, with his wife, Dr. Jennifer L. Swanson MD, a local Ob/Gyn. They have two young children in Pre-School and Kindergarten.

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**DON HALL**

Don Hall is the founder and Executive Director of Transition Sarasota. Previously, he worked for two years as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for Transition Colorado (now, the Local Food Shift Group), the first official Transition Initiative in North America and a statewide hub. Don holds a Master's in Environmental Leadership from Naropa University and is a certified Permaculture Designer and US Transition Trainer. In 2012, Don was recognized as one of the "10 People Behind Local Food" by Cooper Levey-Baker in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, and, in 2015, he was profiled as part of SRQ Magazine's "SRQ Millennial 6."

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**DR. PIERCE JONES**

Dr. Pierce Jones graduated from UF in 1980 with a PhD in Mechanical Engineering. He is a Professor at the University of Florida where he directs the Program for Resource Efficient Communities, an interdisciplinary group that promotes the adoption of "best design, construction and management practices" in master planned developments.

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#### **COOPER LEVEY-BAKER**

Cooper Levey-Baker has covered food, politics, civic issues, the arts, and music in Southwest Florida for a decade, and his writing has appeared in nearly every local publication. His work has won an honorable mention from the Julia Child Foundation and a Bronze Award for Best In-Depth Reporting from the Florida Magazine Association, and he was named a finalist for Best Public Service Reporting by the Florida Society of Professional Journalists.

His fiction has appeared in a number of literary journals and earned him a John Ringling Fund Individual Artist Fellowship from the Arts Council of Sarasota County. His rendition of "Drunk in Love" has left karaoke audiences throughout the region bewildered.

Follow him on Twitter: [@LeveyBaker](https://twitter.com/LeveyBaker).

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#### **SUSAN NILON**

Susan Nilon is president of Florida Talk Radio and owner of [WSRQ radio](#) (98.9FM, 106.9FM and 1220AM) in Sarasota. She can be heard on the air weekdays with her show, "The Nilon Report," and followed online at [TheNilonReport.com](http://TheNilonReport.com) or with her column, The Report, in [SRQ Daily](#).

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#### **DEBI OSBORNE**

Debi Osborne is the Director of Land Protection for Conservation Foundation of the Gulf Coast, a regional land conservation organization working with communities to protect priority lands along the Gulf Coast's bays, beaches, barrier islands and rivers. Debi joined the organization in September 2013 after serving eight years as Director for Real Estate for the National Audubon Society. In this position, Debi oversaw the acquisition of new property interests and management of Audubon's conservation real estate portfolio, including Audubon Centers, sanctuaries and other properties nationwide totaling more than 150,000 acres in thirty states.

Prior to joining Audubon in April 2006, Debi worked for the Trust for Public Land for seventeen years in the Chesapeake & Central Appalachian Office. After establishing the new TPL office in 1988, she helped conserve over 60,000 acres throughout the region during her tenure as project manager and Field Office Director.

Debi has a Master's degree in City and Regional Planning from Harvard University and undergraduate degrees in Social Ecology and Urban Geography from the University of California, Irvine. Prior to joining the Trust for Public Land, Debi worked for The Rouse Company performing market and financial feasibility studies for downtown redevelopment projects.

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#### **TIM RUMAGE**

Tim is the Coordinator, Developer and Professor of Environmental Studies at Ringling College of Art and Design where he teaches courses on green building, sustainability, creating ecological cities, applied environmental design and environmental ethics. Working with David Crane, they jointly developed the Green Building Seminar at USF/SACD. Tim is also the Coordinator for Sustainability in Design Education at CUMULUS. CUMULUS is the only global association to serve art and design education and research and currently consists of 198 institutional members from 48 countries.

He is also involved in a variety of interdisciplinary projects in the US and Africa involving habitat restoration and protection, green infrastructure, local food production, and sustainability. Tim's recent work focuses on the economic value of nature and nature's services, and lectures at other colleges and community organizations. He and David Houle are writing a book on environmental consciousness which is scheduled for release in Spring 2015.

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#### **SEAN SELLERS**

Sean Sellers is a co-founder and senior investigator at the Fair Food Standards Council. Launched in 2011, the FFSC advances the human rights of farmworkers, the long-term interests of growers, and the ethical supply chain interests of retail food companies through implementation of the Fair Food Program. The Fair Food Program, which emerged from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' successful Campaign for Fair Food, has been recognized by experts for its unique effectiveness in eliminating forced labor, gender-based violence and other abuses in the workplace. Sean has supported worker-driven human rights initiatives in U.S. agriculture since 2003.

He is a principal author of the Fair Food Program annual report, and his writing has also appeared in *The Nation*, *Huffington Post*, *Race/Ethnicity*, and *The University of Pennsylvania Journal of Law and Social Change*. Sean holds an M.A. from the University of Texas at Austin and has harvested watermelons throughout the Southeast.

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**DR. JENNIFER SHAFER**

Jennifer grew up in Sarasota, where her family has lived, worked and enjoyed the area's natural lands and waters for over five decades. She is an owner and principal of Shafer Consulting, a local environmental consulting firm specializing in communicating science and science-policy issues through technical analysis, outreach and creative design. She currently serves as co-executive director of the Science and Environment Council of Southwest Florida, a consortium of science-based environmental nonprofits. Jennifer is a broadly trained marine ecologist with a B.A. from Wellesley College and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Hawaii Manoa.