

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

### Chris Castro



[Chris Castro](#) is director of Orlando's [Office of Sustainability & Resilience](#), developing policies and programs to advance the city's sustainability, clean energy, and climate action goals.

Chris helped develop and found IDEAS For Us, a United Nations-accredited nonprofit working to incubate and fund innovative projects that advance the U.N. sustainable development goals; Citizen Energy, a clean-energy consulting firm; and Fleet Farming, an urban farming social enterprise redefining local food systems by building organic farms on residential lawns.

Chris currently sits on more than 10 nonprofit and academic boards, including the Florida Solar Energy Center, US Green Building Council of Florida, Project Green Schools, and Goodwill of Central Florida. He has previously held positions with University of Central Florida, Orange County Government, and the U.S. Department of Energy. He has been recognized for his efforts in sustainability and resilience by former Presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, and former Vice President Al Gore.

In 2018, Chris starred in National Geographic's "Paris to Pittsburgh" documentary, a look at climate change. As a thought leader, he has spoken at more than 150 conferences and events, including the United Nations Summits, Smart Cities Week DC, NASA Innovation Expo, Sustainatopia, and TEDx Orlando.

### Syd Kitson



Syd Kitson is chairman and CEO of [Kitson & Partners](#), a Florida-based real estate company specializing in the creation and development of master-planned communities and commercial properties.

Kitson is a graduate of Wake Forest University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics. Kitson had a notable career in the National Football League, playing offensive guard for both the Green Bay Packers and the Dallas Cowboys. Upon his retirement from professional football in 1985, he began his career in real estate and founded Kitson & Partners in 1999.

In 2006, Kitson completed the historic purchase of Babcock Ranch in Southwest Florida, encompassing more than 91,000 acres – an area five times the size of the island of Manhattan. More than 80 percent of the original land purchase – some 73,000 acres within Charlotte and Lee counties – has been preserved by the Florida and Lee County governments, in the largest single land-preservation agreement in the state's history.

Syd lectures at Princeton University, and has served on multiple civic, education and non-profit boards. In addition to serving as vice chair of the Board of Governors for the State University System of Florida, he is also vice chair of the Florida Council of 100 and was elected the 2016-17 chair of the Florida Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

### Josh Tickell



Josh Tickell is an author, film director, speaker, and expert on sustainability and the climate, who captured global attention in 1997 by crossing the United States in his "Veggie Van" powered by French fry oil.

After writing his first book in 1998, Josh embarked on a decade-long world tour, culminating his journey with the release of his first feature film, "FUEL." The global-release film won the Sundance Audience Award for best documentary and landed on the Oscar shortlist. He followed up the movie with the critically acclaimed films "The Big Fix" and "PUMP."

Josh's second book, "Kiss the Ground: How the Food You Eat Can Reverse Climate Change, Heal Your Body & Ultimately Save Our World," details his journey to learn how climate change effects can be reversed by regenerating the world's soils. His most recent work, "The Revolution Generation: How Millennials Can Save America and the World (Before It's Too Late)," provides tools to reshape political power, change the climate conversation, and save Earth's ecosystems.

A featured guest in print and on television, Josh regularly consults on sustainability, energy, trends, and technologies with corporations and governments, including the U.S. Department of Energy, Cuba, Australia, General Motors, and Yum! Brands. Learn more at [joshtickell.com](http://joshtickell.com).

## INVITED SPEAKERS

### Shelia Atkins



Shelia Cassandra Hammond Atkins was born in Manatee County in 1952, but grew up in Newtown. Her family lived in the carriage house on the grounds of the Caples Mansion, where her mother, Delma, was a cook and her father, John, a butler. According to family lore, as told by Mrs. Atkins' mother, she was named by Mrs. Caples.

A paraprofessional aide at Alta Vista Elementary, Shelia attended high school in Sarasota during integration. She has resided in Sarasota for more than six decades, and she and her husband, former Sarasota Mayor Fredd Atkins, are active members of the community. Shelia's oral history interview was provided by New College of Florida Oral History Program.

### Tiffany Bailey



A fifth-generation farmer in Sarasota County, Tiffany Bailey is the president and owner of Bayside Sod Inc., Honeyside Farms, and The Florida Beef Alliance. These operations are responsible for more than 700 acres of turfgrass, organic fruits and vegetables, and all-natural cattle in Sarasota and Manatee counties.

Tiffany has a Bachelor of Science degree in horticultural sciences from the University of Florida. In her daily operations, she strives to connect local businesses with local agriculture as a way to improve sustainable opportunities within the community. Additionally, her farms actively engage in myriad educational events with local residents.

### Tom Barwin



Tom Barwin began work as Sarasota city manager Sept. 1, 2012, following a national search. He is Sarasota's seventh city manager since 1945. Prior to Sarasota, Tom served six years as village manager in Oak Park, Illinois, and eight years as city manager in Ferndale, Michigan.

During Tom's administration in Oak Park, the village was powered by 95 percent renewable energy, which won national acclaim and EPA environmental sustainability awards. As Ferndale city manager, Tom was credited with advancing urban bike lanes and multi-model transit in the Detroit metropolitan area, while leading an economic turnaround that transformed the community to one of Michigan's most vibrant, creative, and diverse communities.

### Liliana Benitez



Liliana (Lili) Benitez is a fourth-year student at New College of Florida, focusing on environmental studies and Spanish. As a vice president of the New College Council of Green Affairs, she works with students, faculty, and staff to organize sustainability initiatives on campus.

Lili holds a special passion for environmental justice, ecology, and bridging the gap between scientific research and land management. For her undergraduate thesis, she employs species distribution models to inform conservation efforts of the endangered Florida bromeliads *Tillandsia fasciculata* and *T. utriculata*.

## INVITED SPEAKERS (cnt'd)

### Sarah Bostick



Sarah Bostick is the sustainable agriculture Extension agent at UF/IFAS Extension Sarasota County. She works with farmers, ranchers, and nursery operators to share information about best management practices and resource conservation practices and programs while helping producers troubleshoot issues as they arise.

A graduate of Colby College in Waterville, Maine, Sarah earned her bachelor's degree in biology and environmental policy. Sarah farmed vegetables and cut flowers for 16 years before moving to Sarasota. She spent 10 of those years starting and managing a food hub, managing education and marketing for a refugee farmer training program, and consulting with food hubs and small-scale farmers to enhance their competitiveness in wholesale markets.

### Sadie Chawkins



Sadie Chawkins discovered her passion for reducing plastic pollution as a 3-year-old on a trip to the beach, when a wave washed away her plastic shovel. The experience left her wondering (and concerned) about the fate of plastics in the ocean. She attended the 2017 Youth Ocean Conservation Summit at age 11, developing a plastic pollution-related service project. A year later, the project blossomed into her organization, STOP (Stop Toxic Ocean Pollution), which aims to educate the community on the impacts that plastics have on the marine ecosystems, while working with local restaurants and businesses to help reduce their plastic footprint.

In her spare time, Sadie likes to spend time with friends and family, visit the beach, and is a competitive dancer.

### Cheri Coryea



Cheri Coryea stepped in as Manatee County administrator in 2019, by unanimous board vote. She has 30 years of experience in administration, including 28 years in Manatee County. She became interim deputy county administrator in 2017, previously holding the position of Neighborhood Services director for 10 years.

Cheri has led the development of several key Manatee County initiatives, including the creation of the Economic Development Incentive program (EDI), health care for the medically needy, Children's Services tax, Manatee Millennial Movement (M3), the formation of the Southwest Tax Increment Financing District, Rubonia Community Center renovations and the Norma Lloyd Park Development. Cheri also authored "Voices," a 10-year plan to end chronic homelessness.

### T.H. Culhane



T.H. Culhane is an associate professor at the Patel College of Global Sustainability at the University of South Florida. He is director of the climate change concentration, and teaches courses in food and climate concentrations.

A co-founding director of the not-for-profit educational corporation Solar CITIES Inc., T.H. helps community stakeholders solve urban ecology and development issues surrounding wastewater, solid waste, food security and decentralized clean energy production. His mission is to empower communities to regain ecological self-sufficiency and economic security through regenerative systems integration, believing that we have all the puzzle pieces to make thriving societies, and just need to unite and put them together.

## INVITED SPEAKERS (cnt'd)

### John and Susan Darovec



John and Susan Darovec lead the Bradenton chapter of the Citizens' Climate Lobby, which aims to build support for national carbon fee-and-dividend legislation, and are active in several climate change and justice groups.

John, a retired marine biologist, conducted research in fish ecology and evolution for the Marine Research Institute of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. While there, he acted as senior author on the "Techniques for Coastal Restoration and Fishery Enhancement in Florida" paper. Also retired, Susan taught at public schools for 37 years, teaching language arts at middle and high schools in Michigan and middle school reading in Bradenton, where she also served as a reading coach.

### Stevie Freeman-Montes



Stevie Freeman-Montes is the sustainability manager for the city of Sarasota, leading efforts to increase process efficiencies and conserve natural resources within city operations, as well as supporting community-wide efforts toward resiliency and sustainable development. Among her current responsibilities are conducting a climate change vulnerability assessment, facilitating energy efficiency upgrades for city facilities, integrating climate adaptation into the comprehensive plan, and collaborating on code improvements related to sustainability.

A former Peace Corps volunteer (on the island of Yap, Micronesia), Stevie holds a bachelor of science degree in zoology and a master's degree in sustainable development.

### Michelle Gallagher



Michelle Gallagher is a senior student at Riverview High School in Sarasota, enrolled in the International Baccalaureate Program. In addition to this advanced study work, her scholastic endeavors include developing a "food forestry" program at Riverview, singing in the school choir, and participating in the Sarasota County Students Environmental Alliance (SCSEA).

Michelle plans to study environmental science as an undergraduate, then attend law school. Ultimately, she envisions a career in environmental policy and lawmaking.

### Walter Gilbert III



No stranger to community engagement and activism, Walter Gilbert III accompanied his mother to Newtown community meetings as a child, witnessing neighbors and family friends articulate their vision for neighborhood improvement.

Walter studied men such as the late Neil Humphrey and the late John Rivers, former Sarasota NAACP presidents, eventually becoming president of the local civil rights group. Under the tutelage of Dr. Edward James II, he participated in a federal lawsuit against the city of Sarasota that changed the way voters elect city commissioners. Walter continues to push for social justice and equality, spearheading the recognition of Dr. John W. Chenault, the first African American physician to receive practicing privileges at Sarasota Memorial Hospital.

## INVITED SPEAKERS (cnt'd)

### Jane Grogg



Jane Grogg has worked for Sarasota County for 18 years, and currently serves as manager of the neighborhood services and long range planning groups. She was integral to the 2003 creation of the Neighborhood Services programs and team. Since January 2018, Jane also has managed the Long Range Planning team, including comprehensive planning, critical area planning, demographics, inter-jurisdictional planning, affordable housing, and special projects.

Jane and her family love the sun, from installing photovoltaic panels and solar water heaters at home to kayaking, swimming, beachcombing, snorkeling, and hiking around the Sunshine State.

### Chuck Henry



Chuck Henry has served with the Florida Department of Health since 2002, becoming the DOH-Sarasota administrator in 2011. He previously served 24 years in the U. S. Navy, including service as a hospital corpsman, and as a commissioned officer in the Medical Service Corps.

Chuck earned a Bachelor of Science degree from Southern Illinois University and a Master of Public Administration from Troy State University. A graduate of the National Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute, Chuck is a member of the Florida Public Health Association, and a member and past-president of the Florida Environmental Health Association. Chuck serves as advisor for Florida's Age Friendly Public Health effort and as advocate for Age Friendly Sarasota, the first to earn the World Health Organization's Age Friendly community designation in Florida.

### Charles Hines



Charles D. Hines, Esq., was elected to the Sarasota County Commission in 2012 and in 2016, and is the current board chair, as well as serving as the 2014 chair. A Florida attorney, Charles has practiced law in Sarasota County since 1991, and previously co-owned United Health Care Services, Inc.

Prior to the Commission, Charles served local government through the Venice ADA advisory committee, Sarasota County's surtax oversight committee, and on Sheriff Tom Knight's advisory committee. He currently serves on the Council of Governments, the West Coast Inland Navigation District, several Florida Association of panels, the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, the Economic Development Corporation, and is chairman of the Tourist Development Council. He and his wife, Susan, have three children and live in Nokomis.

### Sara Kane



As sustainability program coordinator for Sarasota County, Sara Kane oversees sustainability improvements within government operations and the efforts to create a sustainable community across Sarasota County. Among her responsibilities and efforts, Sara promotes energy efficiency to residents and businesses, advances sustainability improvements in county facilities and fleet operations, provides employee and community education services, and collaborates on grant management.

Sara previously worked in the environmental field with Sarasota Bay Estuary Program and Mote Marine Laboratory. She earned a master's degree in global sustainability with a concentration in water from the University of South Florida.

## INVITED SPEAKERS (cnt'd)

### Ella Lewis



Sarasota native Ella Lewis serves as director of advancement for Girls Inc. of Sarasota County, overseeing fund development efforts in support of Girls Inc's mission.

Ella completed her undergraduate education at the University of Florida, and earned a master's degree in public administration from Florida Gulf Coast University. She began her career in Sarasota's non-profit sector, with a background that includes direct program service delivery, program and outcome management, plus fundraising, marketing and other development activities. Her hobbies include watching Florida Gator football, spending time outdoors with her three daughters and husband taking in all that Sarasota has to offer.

### Madison Markham



A first-year student at New College of Florida, Madison Markham's studies concentrate on public policy, eager to pursue a legal career to develop stronger environmental policies. She also works as a gun violence prevention organizer and participates in local mock trial competitions.

Prior to graduating high school, Madison spent two years interning at Mote Marine Laboratory. Her responsibilities included assisting in management of education programs, research efforts (including red tide and its impacts), and caring for jellyfish. She helped organize and run programs for her peers, including beach cleanups, the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit, and Teen Science Cafes, which pairs teenagers with scientists in casual settings.

### Grace Moore



Grace Moore, a New York University junior, studies broadcast journalism and environmental science, with aspirations to become an environmental journalist and filmmaker.

For the past year, Grace has worked on a documentary project called "Life After Carbon," based on a book by John Cleveland and Peter Plastrik. The project documents the global transformation of cities as they become lead actors in the charge to reduce carbon emissions and forge a sustainable and resilient path forward.

### Ryan Moralevitz



Ryan Moralevitz long has been an ocean conservationist, his interest tracing back to time spent reading captions in books that explained the threats to ocean life.

Now 12, Ryan started his "The Fishes Wishes" project eight years ago. Through the project, Ryan raises money and donates it to ocean conservation efforts. In addition, he has organized numerous cleanups, planted mangroves and sea oats, and creates sculptures out of collected beach trash.

## INVITED SPEAKERS (cnt'd)

### Vickie Oldham



Sarasota resident Vickie Oldham is a storyteller and journalist who has produced multiple community-themed documentaries and shorts. Her latest work is a groundbreaking preservation project called "Newtown Alive." Begun as an initiative to trace the 100-year history of the African-American community of Newtown, it allowed residents and guests to view the neighborhood through the lens of its rich history. The project earned an outstanding achievement award from the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, and Sarasota Magazine's annual Unity Award.

Vickie started her career as a reporter at WWSB, Sarasota's ABC television affiliate, after earning a bachelor's degree from the University of Florida and master's degree from Florida State University.

### Diana Robinson



Diana Robinson serves as energy manager in Manatee County's property Management division, having previously worked at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and bringing 10 years' experience as an environmental, safety, and health compliance trainer.

Diana moved to Florida to pursue a degree in alternative and renewable energy management, providing her insight into the importance and relationship between good health, sustainability and resiliency. Diana and her county team have worked on projects that gained platinum certification from the Florida Green Building Coalition and earned honors from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She also serves as Alliance for Innovation chief ambassador, and was named manager of Manatee County's new drone program.

### Sean Russell



Sean Russell empowers young leaders around the world to explore and protect our water planet while creating opportunities to increase youth impacts in the fields of environmental education, science, and conservation.

Sean serves as manager of the EarthEcho Water Challenge at EarthEcho International. This global citizen science program connects young people around the world to their local waterways through water quality monitoring, provides a platform for them to share their data, and equips them with the tools to take action to protect their water resources. He also is the founding director of the Youth Ocean Conservation Summit, a local annual event that equips youth participants with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to address ocean conservation issues in their local communities. Follow him on Twitter: [@seandrussell](https://twitter.com/seandrussell).

### Demetri Sedita



Demetri Sedita, along with his brother, Ethan, is an environmental activist and founder of the Green Gasparilla organization.

Through the organization, the Seditas aim to bring awareness to the dangers caused by the mounds of Gasparilla Pirate Festival parade beads tossed into Tampa Bay waterways each year. Through Green Gasparilla, the Sedita brothers hope to ensure that the festival, a storied tradition in the area, is celebrated in an eco-friendly, sustainable and responsible way with little or no environmental threat. Doing so would help usher the festival into the future while assuring the health of Tampa's water bodies for generations to come.

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### Jon Thaxton



Jon Thaxton creates and implements Gulf Coast Community Foundation's key strategies for transforming our region's nonprofit community and providing leadership on emerging issues. Jon joined Gulf Coast in 2012 as director of community investment while completing his 12th year of service on the Sarasota County Commission, and was promoted to senior vice president in 2015.

Jon is also recognized throughout Florida as a leading advocate for protecting the natural environment. A fifth-generation Floridian, he was raised on a farm near Osprey and began working at his family's real estate company at 14. Jon began his environmental advocacy at Venice High School in 1974 as a founding member of the Ecology Club, and in 1996 he was featured in National Geographic for his efforts to protect endangered species.

### Izzie Uribe



Lakewood Ranch High School senior Izzie Uribe serves as vice president of her school's Marine Conservation Club and as an active member of Peace Presbyterian Church's forming Earth Care Team.

Passionate about environmental issues, Izzie has volunteered with 4Ocean cleaning up beaches, restoring oyster reefs with Tampa Bay Watch, and on a mission in Haiti. She spent July 2019 in Costa Rica's rural mountain communities, working with Green Communities to help local farmers switch from conventional to organic coffee production, construct eco-bricks, and refurbish roads and sidewalks. Her work has inspired Izzie to seek more ways to make lasting differences in all communities.

### Karen Willey



Karen Willey founded Around the Bend Nature Tours in 1999, building it into one of the leading ecotour destinations in the area. She recently sold her interest in the business to pursue other activities and interests.

Karen is a self-described climate change communicator. A flower hunter. A people connector. A tree hugger. And, of course, an educational consultant. Her mission continues to be helping folks learn more about Florida native plants and ecosystems.

EMCEE

Cooper Levey-Baker



Cooper Levey-Baker is an associate editor at Sarasota Magazine and has written about food, politics, civic issues, the arts, and music in southwest Florida for a decade. His work has won an honorable mention from the Julia Child Foundation, 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.

Cooper lives in Sarasota with his wife, Rachel, and two sons, Theo and Felix.

Arlene Sweeting



Arlene Sweeting is director of the Fogartyville Community Media and Arts Center, a non-profit space operated by the Peace Education and Action Center. With her partner David Beaton, Arlene co-founded WSLR 96.5, Sarasota's community radio station, and served as station manager from 2005 into 2014. A former public school teacher, Arlene was a candidate for the Florida State House of Representatives in 2000 and 2002. She has served as chair of the Manatee-Sarasota Sierra Club and conservation chair for the Florida Sierra Club.

A Florida native, Arlene spent her early years in the Bahamas. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a master's degree from James Madison University.

# Sustainable Communities