

I went to my first PERC event at Dickinson in the spring of 2009. I was helping informally with the organization the rest of that year and was hired as executive director in 2010. We started with several meetings formalizing the Executive Committee schedule and responsibilities as well as a plan to move forward.

In the first year we converted PERC from a voluntary organization of higher education institutions to a 501c3 corporation. We added sponsors and a paid directorship. With those changes we were able to do things we couldn't before, like open a bank account and hire a paid director.

A lot has happened since then.

The most visible part of PERC is our events. That includes in-person events like this conference as well as workshops on particular topics. In addition, we hold webinars and partner with member schools and others to promote and participate in their events. You can see all of those past events listed on our website. Yesterday I noted that there are 180 plus past events listed on our website. 180 events in 12 years. Not bad.

A few highlights:

The PA Power Dialog, an event that drew approximately 250 students and faculty to the State Museum in Harrisburg to learn about and discuss renewable energy.

College and Community Connecting on Climate: An event that brought together people from PERC with government representatives from DEP, DCNR & the EPA as well as people from local government encourage and discover collaborations on between local communities and higher education. Our last in-person event prior to today had a similar theme. Held at Bucknell in January of 2020, the Making it Work workshop explore successful sustainability partnerships between local communities and higher education institutions.

And then came COVID.

The pandemic was a setback for everyone, PERC included. This is our first in-person event since the January event in January of 2020—and boy it feels good to be back. But despite the challenge, the Executive Committee quickly adapted and we managed to provide an unprecedented amount of virtual programming, including...

EJ in PA... We served as the host and convenor for EJ in PA, a virtual effort that with multiple partner organizations including DEP, Harrisburg University, PennFuture, the City of Harrisburg and many more to build on existing Environmental Justice work and events, with the focus of supporting ongoing activity through the EJ community following the event.

We also provided a series of webinars on health and sustainability called Partners by Nature. Over five monthly sessions Partners by Nature worked to develop skills and build a network of contacts involving practitioners and researchers from both public health and sustainability.

(Programs)

In addition to events, we have initiated and participated in a number programs and initiatives around sustainability.

One of the first was the Pennsylvania Higher Education Food Recovery Challenge. We initiated this idea in 2013 and partnered with the U.S. EPA and Sodexo to make it happen. Over the years, the Food Recovery Challenge led to 4 national awards from the U.S. EPA. With a national administration change in 2016, the EPA restructured some things and so the last official report we have from the EPA was 2017. At that point, the Food Recovery Challenge had diverted 1,146 tons of food from landfills resulting in a reduction over 920 Metric tonnes of carbon—equivalent to over 100,000 gallons of gasoline not burned. With the added social outcome of over 52,000 recovered meals going to the hungry. I thank Sodexo so much for their leadership in the Challenge over the years.

Campus Sustainability Champions. Since 2013, the Campus Sustainability Champion designation has honored students, faculty, administrators, and staff of Pennsylvania colleges and universities who have made meaningful contributions benefiting social, economic and/or environmental sustainability on their campus, in their community, or in society at large. The most recent class of honorees was announced in April of this year and can be found on our website. I encourage you to nominate people from your campus for next year's honorees.

And we have participated in a number of other Partnerships... with DEP's Heidi Kunka on shaping their local climate action planning cohort that paired college interns with municipalities in the state; and with DCNR's Deputy Secretary

Michael Walsh DCNR on Thinking Outside program, designed to expand the learning landscape by inviting colleges and universities to provide hands-on educational opportunities in Pennsylvania state parks and state forests.

We have also partnered with the Sustainable Energy Fund in multiple ways; most notably providing scholarships for PERC faculty and students to attend the SEF's Energypath conference and participate in hands-on workshops.

Behind the scenes:

Some things happen "behind the scenes" that aren't very visible but do make a difference. I'll mention two: PERC was one of the signatories on a petition led by the Clean Air Council to assert that Pennsylvania has a constitutional duty to limit greenhouse gases. In the hearing, PERC was one of five signatories (out of 61) mentioned by the petitioners. The petition has been connected with setting in motion the Wolf Administration's move to enter RGGI-the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, that was finalized in April of 2022.

The Executive Committee undertook a strategic planning process during the pandemic. I imagine you will see more about that in the coming months.

Speakers

We have been blessed to host nationally known Keynote Speakers like Admiral David Titley, talking about climate change as a security issue
DEP Secretary and former DCNR secretary John Quigley.

Dr. Nancy Harris, Research Director for World Resource Institute's Global Forest Watch

Michael Mann, then a PSU professor, now at Penn, author of a number of books including the Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars –and much more.

Richard Alley, a Penn State professor who studies ice sheets to predict future changes in climate and sea level. Dr. Alley also hosted the PBS TV series on climate called Earth: the Operators' Manual.

These are just some highlights. Together, we've done a lot.

My Gratitude to

Don Brown, founder of PERC, who connected me with PERC originally
Executive Committee tireless

Current president Ken Shultes. Previous presidents: Peter Buck, Shaunna Barnhart, Ben Culbertson, Tom Simpson, Liesel Schwarz, Kathy Schreiber, Neil Leary, Eric Foley and before I arrived Rich Bowden was the president for years. Tim Hawkins and Ben Culbertson, both of Shippensburg and Mike Mumper of LVC have served as Treasurer. Ben is also the current Secretary of this 501c3 corporation.

Sponsors, esp Sodexo- Thanks for their faithful support of PERC and leadership in the Food Recovery Challenge. Also NextEra who has been with us for many years and our newest sponsor Nania.

And thanks to for the support of Member institutions—for both their time and talents and their dues.

As I began to phase into retirement, the Executive Committee hired several Associate Directors, Britani Peterson, Dominic Scicchitano, and most recently, Audree Khahlisah, who is the force behind organizing and running today's event. Thanks to all of them.

I don't intend to disappear. I'm pleased and honored to be recognized as Executive Director Emeritus. I've already been volunteering and doing a paid project here and there. I intend to continue to do so as long as I can be of help. This is a wonderful organization—it has done so much and has the potential to continue to do more. I hope you see it that way. Even more, I hope you will consider lending your time and talents to make it even more of a success. I'm honored to have served—even more honored to have built relationships with so many talented and dedicated people. Thank you so much.