

# OCEAN VIEWS

A Newsletter for Ocean County College Alumni, Our College Family, and the Community  
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## Nature Girl

**Becky Laboy still lives in the same old farmhouse in Bayville** in which she grew up. “Built in 1883, our home is one of the oldest in Berkeley Township,” she noted. “My parents raised me and my sister on a ‘mini farm,’ with horses, goats, chickens, turkeys, cats, and dogs.”

## Lifelong Learner

After graduating from Central Regional High School in 1987, Laboy attended Shippensburg University for theatre, but the school wasn’t for her. “I decided to attend OCC while I figured out where I wanted to focus my education,” she explained. She took a variety of classes, including photography and painting. “I had not been an art student in high school, so the opportunity to take classes I hadn’t had previous experience with excited me,” Laboy stated. She graduated with an AA, then transferred her credits to United States International University in San Diego, CA, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in International Relations and a master’s in Education.

Laboy stayed on the west coast for 10 years. In 2001, she returned to New Jersey — and to OCC. “I began a more than decade-long pursuit to complete numerous undergraduate-level chemistry, biology, botany, and calculus classes that I later transferred to Kean University. I finally earned a BS in Biology this past May 2018,” said Laboy. “I was excited that I could attend classes at the Kean-Ocean building on the OCC campus.”

“As I see the changes that have been made to the campus since I attended as young 20-something college student, I know that opportunities abound for students who enroll at Ocean County College,” she remarked. “The partnerships OCC has forged, in particular with Kean University and with the EPA’s Barnegat Bay Partnership, have expanded the options

# Becky Laboy: Environmental Superhero in Ocean County

Superpowers: Education Outreach Specialist, Ocean County Soil Conservation District, Saving the Planet – with a Side of Birding

for incoming students and strengthened their relationships with the community.”

“I would not have been able to predict this decades ago, but my connection to the College has continued throughout my life,” she added. Seasonally, she even works for OCC’s Continuing and Professional Education Department as an instructor for the Barnegat Bay Volunteer Master Naturalist class.

## Teacher of and for the Environment

Laboy has worked in education for 20-plus years, eventually transitioning into informal education with a focus on the natural world. Currently, she is the Education Outreach Specialist for Ocean County Soil Conservation District, endeavoring to teach the community about the importance of healthy soil for a healthy community. “I emphasize the importance of using native plants, which are adapted to local conditions, do not need chemical fertilizers, nor copious amounts of water, and support birds, butterflies and other beneficial insects,” she explained.

“My goal is to ‘save the planet’!” said Laboy. “To do this, I provide education programs to the public and engage individuals in activities and conversation that inspire stewardship of our local natural resources. I present to audiences of all ages and genres, including school children, teachers, scouts, garden clubs, community organizations, government groups – anyone who is interested in learning about the importance of our natural resources and how best to care for them to maintain a healthy community. I also write grants and implement the grant projects focused on creating healthy landscapes.”

She emphasized, “Nature is intrinsically connected, and each link within the chain must be protected and conserved in order for the ecological system to maintain health and structural integrity. We humans are part of nature and

depend on the health of the planet! It is in our best interest to protect it.”

“My favorite part of my job is watching the transformation take place in people who come to my programs,” said Laboy. “Together we transform our little corner of the world to a better place for people and wildlife.”

## Author

Laboy helped pen *The Kid’s Guide to Exploring Nature*, a publication of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, part of its *BBG Guides for a Greener Planet* series. Her chapters are: “Exploring Spring: Beach – Bird Migration” and “Exploring Summer: Beach – Adaptations.” The book can be found in bookstores or online at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and elsewhere.



## Birder

“Birding is my passion!” Laboy remarked. “We birders can be fanatical about keeping track of bird species we’ve seen. I have my yard list, county list, state lists, and country lists, along with lists for other birding regions. Birding is like a treasure hunt, really. I take walks in the woods, on the beach, around ponds and lakes looking for birds, and when I see one or hear one, and positively identify its species, I mark it down.”

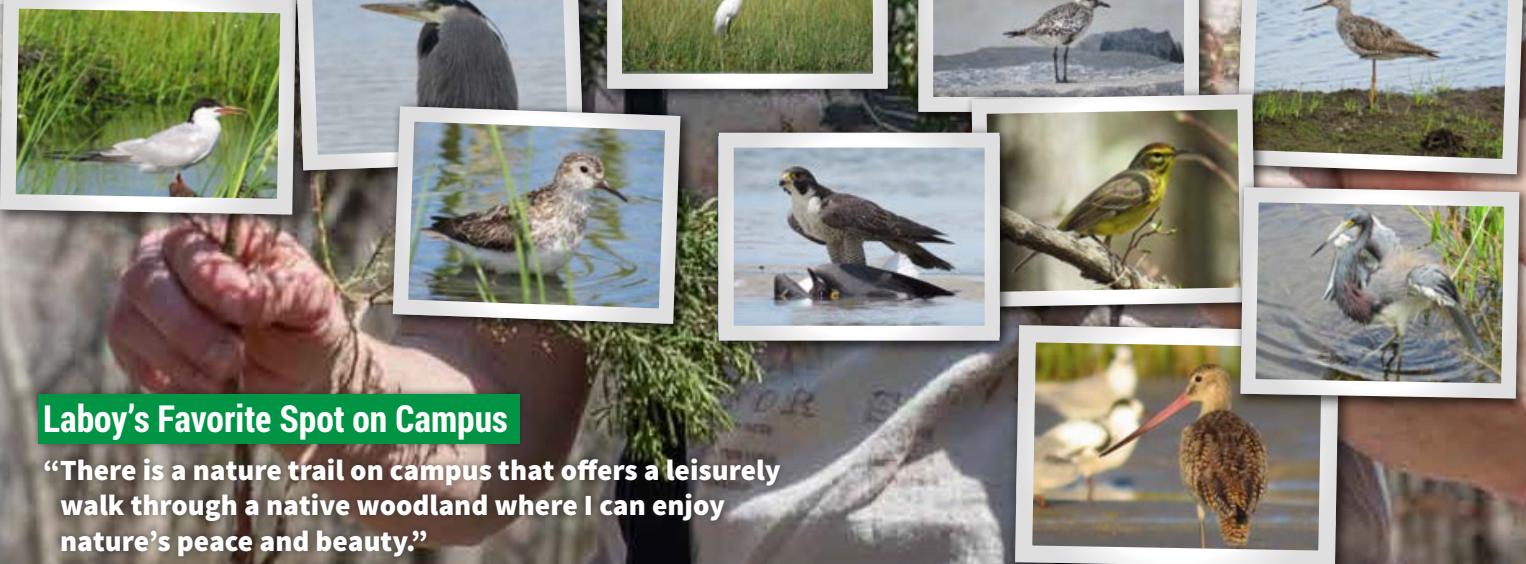
“My sister, who is also a birder, and I are doing an on-going ‘50/50 Quest,’ which means we are trying to find at least 50 birds in all 50 states,” she added. “It will take us a lifetime to accomplish this goal, but it keeps us busy exploring new places and seeing the country.”

## Native Planter

"Plants are amazing!" Laboy exclaimed. "They have evolved perfectly to withstand the pressures of the environment. For example, plants that grow on the barrier beach may have tomentose (hairy) leaves that catch the blowing salt, keeping it away from the delicate blade of the leaf, lest it stings and dries it out – like the salt of a potato chip around one's munching lips."

Laboy, who is one of four co-leaders for the Jersey Shore Chapter of the Native Plant Society of New Jersey, ensures that her home garden is mostly natives or 'Jersey-Friendly' plants, "all part of the natural 'ecosystem' I've created," she stated. "If all of my neighbors 'go native,' together we can re-create biodiversity. Biodiversity ensures resistance, resilience, and stability in the landscape."

– JKH



## Laboy's Favorite Spot on Campus

**"There is a nature trail on campus that offers a leisurely walk through a native woodland where I can enjoy nature's peace and beauty."**

**OCC in three words**

**"Opportunities for everyone!"**