There are two reasons I volunteer at LEAF; being a part of a community of like-minded and service-driven people, and the fulfillment of my purpose in life—promoting positive environmentalism to help mitigate climate change. For me and many others, LEAF is where people can turn their dreams of changing our world to a more sustainable healthier place into reality. So, what exactly is positive environmentalism? It’s the action of living a sustainable life. An environmentalist may be a gardener, an educator, an artist, a filmmaker, or anyone whose heart moves them to influence the world around them in a positive way.

For this January Newsletter, I asked Bruce Cates to share what drove him to start LEAF and why he continues to be engaged. Bruce brings a perspective as the LEAF founder, current LEAF VP, Baby Boomer, environmentalist, activist, artist, gardener, contractor, and parent.
You'll also hear from our new addition to the LEAF family, Lucy, an educated millennial, budding environmentalist, artist, writer, and vegan. She will share why she sought out LEAF and continues to volunteer. As positive environmentalism is embraced by people of all generations, we at LEAF are confident that the work we do will continue on through the ages to come.

All year long, our amazing team of LEAF volunteers plant, nurture, and harvest pounds of produce that are donated to our local food banks. Their motivation? Their desire to provide families in our community with nutritious fresh food. Our friends and neighbors mean the world to us, so we were ecstatic when we surpassed our 2021 goal of donating 6000 pounds of produce. When you donate to LEAF, you can help us make this happen!!!
Today we stand in awe over the dedication that our partners, Tri-City Volunteer Food Bank and Centro De Servicios are making toward eliminating food insecurity in our area. And we'd like to thank all the wonderful people at these organizations who wear their hearts on their sleeves and welcome our partnership. as 2021 comes to a close, together we're moving full steam ahead and are excited to see the continued impact we can make in 2022.

Greetings to our LEAF Members and Friends from the garden shed of your Vice President!

LEAF began after members of the Nakamura family decided to close their Mission Adobe Garden Center and Naka Nursery. I was really sad about the possibility of Fremont losing a nursery so I had the idea to take over the nursery operations as a non-profit. But there were so many obstacles that I soon gave up on that idea. My next thought was to have a meeting with the community to discuss their thoughts on what might become of this nursery and historical park. After passing out tons of fliers, I was pleased to see over 100 people show up to hear my pitch about forming a nonprofit that would oversee the nursery's operations and the historical park.

Following this meeting, about 30 people joined me for a wonderful brainstorming session. During this session, a member of the group, Bill Merrill coined the LEAF acronym which stood for Local Ecology and Agriculture Fremont. As the vision for LEAF became realized, you could feel the excitement from everyone present.
Before long, LEAF became a nonprofit thanks to the legal advice from both my good friend Jenny Kassan (now a Fremont City Council member) and Lorna Jaynes (now my wife.) Together, we wrote the organizational mission and bylaws in about three hours.

Of the many great ideas about what purpose LEAF might serve, it was Dr. Richard Godfrey's suggestion that a community garden would be a natural direction for us to take. With all in agreement, this became our main focus. As we searched for a permanent home for our new organization, we temporarily set up the "LEAF Center" on a vacant lot that I owned in downtown Niles. It was amazing how much energy was put into this active beautiful community garden. It became the source of so many good memories. I even got married there.
Three years later, we took advantage of an opportunity to move LEAF Center to a permanent location in the California Nursery Historical Park (CNHP). Building the garden at this new site while moving from our temporary downtown plot was a lot of hard work. But, with the steady focus and direction of Mia Mora and many others, we created the state-of-the-art community garden that you see today.

Around this same time, a friend of Mia’s, Dr. Chris Stone offered to lease us a plot of land rent free next to her Mission Valley Veterinary Clinic. Excited about this opportunity to expand, LEAF’s board members, Michael and Suzanna Joss came up with the idea of making this new site a permaculture garden. And just like that, LEAF’s C.R. Stone Garden was born. I, along with many others, put a lot of effort into building the infrastructure at Stone Garden.

When I think back on how crazy it was to develop both the LEAF Center and Stone Garden from scratch at the same time, I simply can’t believe we actually did it. And we're about to do it again! Today, as we prepare to move the LEAF Center to a new location in CNHP, we are also starting to develop a third facility, LEAF Urban Farm.

While LEAF has undergone many changes through the years, the presence of dedicated volunteers has been constant. Whether through volunteering hours or monetary donations, I encourage you to get involved and join our efforts to serve the people of our community.
For me personally, LEAF has been one of the most valuable experiences of my life. The dreams I had all those years ago about what LEAF could become have come true. In fact, LEAF is so much more than we envisioned. I sincerely hope that coming generations of volunteers will carry on what we’ve begun, and make LEAF an increasingly vital institution for the City of Fremont for a long time to come.

Happy New Year! Please help save our planet.

Bruce Wayne Cates
LEAF VP/ Founder

WORK PARTY!
Saturdays at LEAF

There's strength in numbers! Come join members of LEAF each Saturday morning from 9am until noon as we tackle various projects that benefit from a group of volunteers. Masks are required! Look for signs upon your arrival at LEAF's CR Stone Garden location at 55 Mowry Ave in Fremont. We hope to see you there!

JANUARY'S FOCUS:
Cultivating the land in preparation for LEAF's Urban Farm
I joined LEAF because I had lots of energy without an outlet. As my awareness of our climate crisis grew, it felt almost unbearable to do nothing about it. That’s when I sent Elaine an email. The very next day, I met up with her at the Stone Garden. Right away, LEAF struck me as a place where individuals are valued, questions are answered, and ideas are encouraged.

A couple times a week, Elaine and I get together along with the other volunteers and care for the garden—harvesting, building hugelkultur mounds and trellises, preparing garden beds with compost and wood chips, and sowing new seeds. What separates our garden from others is how it’s so strengths based. Volunteers are encouraged to use their unique skill sets and we all contribute what we love, be it gardening, artistry, chemistry, or construction. And it all comes together in a thoughtful and beautiful way. A true hive mind.

Organizations like LEAF are especially important nowadays, when the complex problems underlying climate change can seem overwhelming. The media promotes a sense of urgency that, while helpful in raising awareness, can be counterproductive in producing lasting change. LEAF helped me bridge the gap between urgency and action. Being surrounded by passionate, practical people makes it easy to contribute skills toward actionable goals and envision a sustainable future.

I hope others might use the urgency surrounding climate change to imagine what a sustainable future might look like. How would it feel? Which organizations are aligned with your values? What are the small, actionable steps you can take to be involved? The garden at LEAF serves as a reminder that lasting change consists of simple, repeated actions. Sometimes it only takes a quick message to get involved.
Join us on the first Wednesday of each month from 7PM to 8PM PST for our regular online gathering hosted by the Alameda County Master Gardener Volunteers, Guy and Michele along with Rebecca from LEAF. They'll answer your questions and let you in on all that's going on at LEAF. If you're not sure what to plant in your own garden or when to plant it, they've got you covered!

Visit fremontleaf.org/talkindirt to register.