

UD student Tessa Graham listens to a resident's "must haves" and "absolutely nots" for the town.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN BRIDGEVILLE

November 09, 2026 | Written by Katie Peikes | Photos by Michele Walfred

Western Sussex County is home to Bridgeville, a town of about 2,500 people. It's the kind of community where everybody knows everybody. University of Delaware's Ed Lewandowski thinks fondly of his hometown.

"It's an iconic small town," said Lewandowski, who leads coastal communities development for the Delaware Sea Grant (https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/ceoe/delaware-sea-grant/about/). "Neighbors help neighbors. It has a very community-minded atmosphere."

But the small town has some big challenges. Thirty-five miles away from the Atlantic coast, it's affected by heavy rainfall. Its aging drainage system puts it at high risk for flooding. As the population continues to grow, there are economic development challenges tied to its rural roots and a clear socio-economic division between the communities that live there.

"We constantly try to manage the changes that growth inevitably brings while preserving what makes our community unique," said Bethany DeBussy, Bridgeville's town manager. "With that in mind, it often takes innovative or creative solutions to address our challenges."

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October 09, 2026 | Written by Katie Peikes

Kernza, the world's first commercially available perennial grain, has been picking up steam in regenerative agriculture, a conservation approach focused on improving soil and ecosystem health. UD scientists teamed up with scientists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study and compare Kernza's roots with the roots of common crops.

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Hiring a consultant for the work is expensive. So, DeBussy turned to University of Delaware's Coastal Resilience Design Studio (https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/ceoe/delaware-sea-grant/extension/resilient-communities-and-economies/crds/) for help. Co-founded by Lewandowski, the collaboration between Delaware Sea Grant, UD's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative and UD's Landscape Architecture Program, partners with coastal communities to help them beef up their sustainability and resilience, providing communities with longevity.

"One of the reasons we created CRDS is we were hearing from employers that students possessed theoretical classroom knowledge, but they lacked technical competencies and soft people skills to be effective in the workforce," Lewandowski said. "The CRDS bridges that gap."

The CRDS brings in undergraduate and graduate students to work with these towns, understand their challenges and propose solutions for community-identified issues. Zachery Hammaker (https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/departments/plant-and-soil-sciences/faculty-staff/zachery-hammaker/), assistant professor of landscape architecture and director of CRDS, said the work is driven by community engagement. CRDS hears its clients needs and ensures how it can be most useful to them.

"We do the research and analysis across scales, from the watershed down to specific sites," Hammaker said. "While doing analyses we're thinking about the goals and objectives most impactful for town and framing what we find with what we heard from the community."



Students, Zach Hammaker and Eric Bardenhagen stand in front of Bridgeville Town Hall.

This hands-on experience can be hard to get elsewhere, making it a rewarding one for students like Taina Schreiber, a UD Class of 2028 landscape architecture major (https://www.udel.edu/academics/colleges/canr/departments/plant-and-soil-sciences/undergraduate-programs/landscape-architecture/).

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Nov 11, 2026 3pm EST

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources Student Research Symposium (https://events.udel.edu/event/college-of-agriculture-and-natural-resources-

"In the classroom, we've had a lot more hypothetical projects," Schreiber said. "This was very different. We got to visit the town, walk around and talk to the community. It was a great real life experience that would be hard to replicate in the classroom."

In May, Schreiber along with the other five students involved in this CRDS project, as well as CRDS leaders, held a community listening session in town. Residents pushed pins into a three-dimensional map of town to show where they live, where they recreate, and where they've experienced flooding.



Town commissioner Nadine Bravo places pins on a Bridgeville map identifying particular locations of where people live, recreate, and where they've experienced flooding.

Students engaged with the community and heard their challenges. Their main takeaways were preserving the town's identity, culture and character, resolving water and flooding issues, and economic development.

Students worked throughout the summer to put together a community resilience plan for Bridgeville and presented it to the town in August. The plan highlights a need to increase environmental resilience by improving stormwater management, diversifying housing options to guide sustainable population growth, and improving walkability to better connect the three sections of town.

DeBussy said the final product was "invaluable." What was expected to simply be a report and feedback from their discussion earlier this summer, was truly a professional package. UD was able to help the town bridge the gap "from concept to creating plans, projects, and the inevitable change, and we hope it continues to foster pride, trust, and transparency," she said.

"Top-notch service – 10/10, would recommend!" DeBussy said. "The final product was even better than we imagined."

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Nov 17, 2026 12:30pm EST

Tech Talk Tuesday: Tech & Teaching: AI Projects Around Campus (https://events.udel.edu/event/tech-talk-tuesday-tech-teaching-ai-projects-around-campus?utm_campaign=widget&utm_medium=widget&utm_source=University+of+Delaware)

Nov 18, 2026 10:30am EST

APEC Seminar Series (https://events.udel.edu/event/apec-seminar-series-1682?utm_campaign=widget&utm_medium=widget&utm_source=University+of+Delaware)

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