

HOLYOKE SUCCESS STORY

HOLYOKE, MASSACHUSETTS NEIGHBORS RETIRE AND REDEVELOP THE MT. TOM COAL PLANT

MEET CARLOS AND ROSA



Carlos and Rosa Rodriguez, members of community group, Neighbor to Neighbor, moved to Holyoke, Massachusetts years ago from Puerto Rico. Carlos works in a restaurant in the city and Rosa is stays civically active, serving on the board of her housing development.

They're proud of Holyoke. It may be one of the state's poorest cities, but it also has a really great history as the world's largest paper producer in the early 20th century. Until recently, the city was home to one of the state's last coal-fired power plants. Pioneer Valley has some of the worst air quality in the state. Rosa has asthma and so Carlos would take her to the emergency room half a dozen times a year.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CAUSES OF ASTHMA ATTACKS? POLLUTION FROM THE MT. TOM COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT. IN FIVE YEARS THE COAL PLANT HAD RACKED UP 2,500 AIR POLLUTION VIOLATIONS.

Together with Community Action Works and local organization Neighbor to Neighbor, Carlos and Rosa founded ¡Action for a Healthy Holyoke! with a mission of making Holyoke more healthy and economically vibrant. Retiring the coal plant, redeveloping the site and retraining the workers was the first step. With the coal plant pollution gone, it gives the city an opportunity to draw better, greener businesses into town.

▶ From Coal to Sol: Transforming a Coal-Fired Power Plant in Holyoke, Mass.

HOW COMMUNITY ACTION WORKS HELPED

One of the important resources that Community Action Works provides to communities is research and information. When there's a pollution problem or a community wants to take action to be more sustainable, it can be hard to know where to start. So the first thing Community Action Works's community organizer, Claire, did was figure out who we should be targeting to ask for redevelopment, retirement and retraining workers.



Claire's research uncovered that Mt. Tom's owners was GDF-Suez, they have a local office in Hartford and they hate bad media. GDF-Suez likes to paint themselves as environmentally friendly with a website featuring pictures of wind turbines and solar panels, but Holyoke residents knew all too well how they were

not enacting those values in their city.

Together we made a plan draw attention to the dirty coal plant as a big smear on their environmental reputation. The community group members started to call the coal plant “patito feo” or “ugly duckling” in Spanish.

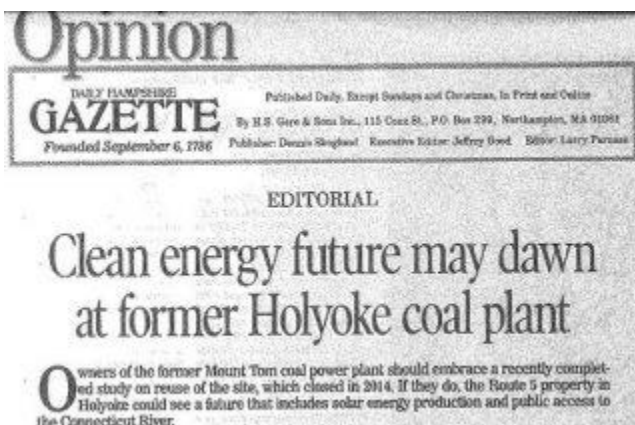
Next we networked the group. Already, Community Action Works community organizers had worked with other residents in New England to clean up and close down dirty coal plants.

Claire made sure that Carlos and Rosa were linked up with experts and other community activists to share information, strategy, tactics and hope. ¡Action for a Healthy Holyoke! joined the Mass Power Forward statewide coalition as well, to ask for clean energy solutions to replace Mt. Tom.



Then we got to work. We worked side by side with group members to build community support and win. Most folks have never spoken at a hearing, held a press conference or lobbied their elected officials. Claire trained the group on how to get media attention to pressure GDF-Suez. She coached them through holding community forums, building a coalition of business owners and residents and holding press conferences.

WINNING A HEALTHIER, CLEANER COMMUNITY



Finally, feeling the pressure, GDF-Suez announced Mt. Tom coal plant would be retired. Claire, Carlos and Rosa celebrated, but also got back

to work to ask for a just transition for workers and the old coal plant site. In the Fall of 2016 their hard work paid off. ¡Action for a Healthy Holyoke! and Community Action Works celebrated at a groundbreaking ceremony for a solar farm at the coal plant site that would power 1,000 homes.

**Want to find out more about how
Community Action Works can help
you tackle a pollution threat in your
town? [Get in touch here.](#)**

