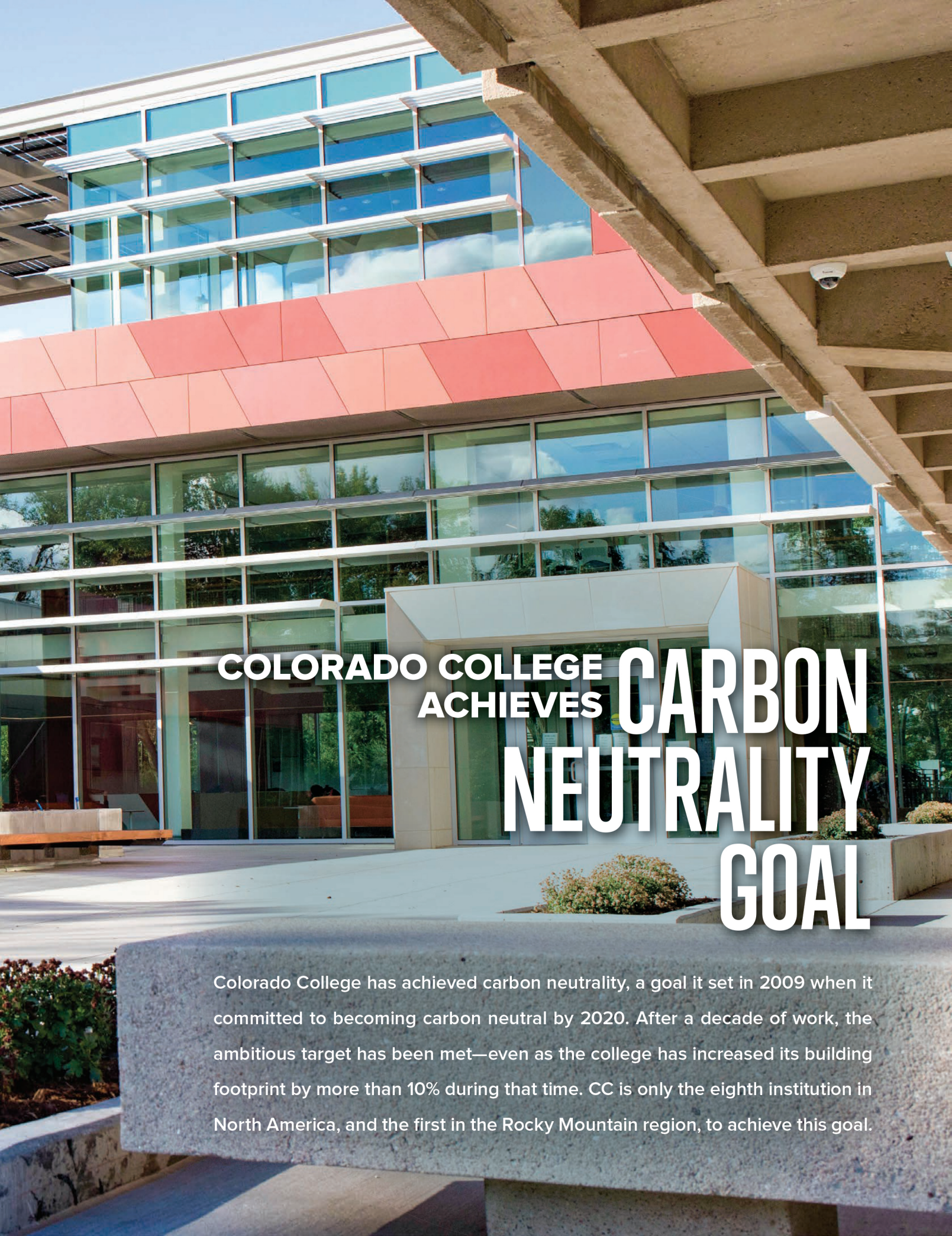




Photo by Jennifer Coombes / Tutt Library



**COLORADO COLLEGE
ACHIEVES CARBON
NEUTRALITY
GOAL**

Colorado College has achieved carbon neutrality, a goal it set in 2009 when it committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2020. After a decade of work, the ambitious target has been met—even as the college has increased its building footprint by more than 10% during that time. CC is only the eighth institution in North America, and the first in the Rocky Mountain region, to achieve this goal.

Colorado College (CC) stands out among other schools that have reached carbon neutrality in an important way: CC has the greatest emission reductions on campus while buying fewer offsets than any other U.S. campus. This ratio means the milestone has been achieved primarily by steep reductions in the college's carbon footprint on campus. "We've done the difficult work of reducing our on-campus emissions first, rather than what some see as 'buying our way' to neutrality through offsets," says CC Director of Sustainability Ian Johnson. Colorado College has accomplished its goal in a replicable and scalable way, meaning nearly any other institution can apply the strategies used by CC to achieve a goal of carbon neutrality. Offset market development also is critical, notes Johnson, but only after working to reduce on-campus emissions as much as possible.

Another significant factor is that Colorado College is the only carbon-neutral institution located in a high carbon intensity electric grid, with two

functioning coal plants operating in the city. This accomplishment is noteworthy, says Johnson, because "electricity use in our region generates more carbon emissions than most any other region, making major reductions in our footprint all the more difficult to achieve as our electricity use pushes up emission faster than other institutions. It also means our renewable energy generation and use have bigger impacts on global emissions than in other regions." CC president Jill Tiefenthaler adds: "This achievement is a shared effort; the result of the hard work, commitment, and resourcefulness of the entire Colorado College community. We thank all those who helped make this happen: former President Dick Celeste, the Board of Trustees who voted to support his signing of the American College and University President's Climate Commitment, the students and young alumni who have worked on these initiatives, and CC's faculty and staff, particularly those on the Sustainability Council, whose work and leadership has been invaluable."

Colorado College embarked on its journey to carbon neutrality in 2009, when then-president Celeste signed what is now known as the Second Nature Carbon Commitment. Celeste chose not to sign in 2007, preferring first to have more information in hand, including the college's carbon footprint and the efforts necessary for it to reach carbon neutrality, including reducing the college's emissions of greenhouse gases, cutting energy use, using more renewable energy, and emphasizing the importance of sustainable energy sources.

Since the college's baseline year in 2008, CC has reduced on-campus emissions by 75%. Colorado College achieved neutrality through a variety of initiatives, including efficiency upgrades, building renovations, campus engagement, on-site renewable energy, and local renewable energy purchases, reducing its carbon footprint even as its physical footprint expanded by 10%, with the alliance with the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in 2017. Between the Fine Arts Center and the Bemis School

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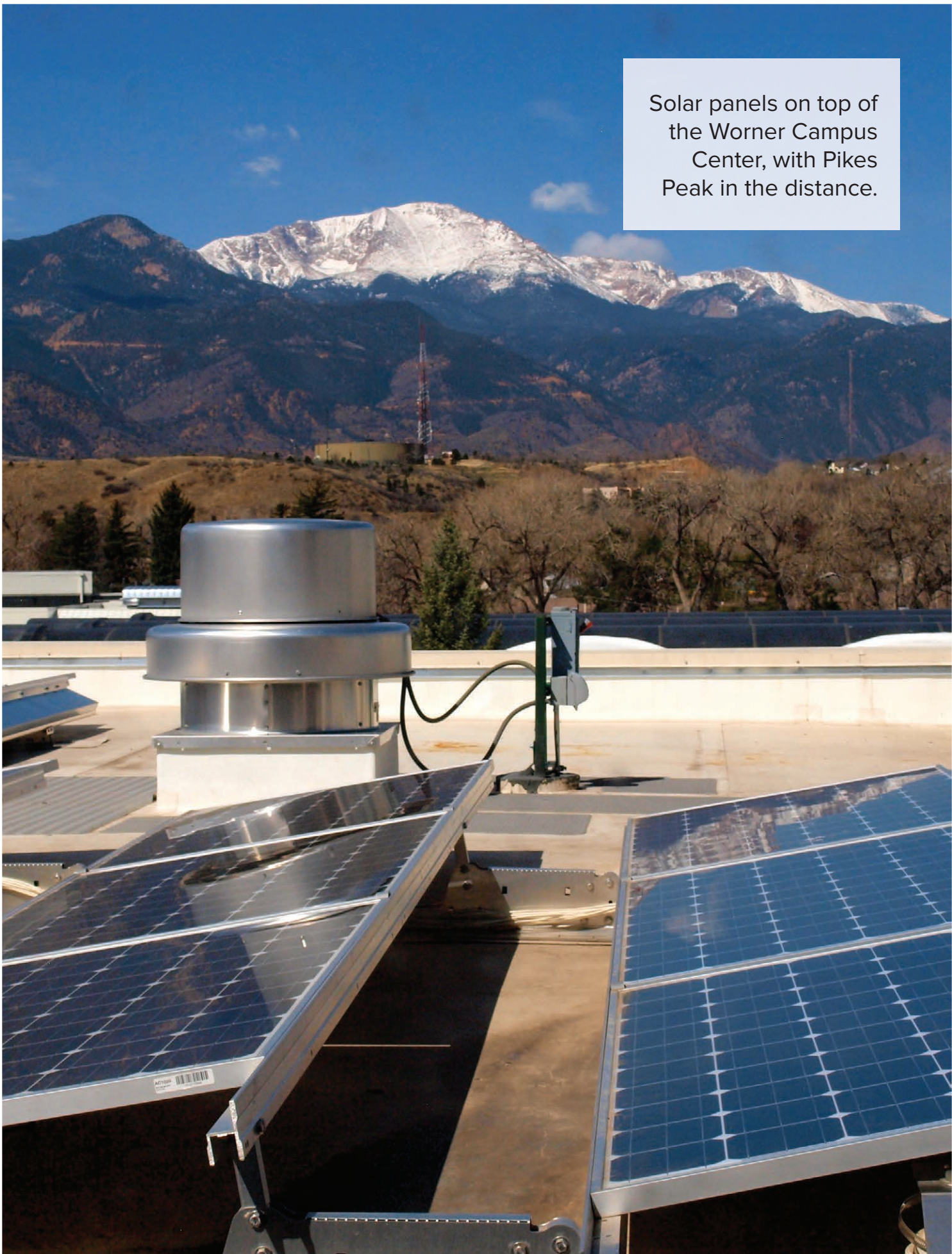


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Solar panels on top of the Worner Campus Center, with Pikes Peak in the distance.



of Art, CC added more than 142,000 square feet to its building footprint.

Because climate change is linked to and influenced by many different factors—from environmental racism to human health and income inequality, clean water, food production and access, and more—achieving carbon neutrality impacts far more than just the college’s operations, says Johnson. Many of the initiatives the college is undertaking, including adding more sustainability courses and finding new ways to make the college more accessible to students from diverse geographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, increase students’ environmental literacies across majors, thereby strengthening the institutions that build the resilient society which will be needed to adapt to impacts from climate change. Some of the college’s major initiatives have included:

- A behavioral change program involving 14 weeks, 14 habits, and a 14% reduction in electricity, heat, and water use. CC saved nearly \$100,000 in utility costs through the “aCClimate14” effort

- Colorado College’s first high-performance energy design guidelines were written for new and renovated buildings
- Tutt Library became the nation’s largest academic net-zero energy library following a massive underground geothermal energy project and major renovations
- East Campus Housing opened with sustainable architecture and energy systems
- Numerous solar PV installations were constructed on and off campus, originally initiated by a student in 2008
- CC has worked with Colorado Springs Utilities over the past decade to find ways to partner and meet its goals. This partnership helped lead to the addition of the 255 megawatts of solar in current and planned projects for the utility

To account for remaining emissions, which include difficult-to-avoid emissions such as college-related air travel, study

abroad, commuting, and wastewater, Colorado College is investing in carbon offsets—innovative projects that reduce or eliminate greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. Specifically, CC has invested in a methane destruction project at the Larimer Country landfill in Northern Colorado. This project prevents methane (CH₄), a very potent greenhouse gas, from entering the atmosphere, and instead uses the CH₄ to generate electricity directly to the Larimer County community.

The Larimer Country landfill project has co-benefits that go beyond reducing emissions; it has opened doors for future carbon related markets, reduced air pollution in the Front Range by adding renewable energy to the grid, and supports the local community of Larimer Country.

“We have learned a lot in the past decade doing this work and look forward to sharing the knowledge we have gained with our Colorado community and institutions across the country,” says President Tiefenthaler. Although CC has met its carbon neutrality goal, it does not mean the work

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Colorado College's
heating plant.

—Photo by Justin Porter



Photo by Jennifer Coombes / Arbor Day

is finished. President Tiefenthaler and the Board of Trustees have put together a Climate Change Task Force, led by Provost Townsend to take on a “What’s Next” project looking at operations, leadership beyond CC, academics and the co-curricular, and the endowment.

“Addressing climate change will take strong, consistent work from institutions of every kind,” says Townsend. “CC has shown that significant progress in the climate impact of operations is possible in a relatively short period of time, and we are committed to showing that can be done in other sectors as well.”

Colorado College also is looking at options to not simply purchase carbon offsets, but to invest in developing new projects that are more socially and environmentally responsible, thereby benefiting its core academic mission, developing markets as part of the solution to climate change, and providing positive social benefits for the community and region.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Contributed by Colorado College Office of Communications. More information and a timeline of Colorado College’s progress are available at: www.coloradocollege.edu/carbonneutral2020.



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Shekinah Oloyede '23, an administrative assistant in the Office of Sustainability works with the Zero Waste team to add new signage to waste bins.

—Photo by Madison Wilkinson '20