

Ecological practices, glorious gardens

By EVE MARX

Lynn Becker, a Katonah resident for 22 years, has always been interested in the garden. “I’ve loved gardening since I was very little, but never thought you could do it as a career,” Ms. Becker said, serving a guest date nut bread and green tea at the table in her cozy farmhouse kitchen. “After being an attorney, an executive recruiter, a substitute teacher and a freelance writer, I realized gardening is what I really want to do. I’m passionate about plants.”

Ms. Becker subscribes to the philosophy of William Morris, who famously said, “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.”

Her personal take on Morris’s words have guided her outside the house. Gardens, she believes, should be beautiful but useful. “I specialize in bringing ecological practices into the creation of glorious gardens,” Ms. Becker said. “My goal is integrating native plants which encourage birds and beneficial pollinators, including butterflies, to return to our gardens, while reducing or eliminating the need for fertilizers and dangerous pesticides,” she said. “Unlike the stereotypical native gardens with weedy-looking ‘good for you’ plants, my gardens are neat, generally weed-free, and can accommodate any design style from formal and sculptural to cottage romantic.” She’s into rain gardens, meadows, and compost piles, but her principal goal overall is the creation of beauty.



PHOTO COURTESY LYNN BECKER

Garden designer Lynn Becker

“Pretty and sterile brings no value, no purpose,” Ms. Becker said. “I think we owe the world more than that af-

ter what we’ve done to the environment.” She said that many people are under the misapprehension that a garden that’s natural, a native garden, is a bunch of weedy-looking plants surrounded by a lot of mulch. “It’s possible to incorporate native

plants and sustainable design into anything from a lush English cottage garden to a manicured English landscape to a minimalist Zen garden, and any style in between, if you work with someone who knows how to analyze the site and who truly understands the plants,” Ms. Becker said.

Ms. Becker decided to get serious about landscape design after completing the cer-

tificate program at the Native Plant Center at Westchester Community College. She is a member of the board of the Bedford Audubon Society where she chairs the Native Plant committee. “I’ll have my certificate in landscape design and another in horticulture this June,” she said. “I started my business, Trout Lily Garden Design two years ago. My projects are in Westchester, Fairfield County, Nassau County and Manhattan.” Her work was recently featured in a spread in Darien-New Canaan magazine.

Ms. Becker said her preference is working on residential gardens. “I like talking to people about how they use their property and helping them design a garden that reflects their aesthetic sense and the particular site,” she said. “If you have a really sandy, sunny yard, you can tell me you love ferns and hosta until the cows come home, and I’ll tell you those are the wrong plants for your place. Putting the right plant in the right place is essential,” she said. “The reason you hire an independent garden designer is so you don’t find yourself in the situation where you’re in a garden store and they only want to sell you what’s in stock,” she said.

There are, of course, trends in landscape design. “In this area, and I believe in no small part because of Bedford 20/20, people are open to sustainable design,” Ms. Becker said. “They’re open to composting. They’re open to rain barrels and rain gardens and a

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more naturalistic style of design." She said she really sees the difference when crossing the border into Connecticut, where there the look is more symmetrical and clipped with huge lawns.

"Instead of controlling nature I prefer working with it," Ms. Becker said. "My goal is to encourage people to plant things that won't just survive, but will thrive with no fertilizer, no pesticides, even no rain," she said. "I planted a lot of things in my own garden after Hurricane Sandy knocked down my fence and took all the plantings with it, and the new things I planted are all drought resistant. Honestly, I never watered at all last summer."

Let's talk about color. "I think many people don't realize the spectrum of color available in native plants," Ms. Becker said. "There's phlox with its purple cone flowers. There's black-eyed Susan. There are native roses. Butterfly weed is a magnet for butterflies and comes in pink, white and bright orange. Trout lily is an absolutely beautiful native plant that blooms

in early spring, and has a tiny, bright yellow lily-looking flower that hangs upside down," she said. "A patch of them under a tree in the woodlands just glows. Trillium comes in white and pink and mauve and yellow. People forget that green is a fabulous color with a lot of range. There's dark green to chartreuse, which planted with other plants that have white blossoms, is just breathtaking. Amsonia comes in two varieties, the one with little blue flowers in the spring, and a more popular variety with feathery leaves that turn a gorgeous yellow in the fall. Another native plant, Clethra, has one of the most magnificent fragrances in the plant kingdom, and the leaves are an extraordinary gold. If you want autumn color you have to go with natives. There are native winter plants with fabulous red stems that just pop when the snow is around. Some have incredible berries that last through February," she said.

Ms. Becker said she encourages her clients to live more harmoniously with nature. "You want the birds and the

butterflies," she said. That is one of the reasons she so loves the plant known as Trout Lily. "It's one of the earliest flowers to bloom in the woodlands," she said. "The pollen offers a food source for the earliest insects so that other plants can be pollinated. That's what the early spring flowers do — they're a source of nutrition for the birds, who eat the insects that are inside of the plant. You want a food source for all the birds that migrate," she said. "Dogwood is wonderful. Native American dogwood has berries that become ripe at the exact same time the native birds are ready to migrate south. It gives them an excellent food source for their long trip. Chinese dogwood blooms later and bears fruit later, but the birds can't wait."

Ms. Becker said that butterfly bush is "nice, and it attracts butterflies to drink the nectar, but the problem is that if you don't have a host plant for the butterfly caterpillars, you won't have the butterflies next year." She advises planting butterfly weed and other plants that the larvae and the

caterpillars can use. "It's about supporting nature."

Not every client is prepared or ready to redo their entire garden. "If somebody wants to start small, I can do planters and pots in their yard," Ms. Becker said. "I can give you the most beautiful planters you've ever had." She said that when working with new clients, she enjoys becoming familiar with their aesthetic and their property and takes it from there. "Whether it's a small butterfly garden, or building a terraced patio with seating walls or an infinity pool surrounded by a native meadow, I can do that."

Ms. Becker never forgets her time working as a substitute teacher. "I enjoy education," she said. "I enjoy teaching people how they can learn how to do some of these things themselves. Good landscaping really adds to the value of your home and how much you use and enjoy your house. And it doesn't have to be expensive," she said. "Please look at my website and check it all out."

Ms. Becker can be reached through her website, troutlilygardendesign.com.

Landscaping enhancements in store for Katonah Ave. gateway

By JESS FASANO

A prominent stretch of downtown Katonah around the train station is expected to look a lot nicer this fall, thanks to a beautification project led by the Katonah Village Improvement Society in collaboration with the Town of Bedford.

The town board approved the proposal for the first phase of the project made by KVIS at its meeting on Tuesday. Thomas Hagen, KVIS co-president, presented the proposal to enhance the northern end of Katonah Avenue. He explained that over the past two years KVIS has developed a plan to improve the area by the Katonah train station, from Edgemont Road to the gazebo by the railroad crossing.

The plan was designed by a professional team including Dwight Brooks, of Dwight Brooks Horticulturist; landscape architect Tracey Miller, of Tracey Miller Associates; and landscape designer Lynn Becker, of Trout Lily Garden Design. Ms. Becker is also a KVIS board member and chair of the beautification project.

According to Ms. Becker, the plan involves redesigning the stretch of land as a “bird and pollinator-friendly garden” that is beneficial to the environment as well as aesthetically pleasing.

“It’s the place where people first meet Katonah when they get off the train and it needs to be beautiful,” she said.

The proposal, Mr. Hagen said, is made up of “multiple, independently beneficial phases.” The first phase, which will take place this fall, involves removing some existing plants which are invasive or no longer viable, from a section of Katonah Avenue beginning at Edgemont Road and ending at the end of the train station platform. New plantings will be put in their place.

Subsequent phases of the project are expected to include installing permeable paving at the bottom of the train station’s steps, new benches and bike racks, and other enhancements.

“Reflecting on the sustainability philosophy of our designers, our design emphasizes native plants that are environmentally friendly, hearty, and require minimal maintenance,” Mr. Hagen said. He added that the plants would not require any fertilizers or pesticides.

According to Mr. Hagen, the design includes “canopy trees, which will be complimented by understory flow-



JESS FASANO PHOTO

Lynn Becker, who is heading the KVIS beautification project, joining KVIS co-president, Eve Hundt, at the project site.

ering trees, fruit-bearing shrubs, fragrant perennials and seed-bearing grasses.” A 5-foot grass buffer between the plants and the curb will also be provided to allow for town snow removal.

“Layers of plants will provide a visually pleasing

Mr. Hagen also stressed the project will not pose any additional expenses for taxpayers. KVIS will supply the landscaping materials such as trees, perennials and grasses. Town employees will assist KVIS volunteers with planting and be responsible for

pect the completions of the first phase of the project this fall. He also said that the department is prepared to begin planting before the end of October.

“I think the plan is going to really do great things for that stretch of Katonah Avenue in the future,” he said.

Town Supervisor Chris Burdick called the proposal “wonderful,” and said the board is in favor of the design. “I know there’s a lot of support up here for what you folks are doing,” he said.

Board members were enthusiastic about the KVIS proposal.

Lee Roberts said, “First of all, I think it’s beautiful. I’m very excited. I think it will enhance that area.” Mary Beth Kass praised the “beautiful design” and the society’s inclusion of native plants. Don Scott also voiced his approval of the plan, explaining that the proposed improvements will reflect well on the hamlet as a whole.

“You don’t realize when you live here what a focal point the train station is for literally hundreds, if not thousands, of people a week that come through there,” he said.

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— LYNN BECKER, PROJECT CHAIR AND LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

landscape that mitigates the sights and sounds of the railroad platform, while providing food, habitat and nesting for songbirds and butterflies,” said Mr. Hagen.

Mr. Hagen cited community support for the project, noting that KVIS members spoke with residents and shopkeepers along Katonah Avenue, as well as with representatives of the town’s Historic District Review Commission and Bedford 2020. According to Mr. Hagen, the final design reflects their feedback and input.

maintaining the landscaping.

Mr. Hagen also added that KVIS would welcome the help of additional volunteers to assist with planting and maintenance.

At Tuesday’s town board meeting, Superintendent of Recreation and Parks William Heidepriem said, “There’s certainly no objection from a parks department standpoint for this project.” Mr. Heidepriem said he and other town staff have met with KVIS to discuss the project, and agreed that it was realistic to ex-