



STAFF PHOTO/JACK HALEY

Dan Birecree, an employee with Zaretsky and Associates landscaping, prepares some plants at the new rain garden.

This garden makes the environment better

Penfield built a natural wetland to deal with the water run-off from its highway and sewer department buildings.

By **AMY CAVALIER**

Messenger Post Staff

With one hand, Bruce Zaretsky slams a sledge hammer into the ground to open up a small hole in the soil. With the other hand, he gen-

tly places a small patch of decorative grass, roots and all, into the opening. He spreads top soil around it to keep it in place.

On his hands and knees in a roughly 75-by-150-foot garden next to the town's new Sewer Department on Jackson Road, Zaretsky and some of the employees from his landscape firm carefully place each perennial, shrub and grass in the ground. That's nothing compared to the work that went into preparing the plot of land for planting.

This is no ordinary garden.

It is a "rain garden" or in technical

terms, a bio-retention swale. Rather than using retention ponds, Zaretsky said, rain gardens are a natural, environmentally friendly alternative of dealing with run-off and water accumulation from heavy rains. To create it, first, you dig down deep, lay stone and install a perforated pipe to create something called a French drain. On top goes a mixture of sand and top soil. Then come the plants.

"If you take that water instead and have it drain into a large-scale garden alongside the edge of the

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parking lot, with plants that can handle periodic inundation of water and salt and everything else, what you're doing is essentially using those plants to filter the water," he said.

Retention ponds don't remove things like oil, antifreeze, transmission fluid or salt that drips off people's cars. That all winds up running into the ground and eventually back into lakes and rivers.

The rain garden even looks different. It's sucked in, rather than built up, like you would imagine a garden should be. It is filled with natural, native plants that can withstand extremes of wet and dry conditions.

"In other words, the toughest plants you can find anywhere," said Zaretsky.

The rain garden was cre-

ated with the help of a \$25,000 matching grant funded by the Environmental Protection Fund and awarded by Monroe County Storm Water Coalition, according to John Ricci, a spokesman for Monroe County. Mark Valentine, assistant engineer in Penfield, said the town provided \$12,500 in in-kind services, such as providing labor to design and install the garden.

"It's a more aesthetic treatment option than ponds," said Valentine.

The town has had complaints about ponds, he said. Some residents say they smell, others think they are unsightly. They also require maintenance, including periodic dredging and mowing around the edge.

"This will look more like a flower garden," he said, "and it will be a habitat for animals."

When it grows in, Zaret-

sky said, the rain garden will resemble an abstract painting and maintenance will be minimal.

"This is meant to be a wetland," he said. "Nobody's going into those and cutting them down and maintaining them once a year."

Supervisor George Wiedemer said it's a unique solution to meeting the requirements the town had to address with the construction of its new \$800,000 sewer building.

"I think it's the wave of the future," he said.

The Environmental Protection Fund grant was also used to install a rain garden in the city, at Turning Point Park on Lake Avenue.

Valentine said this is something the town of Penfield will be pushing developers to consider when they build. And on Oct. 11, the town, county and city are hosting a sem-

inar at the Dolomite Lodge in Penfield for engineers from other municipalities and developers to get a look at the process of installing a rain garden.

Homeowners can benefit from installing rain gardens in low spots on their property where water naturally pools.

Zaretsky said it won't be easy getting developers to understand that installing a rain garden may cost more to install, but will save them money in the long run.

"It's a matter of beating it into developers' heads because they consider landscaping a necessary evil," he said. "If we can change their minds, they are making the site more valuable and making it better for future generations."

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