

Local Landscaper Spearheads Effort to Construct Healing Garden

By Janice Lane Palko

When Kevin Soergel gets an idea, he runs with it. Soergel, owner of Soergel Landscapes, Aquascapes and Florascapes, located in Gibsonia, had an idea that a water garden might be a nice addition for the Ronald McDonald House in Shadyside.

The Ronald McDonald House is a home away from home for families who relocate temporarily to Pittsburgh to receive medical treatment for their seriously ill children. The house, located close to area hospitals, gives family members a place to sleep, eat, relax and find support from other families in similar situations. Last year, more than 750 families stayed at the Pittsburgh Ronald McDonald House.

"I presented my idea to Paul Sweeney, who owns several McDonald's franchises in Beaver, and he made some calls and put me in contact with the appropriate people," Soergel said.

Within a month's time, Soergel designed the project known as the Healing Garden and lined up Aquascapes of PA, a local supplier of pond equipment, to sponsor the event as a training exercise for about 20 local area landscap-

ers. All the participants donated something, either plants, rocks, pumps, wood timbers or labor.

Soergel designed a pondless waterfall that incorporated some new and advanced technologies. "Because this is a home that houses children, I didn't want any deep water that could be potentially dangerous to small children," Soergel said.

No where in the design is the water deeper than an inch and a half. While the area Soergel had to work with was rather small, less than 20 foot by 20 foot, he managed to design a mountain stream with two waterfalls. The Healing Garden begins with a bog garden, a small wetland with suitable plantings such as water hyacinths. From there the stream splits into two waterfalls. One fork runs near the patio and the other runs perpendicular to the house and has a stepping stone bridge and flows to a second bog garden.

The streams then converge and the water collects in an underground reservoir that is below the second bog which filters water and is disguised with boulders and landscaping.

Incredibly, the installation of the garden was accomplished in one day, June 21, with the contractors working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"The administration, parents and visitors love it," Soergel said. "But most importantly, the kids love it. One little boy from Columbia, who was about three years old, came out on his walker to see it and kept saying, *agua*, which is Spanish for water, and *aryo*, which means waterfall or stream. It was great to see him so excited," Soergel said.

You can see the Healing Garden during the Fourth Annual Parade of Ponds on September 8 and 9, and the proceeds from the event will benefit the Ronald McDonald House. Tickets will be available through Ronald McDonald House of Pittsburgh, 412-362-3400, or (website) or on Soergel's website, www.YourEscapes.net. Please support the Ronald McDonald House Charities with your donations. ▲