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A creekly kind of makeover

*Local environmental artist takes on Mattituck Creek project*

BY ERIN SCHULTZ I STAFF WRITER

Since the public boat ramp at Mattituck Creek was replaced some 10 years ago, stormwater from Route 48 and a gravel parking lot has simply flowed over its concrete slabs and into the creek. Local environmental artist and land preservation committee member Lillian Ball is working to change that. "It's a beautiful spot," she said last Thursday. "Today, we'll start by cutting the phragmites."

After receiving a matching grant of nearly \$83,000 last October from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, a federal program, Ms. Ball began work last week to replace much of the current surface of the parking lot near the boat ramp with permeable pavement as part of the town's ongoing stormwater reduction project.

The pavement is made from Long Island recycled glass and is often used for roads, parking lots, pedestrian patios, driveways and sidewalks.

The material is aesthetically -pleasing, as well as structurally stable, Ms. Ball said. But most important, she said, the permeable pavement will slow down and filter the water before it runs headlong into the creek.

She added that the habitat surrounding the boat ramp, which includes an osprey nest occupied by a mating pair for the first time in years, is a big reason she picked this as the site for "Waterwash."

The project's purpose is not only to reduce the ramp's stormwater runoff, but to raise awareness of waterfront pollution in Southold through educational signs, she said. "I've had such a positive response," Ms. Ball said. "People want to be involved, because they think it's a good idea."

Last Thursday afternoon, volunteers Nick DeLong, 16, and Zachary Palladino, 17, helped Ms. Ball cut down stalks of invasive phragmites -- the first step of the two-week "public art" project.

The Mattituck High School juniors learned of the event through the North Fork Environmental Council. Both said they eventually want to work in environmental science or biology.

Group for the East End members Jennifer Hartnagle, Jennifer Skilbred and Kate Schertel also provided volunteer labor.

"We definitely support this project," said Ms. Skilbred. "It's a great education."



Peter Blas photo Mattituck High School juniors Zachary Palladino (from left) and Nick DeLong, Group for the East End representative Jennifer Hartnagle and local environmental artist Lillian Ball cut down stalks of phragmites last Thursday at Mattituck Creek's public boat ramp. The work is the first step of "Waterwash," Ms. Ball's federally funded project to reduce stormwater runoff.

Ms. Ball said she and her rotating group of volunteers will cut the phragmites but will not apply the chemical to kill them, because the plants are good for soaking up nutrients when there is too much in the water.

"Cutting two or three times a year weakens the plants, so they grow back spindly and are easier to control," she said. "They can be maintained so they won't invade the existing spartina [native grasses] on the creek side or the new native plants we're putting into the vegetated swale."

Native plants such as prismatic, switchgrass and little bluestem will be planted from seeds that were found on the North Fork -- "not in New Jersey," she said.

With a curly mop of short gray hair, Ms. Ball, 54, is a bundle of energy and calls herself a "public artist."

"Public plantings happen all over the world," she said. "Just not so much in Southold."

Originally from Maine, Ms. Ball has lived in Southold for seven years. Her educational background is in anthropology and art, but she said she comes from a family of artists.

When she started visiting the North Fork, she said she began to see what was possible in preservation and became fascinated with Long Island Sound in particular.

She was an artist in New York City for 32 years, traveling up and down the island to visit the North Fork. Just this past year, she said, she gave up her studio for full-time work in public art here.

For years now, Ms. Ball has been a familiar face at public meetings, having met with the town, the trustees, the hamlet stakeholders and the park districts.

Southold Town Supervisor Scott Russell said he greatly appreciates Ms. Ball's persistence.

"She has the dogged determination to weave through several agencies to see a project through, that's for sure," he said. "We should have asked her to build our animal shelter years ago. It would have been done in a couple of months, not several years."

Ms. Ball said she hopes the concept of Waterwash will trickle into other areas of town where 70 roads end -- and drain into local bodies of water.

"This will work equally well in any kind of waterfront situation," she said.

[eschultz@timesreview.com](mailto:eschultz@timesreview.com)