

RAMSEY SUBURBAN NEWS

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SHADE TREE COMMISSION

Three businesses get green thumbs up



PHOTO/GINA PERFETTO

BY GINA PERFETTO
Of Suburban News

RAMSEY – The Shade Tree Commission has been making the borough a little greener, one thumb at a time.

The Green Thumb Awards have been presented yearly since 1993 for the best-landscaped and -maintained commercial properties in the community.

This year, the three winners – Fieldstone Fine Art, the Holiday Inn Express, and Varka Estiatorio – were chosen during the commission's September meeting and were announced Oct. 9 at the Borough Council's meeting.

Bill Jones, councilman and liaison to the commission; Henry Schumacher, a representative of the commission, and Mayor Christopher Botta presented the winners with plaques.

Mariana Maldonado accepted the first-place award for Fieldstone Fine Art, 147 E. Main St., and George Georgiadis accepted the third-place award for Varka Estiatorio, 30 N. Spruce St.

Mary Bergonzi, coordinator for the commission, said that the Green Thumb Awards are a positive community event that began under Herman Malefy's term as

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GARY JUNG/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



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Counter-clockwise from top, the landscapes of first-place winner Fieldstone Fine Art; second-place winner Holiday Inn Express; and third-place winner Varka Estiatorio.

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AWARDS

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chairman of the commission. "Ken Englishman is the current chairman and has done an excellent job. He believes in these awards, as we all do," Bergonzi said. "The award is given to commercial establishments and it is not only for excellence in landscape design, but also for compliance with the maintenance ordinances of the borough. It is hoped that these awards will inspire other businesses to more fully contribute to the beautification of Ramsey."

Hector Rivera, front office manager at the Holiday Inn Express, 946 Route 17 north, expressed great joy that the hotel won second place, and also regret that he wasn't able to attend the awards presentation.

"I wanted to go and formally accept the second-place award, but the hotel business is so busy and I was sad to have missed it. I am very appreciative of the recognition and wanted to share my gratitude with the council and Shade Tree Commission. Of course, the credit also goes to Sal Prasad of Innovative Landscaping. He took the old scenery, created better visibility. We went from being a Chevy to being a Cadillac. He added an island of all different kinds of flowers in an amazing arrangement. It creates great impact and is very eye-catching."

Maldonado, who co-owns Fieldstone Fine Arts with Violet Lorenzo, said that it was a pleasure to win both the award and the recognition from the borough. While she and Lorenzo had a vision for what they wanted to accomplish, it was Joe Monello of Monello Landscape Industries LLC who helped to fulfill it.

"It was wonderful and exciting," Maldonado said, "to receive an award at borough hall - we're new to town, and it's very nice to be recognized. We wanted to do something for the town and something that promotes nature and the arts. Joe Monello helped us to create an English and sculpture garden, and we won first prize. And he's still working. He'll be back soon and make a fall garden, with mums, and weed out the petunias. We won an award for landscape, and I think we've changed the landscape of the borough in more ways than one."

Not all of the winners had professional landscapers. Varka Estiatorio, a Greek restaurant off East Main Street, had Roxanne Mastorakos, part-owner of the restaurant, who brought a little of her native Greece and love of gardening to the borough when the establishment opened three years ago.

Mastorakos used an anchor to create interest and variety in a garden with trees, clay pots and plants native to her homeland, like bougainvillea and jasmine. But the anchor fits the theme, too, as the restaurant's name Varka means "boat" in Greek. Mastorakos did almost all of the work herself. George Georgiadis, a partner in the business and executive chef, received the award on behalf of the restaurant.

"Roxanne did the landscaping; she was the head designer. It's nice and country looking, rustic and Mediterranean. She says it reminds her of Sparta, her hometown in Greece. She even added seashells, ocean rocks and starfish to the garden."

All the winners agreed that when it comes to business, what's on the inside is just as important as what's on the outside, and that being successful means being

good neighbors.

"We won third place - I felt proud for what we were doing, and that our work was noticed by the borough. I am proud to be a part of the restaurant," Georgiadis said. "Of course the food must be great, but I believe that in a restaurant, everything is important - cleanliness, service and the aesthetics, inside and out. It isn't only about food."

Jay McMahon of the Shade Tree Commission said he was pleased with the outcome of this year's contest, and explained that determining the winners is a rewarding but difficult task.

"There are seven members on the commission and two alternates and we all got out and looked at the commercial properties in Ramsey," McMahon said. "It was a thorough and an exhaustive search, and so it is an honor and a distinction to win. The winners all did a great job on landscaping, using top-quality plants and materials, and they have all maintained their landscaping, which is important."

The Shade Tree Commission Green Thumb Awards are important for many reasons, he said. It serves to beautify Ramsey and encourages business owners to be responsible stewards of the community. McMahon said that the commission works to plant roughly 100 trees a year to keep Ramsey green, and that the awards are a natural extension of that effort.

"You are keeping the environment and the borough beautiful," he said. "We've had the designation of 'Tree City U.S.A.' for 13 years now, and I think our awards are a contributing factor. When you live in a densely populated region, you need to keep trees and shrubs in healthy condition. We need to keep Ramsey green for the future."

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