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LOCAL NEWS

Project a win for wetlands

By **Mark E. Jolly**
Staff Writer
E-mail

A collaboration between Buckingham, a builder and volunteers transformed the basin into a living classroom that looks better and provides good storm water management.

BUCKINGHAM —For nearly a decade, township supervisors here wanted to do something about the large storm water detention basin dominating the land next to the municipal building on Hughesian Drive off Route 413.

And through the collaboration of the township, a developer, a consulting firm and volunteers, this year those desires were realized. The basin has become an area of wetlands that is more attractive, that provides better storm water management and that creates a living classroom for students at neighboring Buckingham Elementary.

"That was one of the real nice things about this: the fact that the school is right there," said Mike Vesey, president of Orleans Homebuilders. "They can see first-hand the impact the creation of these wetlands brings."

Orleans and Princeton Hydro, their consultants, created about an acre of wetlands between the township building and the elementary school earlier this year and are now finishing up some details. From an engineering perspective, the wetlands serve as a detention basin with a purpose. While storm water slowly makes its way through the wetlands, the native vegetation cleans the water before it reaches Watson's Creek.

Both Geoffrey Goll, vice president at Princeton Hydro, and township Supervisor Janet French said Buckingham was interested in setting an example of good storm water management. And a path through the wetlands, complete with a bridge linking the school and the township grounds, offer opportunities for teachers to use the area as an example of many different things for their students.

French said the township still wants to build an observation area in the next year, and she said they have identified other additions to the project, buffer plantings along the stream and a larger culvert under Route 413 for instance, that can be added as the township finds the money for them.

Although a township goal, the wetlands were stalled for years because of fiscal constraints. The project only got under way recently because Orleans was required to create an acre of wetlands as mitigation for wetlands it destroyed in a building project

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create an acre of wetlands as mitigation for wetlands destroyed in a building project elsewhere in the township. And Orleans was aided in what was ultimately an expensive mitigation project by a \$60,000 Growing Greener grant partially tied to using the wetlands for education. French said the project also benefited from numerous volunteers.

"Between working with the community, looking for grants and working with developers, so far we've been able to do this virtually cost-free or at minimal cost," she said. "We've had a good relationship with Orleans, and they really moved into it with enthusiasm. They, as a consequence, did things we could not have done in the same way and moved this project forward enormously."

Goll, whose firm does wetlands creations from New York to Delaware, said the wetlands established in Buckingham have thrived and done so more quickly than usual. He attributes the success of the project, as Vesey did, to an ideal site for wetlands creation, adjacent to a stream and relatively damp.

"This one really took off, even in this drought," he said. "The plants that we put out there are getting larger. They're spreading. We have volunteer vegetation. The plants got established even faster than we expected."

Mark E. Jolly can be contacted via e-mail at mjolly@phillyburbs.com.

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