

# It's easy being 'green' for land designer from Edgeworth

BY JOANNE BARRON  
STAFF WRITER

Christine Tomana followed her heart back to Pittsburgh. The 2001 Quaker Valley High School graduate, who worked in Washington, D.C., for several years, is back in Edgeworth trying to use her experience to make a difference in the environment in the place she calls home. She said she didn't anticipate coming home so soon, but she is glad she did and knows for sure she made the right call.

Now the owner of Eco-Land Designs, which recently installed the first "green" driveway in Sewickley, she said, she has completed 25 various projects in the Pittsburgh area since March.

The driveway, installed by David Graff at a newly constructed home on Creek Drive just past the Edgeworth Club, is a permeable surface, said Tomana, 29.

When water hits a permeable surface, it naturally percolates into the soil slowly, keeping it on the property, preventing it from running into the stormwater system and creating a self-draining system.

Because Edgeworth has a strict impervious-surface limit, Tomana said, a penetrable surface needed to be used on the driveway to stay within the borough's 30-percent limit.

When rain falls on a surface such as concrete, flagstone or mortar, it has no place to go, Tomana said, so it runs into the storm sewer system collecting toxins as it flows.

She also installed the patio and created native plantings at the site, also to control water runoff and to conserve water on the property, owned by Damian and Tracey Georgiano.

The driveway was completed

in September and the landscaping, by Good 2 Great Landscape Co., last month.

Tomana explained that in the Pittsburgh area, many storm-water and sewage drains are connected, which leads to a lot of overflow and flooding. That's why Edgeworth has such strict limits, which, she said, she thinks is "a great thing."

On most of her projects, she has used a large amount of stonework from dry-set stone, which does not work as well as a permeable surface.

One of the biggest issues is the initial cost of using a permeable surface, which can be up to 20 percent more than traditional surfaces but does not have to be replaced as often.

"So, in the long run, you will save money," she said.

Tomana also recently completed another project using native, drought-tolerant plants for erosion control at a site on Backbone Road. Some of the native plants include 60 low-growing sumac, American holly, shade trees, dogwood and various grasses.

Some native plants used at the Creek Drive include winterberry holly, sweetbay magnolia and hemlock.

"I have two niches. One is the permeable surfaces, and the other is native plants," said Tomana, who will not use chemicals in her landscaping work.

Although she said she learned about plants from her father, Mike, who she calls "a big plant guru," she didn't really get interested until she learned about native plants at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where last year she earned her master's degree in sustainable landscape design, a program she said is offered only at two other colleges in the country.



PHOTO/KRISTINA SERAFINI

CHRISTINE TOMANA of Eco-Land Designs poses on a deck overlooking a local client's yard, where sod and native plants were installed.

"My dad likes the Japanese maples and ornamentals, boxwoods and hedges — the more formal stuff. I'm into native plants. I tried to change his mind, but I can't," she said laughing.

Tomana said she originally thought she wanted to work as an architect, so, in 2005, she graduated from Miami University in Ohio with a bachelor's degree in mass communications and management and landed a job with an architectural firm in Washington, D.C., that specialized in equestrian designs.

"But I found out I was interested in the outdoor part of that, so I looked at the program at George Washington University," she said.

She worked in the landscape business in Washington, D.C.,

for several years after graduating. The company, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, is funded by the RiverSmart Homes program, a government-run initiative which helps to reduce the amount of storm-water runoff.

Tomana also had the opportunity to start up a company with fellow students from the university but chose to start her own in the Pittsburgh area instead.

She said although it was scary quitting a job with a reliable income, she always had a dream of starting her own business.

"I figured this was the best time to do it. I'm young, and I don't have a family yet. I thought I'd give it a shot. I also felt I had a responsibility to take what I learned and experienced and

bring it here."

Citing the Consol Energy Center, she said, she sees lots of green trends in Pittsburgh. And when she learned that Pittsburgh had the same connected storm-water-sewer connected system as Washington, D.C., she wanted to work on projects that would help redirect water flow.

"I saw a need for more services in Pittsburgh. People are becoming more and more concerned about the environment here," she said.

"People who call me are Googling 'environmentally friendly landscaping,' so they are looking for this type of service," she said.

"There were a lot of opportunities in D.C., but I care about Pittsburgh," she said. "My heart is here. It's my home."

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