
Greenbriar Yard Gets Makeover

Friends, businesses lend a hand.

By **Bonnie Hobbs, Centre View**

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With their middle son Timothy severely injured and hospitalized for 16 months, the last thing on John and Michele McClellan's minds was their yard.

They've lived in Greenbriar since 1982 and kept up their property until medical problems befell Michele in 2000 and Timothy in October 2006. Tragically, he died this February at age 24.

A month later, aware of the sad shape their yard had fallen into, Michele McClellan casually remarked to former neighbor Gwen Krahl that she wished some TV show would come fix it.

"Michele had told Gwen of her dream of a meditation garden [where she could sit and reflect on Timothy]," said John McClellan. But knowing that wasn't likely to happen, he added, "Michele joked and said, 'Maybe if 'Desperate Landscapes' calls.'"

"That gave us the idea," said Krahl. "I lived across the street from the McClellans for many years, and my daughter Alex and their youngest son Joseph grew up together."

Now Krahl is vice president of Orr Partners commercial real-estate developers in Falls Church and Alex works with her. At their holiday party last December, they decided to give back to the community, so Krahl suggested doing something about the McClellans' overgrown yard.

Her partners at Orr, David Orr and Scott Siegel, supported the idea, and then the industry partners joined them. DPR Construction "provided a bench and tons of sweat equity," said Krahl, and also connected Orr with Rupert Nurseries, which contributed landscaping materials, and Century Fence Construction, which donated a new fence.

Then, over two days, the beginning of May, they rolled up their sleeves and went to work on Orr Partners' first "Community Initiative" — rejuvenating the McClellans' yard. On the first day, alone, 16 people worked six hours.

"We cleaned out trees, bushes and weeds and filled two dumpsters full of debris," said Krahl. "We also tore down the old fence that was there when they moved in years ago. And we replanted perennials and embellished the yard with new flowers and plants."

The volunteers worked their magic on the front, back and side yards and truly transformed their appearance. "The intent was to create a prayer or memory garden where the family can sit and relax," said Krahl.

If not for this group's kindness and generosity, the work they did would have cost the McClellans thousands of dollars. But, said Krahl, "We're celebrating our 20th year in business, this year, and it's a good way to do that by giving back to the community."

The McClellans were delighted with the outcome and overwhelmed by being the recipients of such a good deed. To understand how their yard fell into such ill repute, John McClellan explained what happened to Timothy.

"He was assaulted at a bar in Frederick, Md., in October 2006, and received a severe head trauma," said McClellan. "As a result, he developed ARDS [Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome] and his lungs never recovered."

"He was put on an ECMO machine [similar to a heart-lung machine] and set the world's record — 107 days — for being on it," continued his father. "Timothy then received a double-lung transplant and, afterward, showed promise and was walking around. But he was so weak and had lost a third of his body weight."

His parents and brothers, John, 27, and Joseph, 21, encouraged him and were by his side, throughout it all. Said McClellan: "Timothy was never alone."

"We all took turns being there with him, the whole 16 months he was in the hospital at the University of Maryland Medical Center and in a nearby rehabilitation center," said his father. "We got to know Timothy even better through that, and I think that we were able to connect even better as a family because of it."

Timothy died Feb. 21 and, shortly after his funeral, Krahl and Alex talked to the McClellans about a yard makeover. "Michelle was speechless, and I thought it was so wonderful," said John McClellan. "They took out all the old growth — even a 4 foot pine tree too close to the house. Just taking down that tree, alone, was a several-thousand-dollar job. They were so generous."

He said the volunteers pruned bushes, replaced the fence and planted boxwood, holly and other bushes, plus flowers including begonias, petunias and impatiens. They also put down mulch and planted six large trees — two in the cypress family, two dogwoods, a cherry tree and a white-fringe.

"The dogwoods meant something special to Michele because we're Catholic," said McClellan. "The legend is that the dogwood tree grew in Jerusalem and its wood was used to build the cross for Jesus. But after that, it told God it didn't want to be that strong anymore, so now it's a weaker wood. And on some varieties, the petals have crosses on them when they blossom."

The McClellans also plan to pay it forward by giving one of the dogwoods to their neighbors, Sender and Lesbia Salguero. Their 8-year-old son, Sender, was struck a car on Route 50 in Fair Oaks, on Christmas eve 2006, and died the next day. Said John McClellan: "It was Michele's idea to give them a dogwood tree, and I think it's great."

Thanks to the hard work of Orr Partners and their helpers, he said, "They gave us a new start. They gave us the beginnings of a new yard and now we can run with it. I just can't say enough about them. We couldn't have done it in five years, let alone two days."

The family also received two benches. And in the backyard, said McClellan, "Michelle didn't just get a meditation garden — she got a whole, meditation yard. Maybe I'll never figure out why things happened like they did to my son, but I learned there are a lot of good people out there. Hopefully, we'll have them all back again for a cookout to thank them."