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DeFranco Landscaping was the recipient of the 2010 Frank Leonbruno Memorial Lake Stewardship Award

## The DeFrancos of Hague: Sustainable Landscapes and Green Infrastructure

By Buzz Lamb

Sunday, June 5, 2011 +

What does sustainable landscaping actually mean? There are varying definitions but, according to Tony DeFranco, sustainable landscaping should include an attractive environment that is in balance with the local climate and requires minimal resource inputs, such as fertilizer, pesticides and water.

Tony's father, Dave DeFranco, started DeFranco Landscaping, Inc. in Hague more than 30 years ago. After graduating from Clarkson with a degree in Civil Engineering with a concentration in environmental engineering, Tony, 36, spent about 12 years consulting in the Capital District region.

Tony said that a couple of years ago he realized that he could take his expertise and implement it to broaden the range of what DeFranco Landscaping has to offer to the public. As a result, DeFranco Landscaping was the recipient of the 2010 Frank Leonbruno Memorial Lake Stewardship Award from the Lake George Watershed Coalition.

"I spent pretty much my whole childhood growing up in the (landscaping) business," Tony said. "After graduating, I focused on stormwater management, doing a lot of inspections for erosion control and sediment control. Last year New York State came up with a new set of stormwater regulations called Green Infrastructure," he said.

"It concentrates on using such things as rain gardens instead of dry wells; permeable pavers instead of blacktop and a system of credits for stormwater management techniques by using certain native plants and trees when redesigning a site." Tony said the new regulations went into effect on March 1, 2011.

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installing an on-site stormwater basin. They found that stormwater basins do not always function properly. Using the previous technology, contaminants were flowing through the system, so the State re-vamped the system based on those findings.”



Tony DeFranco

Tony says he tries to use native plants whenever possible. “Native plants are the best for this region because once they are established they require little or no irrigation and no fertilizer. Some clients may want more variety or splashes of color so we try to offer a mix that works for their property,” he said.

Tony says there are several plants that are more tolerable of wet environments. “We are currently working on a 1,100 square foot rain garden on a property in Bolton Landing. We’ll be using dogwoods and witch hazel for the larger plant material. They should consume more water and they will pick up some of the contaminants as

well,” he said. “For really wet spots we use iris, Joe Pyle weed and cardinal flowers.”

According to Tony, DeFranco Landscaping has, for several years, been installing landscape buffers along the shoreline that provide filtered views offering privacy for the property owner by shielding out noise and light from boat traffic on the lake as well as neighboring activities on shore.

“Plant buffers also provide a natural way to filter run-off before it leaves your property, as well. Plants and trees have a deeper root structure than grass and therefore will consume more water from the soil,” he said. “Landscape buffers provide greater benefits by reducing a lawn’s footprint and reducing the amount of maintenance for that lawn area.”

Tony said shoreline buffers are also an excellent deterrent for Canada Geese. “Geese will not go onto a shoreline with dense vegetation because they feel threatened that a predator, such as a fox, may be lurking in the plants,” he added.

Tony said that when he returned to the Lake George area he began following what the Lake George Association was promoting. “I realized that they were advocating what we were already doing in some of our designs,” he said. “I said to my Dad that we were definitely on the right track and yet we did have some projects we did 15 or 20 years ago where we went back and said, ‘I guess we could have done this or that a little better,’”

Tony said recent designs have included the use of a combination of residential and native plants such as Black-eyed Susan, silky dogwoods, Christmas ferns, switch grass and wild ginger. “We use a lot of low-grow fragrant sumac. It’s a native that is a perfect lush-green ground cover in the spring and summer that turns a very rusty color in the fall,” he said. “Don’t confuse this with the stag horn sumac...along the road that’s great, but for me it almost looks like a plant from the dinosaur age,” he said with a grin.

Tony says that sustainability means cutting down on greenhouse gasses and trying to be more sensitive to the environment. “If everyone buys into being environmentally friendly we’ll all be at an advantage. New construction will unquestionably have to comply with the new regulations but if existing property owners just did some small things on their property, globally we are all going to be better off,” he said.

Tony recently started a civil engineering consulting business to complement his family’s landscaping and property management business. According to Tony, he recently completed the design of a Pura-Flo Peat Fiber Biofilter System, an on-site wastewater treatment system, which will be installed this summer.

Tony notes that the “Do-It-Yourself Water Quality: A Landowner’s Guide to Property Management, a guide published by the Fund for Lake George, is a great resource which helps educate the public by providing specific examples of best management techniques.

For more information, contact Tony DeFranco at 518-543-6089.

Tags: Dave DeFranco, DeFranco Landscaping, Do-It-Yourself Water Quality: A Landowner’s Guide to Property Management, Fund for Lake George, Hague, Landscaping, Sustainable Landscaping

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