

Natives Haven is wild for wildflowers

Harvard nursery owner focuses as much on the visitor's experience as the plants they sell

By Sandy Kucharski
THE MAIN LINE

Bill Warzecha, owner of Natives Haven, a native wildflower botanic nursery, loves to take a leisurely stroll through his garden. He and his wife and business partner, Terrie, often grab a glass of wine and wander the groomed paths that wind throughout the nursery, enjoying the beauty of the plants and the peaceful setting. They love to take others on the tour as well, planting the seed of desire for landscaping with native plants.

They formally opened the doors of the nursery to the public in June, inviting visitors and offering native wildflower plants for sale. Located in rural Harvard at 13809 Durkee Road, nursery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays through September. Visits are also available by appointment. Plant prices are based on the size of the pot.

"We're not in this for the money," Warzecha said. "We're trying to sell a feeling, a sense of peacefulness."

The idea of creating the nursery as a retirement business had been germinating with Warzecha for more than 20 years. While recouping from knee surgery in 1994, he designed and installed a pond – complete with native plantings – in the backyard of his McHenry home. He entered the project in a contest and won. Inspired



HML PHOTO BY SANDY KUCHARSKI

Bill Warzecha, owner of Natives Haven wildflower botanic nursery, stands at the cornerstone of his property.



by his success, he enrolled in various horticulture and entrepreneurship classes through McHenry County College, and his interest and knowledge grew.

Warzecha purchased the 6-1/4-acre rolling farm field in Harvard in 2005. He began the restoration and transformation from corn crops to native wildflowers and plants, 1

acre at a time. The transformation included trenching two ponds and setting up numerous formal beds.

"We'd come up here and wander the property with a glass of wine and plan each planting area," he said.

The Warzechas built a house on the property in 2007 and made the move from McHenry. In 2010 they added a 1-acre ornamental prairie containing more than 100 different species of native wildflowers and grasses. In the spring of 2015, Bill Warzecha retired from Northrup Grumman and spent a year sprucing up the gardens in preparation for this season's opening.

"That was 20 years back," said Terrie Warzecha, referring to the realization of her husband's dream. "It was so far away. I didn't envision it going this far."

The nursery is designed with paths and benches among the formal gardens and around the prairie, showcasing the native plants as elements in gardens as well as in their natural setting. The potted plants are placed in the gardens next to the existing plants so shoppers can see what the mature plants look like. Most plants are labeled to aid in identification as well as educate visitors.

Several of the plants growing and for sale at Natives Haven are on the federally threatened and endangered list. In fall 2015, the Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee of McHenry County recognized the Warzechas' commitment and efforts in preserving and perpetuating native planting by showcasing their gardens.

"I wanted to create something different," Warzecha said. "I'm very pleased with how it's turned out. I think it's ready to explode."

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