



The McFarland Thistle

Car wash rain garden to improve water quality

By Vivian Obarski
Regional Reporter

Even though it may seem like a patch of wild flowers and grasses, the garden in front of the Quick 'N Clean Car Wash on Farwell Street will soon have the power to improve water quality.

Known as a rain garden, the car wash's vegetation is the first of its kind for a business in McFarland.

"I believe in leading by example," said Quick 'N Clean Car Wash owner Chris Klar. "If it's a good idea, then I'll be the guinea pig."

"I think that it's important to look at creative solutions to common problems," he added.

For Klar, who also serves as village trustee, the reconstruction of the car wash this summer served as the catalyst for the rain garden.

To combat stormwater runoff — which can erode soils and carry excess debris such as fertilizers and animal waste into area lakes and streams — the village approved a

stormwater ordinance last year.

The ordinance requires that construction also includes stormwater control measures to control the temperature and rate that runoff occurs.

"It was a combination of needing to do something with the stormwater because of the redevelopment and wanting something creative," Klar recalled.

Around this time, Klar was introduced to Susan Priebe of Partnership for Rain Gardens LLC at a McFarland Chamber of Commerce meeting.

"I came to talk to the chamber and (chamber volunteer) Ken Brost invited me to talk to Chris," Priebe recalled.

"He was excited and wanted to do something that wasn't as costly (as other stormwater control measures)," she added.

"It was good timing," Klar said. "And it made sense."

Rain gardens utilize native



Arden Bolton and Calvin Evans plant some vegetation (above) for the Quick 'N Clean Car Wash rain garden as Ellen Ruseh of Partnership for Rain Gardens LLC digs a culvert to allow excess water to drain away (right). Located on Farwell Street, the rain garden is the first business one in McFarland.



• Rain garden to slow water runoff

plants such as purple coneflower and golden Alexander, explained Ellen Ruseh of Partnership for Rain Gardens LLC.

"Native plants are good at soil infiltration," Ruseh said, adding that the roots on native plants can extend as far as five feet deep.

"Once the garden's established, it's relatively maintenance free and drought resistant and the microbial action is very beneficial."

According to Klar, he had the option to choose between a wild, native prairie look and a garden with more flowering plants.

"It was pretty straightforward," said Klar about the design process.

"Susan had to calculate the amount of water directed into the rain garden, which was 2,400 square feet.

"I went with a more formal setting because there's more color and it's small enough that the area's manageable," he added.

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- Chris Klar

The garden, which is situated in a depression to hold water, then receives its water from stormwater runoff from roofs and other areas.

In addition to slowing the flow of stormwater, filtering particles out and increasing water infiltration into the ground, Ruseh said a rain garden can help improve the condition of soils.

"One-third of the roots die off each season," she said. "Because of this; there's space in the earth to increase infiltration.

Because one square foot of rain garden can handle approximately three square feet of runoff, Priebe said Klar's rain garden will be 800 square feet.

"We talked about where the downspouts were located and I also took into consideration his sign — he didn't want plants obscuring the area by his sign." Priebe added.

On Aug. 27, Priebe, Ruseh and a group of employees began planting the 800 plants needed for the rain garden.

Located in front of the Quick 'N Clean Car Wash sign, the garden can handle roof runoff from the

first three bays of the car wash.

While the plantings have yet to mature, Priebe said it typically takes two to three years for a rain garden to fully mature.

"Probably next year, in July, this should be at its full height," Priebe said. "Next year it'll be mature, but it'll take two to three years for it to reach its full potential."

In addition to the ecological impact the rain garden will have, Klar said he hopes the garden will also leave an impact on his business.

"For a business owner to be able to catch the eye and get attention is good," he said. "I'm pleased at the way this turned out."