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Waterwash makes a splash

Southold-based environmental artist Lillian Ball reveals unique runoff project

BY ERIN SCHULTZ | STAFF WRITER

Art and architecture. Ecology and biology. Conservation and education.

With a background in anthropology and art, Southold resident Lillian Ball was able to combine all of those into a project called Waterwash near the Mattituck Creek boat ramp off Route 48.

The 54-year-old environmental activist spent years developing the concept and gathering the funds for Waterwash, a combination of permeable pavement, vegetative swale (a constructed earthen channel planted with native vegetation) and informational signs to replace a gravel parking lot and a phragmites-infested shoreline.

"It's a total concept -- a way of looking at stormwater removal and public outreach from a totally different perspective," Ms. Ball said this week. "I envisioned this project as a prototype for other places around the world."

The unique installation -- an aesthetically-pleasing way to mitigate stormwater runoff while educating the public, said Ms. Ball -- officially opened Nov. 9. Ms. Ball, Suffolk County Legislator Ed Romaine, Southold Town Supervisor Scott Russell, and Group for the East End's president Bob DeLuca were among those who gathered to see the finished project, the first of its kind on the North Fork.

"This is visually gorgeous and aesthetically fabulous," said longtime Southold resident Ellen Wexler at the summer-like Monday morning event. "The pairing of an artist's point of view with those in government can really make things happen."

After receiving a matching grant of nearly \$83,000 last October from the Long Island Sound Futures Fund, a federal program, Ms. Ball and members of Group for the East End began work this past spring to replace much of the surface of the boat ramp's parking lot with the permeable pavement as part of Southold Town's ongoing stormwater reduction plan.

Volunteers from Mattituck High School assisted with efforts to complete the plantings and maintain the site, and Mattituck Sanitation donated dumpsters to remove the invasive species and trash.

Manorville-based Excav Services excavated the site and installed what's known as Filterpave, made from recycled glass. This Filterpave project, Ms. Ball said, is the first of its sort in the Northeast, and it's currently being developed for application all over the country.

"I responded immediately to the beautiful quality of the material as well as its permeable capabilities," Ms. Ball said. "I think there is a lot more that can be done with it."

The informational signs overlooking the creek describe the plants and wildlife found around the area, with one explaining how similar crushed oyster shells -- which were used as gravel historically on the North Fork -- are to modern permeable pavement.

Environmental advocates Marylou Stewart and Alina Wilczynski traveled from Rocky Point to Mattituck to witness Waterwash's unveiling.

"We've got runoff coming a mile and a half away from [Route] 25A into the Sound, and something needs to be done," Ms Stewart said of her town. "We're very much involved in educating people about conservation efforts. We'd love to implement something like this."

Southold Town Trustee Jimmy King, who lives on Mattituck Inlet and works as a lobsterman, said that the water quality of the creek and inlet have improved "dramatically" over the 14 years he's been testing it -- "and it's because of these runoff projects," he said.

Mr. King compared the Waterwash project to an innovative boat he and his father built 40 years ago.

"This is a special day for me, because 40 years ago today, my dad and I laid the keel for that boat, which had a very unusual hull shape and the method of construction wasn't the norm around here," he said. "This project reminds me of that -- and that boat turned out to be one of the best vessels in this creek.

"I hope the same can be said about this years down the road."

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FEATURED VIDEO



Waterwash at Mattituck Creek



RANDEE DADDONA PHOTO With Southold Supervisor Scott Russell looking on, Lillian Ball uses a bucket of water to demonstrate how her 'Waterwash' project at the head of Mattituck Inlet helps prevent storm-water runoff, which can carry a multitude of pollutants, from reaching local coastal waters.