The Dairy Farm Chronology

In mid-2010, Karyn Molines, supervisor of cultural resources, Recreation and Parks Department in the County, gave a presentation on a vast plot of land that had been leased to the County. The presentation impressed us, of course. The County had a 30-year lease on this large property, and the Master Gardeners were invited to participate in transforming it into a park, one that eventually could be a singular feature of the County. What an opportunity! 857 acres! Specimen trees! Panoramic unspoiled fields! Acres and acres of rolling pasture full of Maryland history! We - Susan Knisely, Sue Owens, and I, Elizabeth Matarese - decided it was just the kind of project we wanted. We set to making plans. The collaboration was harmonious, as we shared Karyn’s enthusiasm and embrace of the challenges that lay ahead. But! First things first. We had a process in place in the Master Gardener Program, which meant getting a proposal on the table and getting it approved.

Our proposal took shape after several meetings where we plotted priorities and scoped out possibilities. We visited the site and helped with the “Dairy Farm’s Open House” activities. We looked at topographic charts, maps supplied by the Recreation and Parks’ consultants, and documents that contained the locations of specimen trees. And then one day we visited the sites in earnest to select what would actually be the first project. Traipsing around the Dairy Farm brought us to a spot that looked like a natural beginning. A stand of holly trees stood entangled in vines and briars. It also featured a few specimen trees, and it was a relatively accessible area. We decided to make this “the spot.”

The beginning of a project always requires vision, hard work, and energy. And recruiting like-minded individuals who share, optimistically, the view that nothing is impossible…that even briars, poison ivy, and Mile-a-Minute can be quelled! We were joined by Malcolm Doying, whose ability to assess workload is daunting. He became our fourth co-chair and offered the kind of insights we needed as well.

In 2011, the annual meeting gave us an opportunity to recruit other Master Gardeners who could roll up their sleeves and see the potential beauty of what we ultimately called “The Holly Glen.” Below, Susan Knisely shares the plan that will shape our first effort at creating space among the specimen trees, including the stand of hollies.

When we first came to “The Holly Glen,” we could barely find it! The vines and poison ivy, the briars, the weeds….so overwhelming! We crawled into the “Glen,” carrying loppers, garden saws, and various tools.
Inch by inch, we cleared small areas around several holly trees, revealing a beautiful place that held great promise. The hollies were natives (Ilex opaca) and had been there for, probably, 30-40 years at least. They had survived, despite the onslaught of these pesky invasives. The briars were the worst: a tangle of roots, criss-crossing and girdling one another, strengthening their hold on the soil by branching out and claiming one another’s roots and those of the trees. Vines hanging from the branches added an Amazon aura to the place. The mile-a-minute was creepy and sticky, and the beech and hickory trees had evidently done a good job of feeding the squirrels and other animals, for nutshells abounded. Undaunted and focused, we set to work. The interest in the Dairy Farm grew, as more and more Master Gardeners joined the project and pitched in with energy and tools to tame the place. Workdays became routine: Second Saturday, Third Thursday...each month. In between, several Master Gardeners put in extra days, as the Farm had Open House Sundays, and it was apparent that a little sprucing up around the Pavilion might be helpful in making the place more welcoming. We also got an “official photographer” and a “Newsletter reporter.” Things began to take on a structure that was functioning pretty well.

Eventually, we got control of a wide area. The briars were most persistent, but we persevered. And we won. With chips donated by local tree service companies, we created the first of our paths. We realized one day that we really had accomplished a lot when we compared before and after pictures. The picture (above left) shows how dense the vines and briars were around the stand of hollies. The pictures (above middle and right) show our first clearing and what we had to remove. Below left: compare this with the picture to its right. Just a slightly different angle, but the large tree is the same in both pictures. With having cleared the area and chipped it, we opened up a place that’s cool and inviting. What a difference!

One of our most memorable days was when we planted the first of our natives: ferns, spicebush, lobelia, ginger, and many other native herbaceous perennials. We also got Serviceberry, Magnolias, Redbuds, and Arrowwood Viburnums. Additions over the next two years included ground covers, Paw-Paws, buttonbushes, Sedums,
various wildflowers, phlox, campanula, and bald cypress. Our ferns have fared the best. Maybe it’s Sue Owens’ touch? Below left is a photo of Sue planting New York ferns. The companion plants contributed by Debbie Werre have also flourished, and soon the goldenrod and the Blue Mist will add even more color. Below right: Debbie with a portion of the plants she has donated from her native plants garden. All our plants are labeled and marked. We continually add to the plantings, and we continually weed as well. We have enlarged the space and created a new complementary space under two large trees across from the Holly Glen. In the middle photo, Paul McCauley looks up from his work in what we named the “Copse.”

We continue to remove invasives: the Mile-a-Minute does not give up easily! And we have learned valuable lessons about the need to protect our saplings from the deer! Especially during rutting season. With help from the Recreations and Parks Department and the Fish and Wildlife Service, we have made a lot of progress.

These hollies have endured! Limbing them and removing the vines that hid them have made a dramatic difference in their appearance.

We have had some of the most talented and generous help in our efforts. Like Chris Coates – Arborist, on the right in this photo, who gave us plenty of advice in caring for our trees.

Two of the greatest “Friends of the Dairy Farm” have been Tom and Anita Dorr. Tom’s unstinting help in moving loads of chips and helping with events at the Dairy Farm have earned him “Honorary Member of the Dairy Farm Project.” Bartlett provided the wood chips; Tom delivered them to various locations of our Holly Glen and Copse. And here we are!
As more Dairy Farm projects arise, we realize we have expanded our view of the Farm and our responsibilities. We have taken on the weeding and restoration of the Pavilion gardens. Below right are the Bodnant Viburnums, beautiful specimens that Jacqui Rouse and Elizabeth Matarese researched and identified. The Pavilion is one of the first places a visitor encounters, and naturally, the Dairy Farm committee wanted to ensure that the Farm would make a good first impression. In addition, the Village Garden, which adjoins the new Extension Offices needed rehabilitation. With a Design Competition as a vehicle for getting the best possible set of ideas, the Dairy Farm committee members are now engaged in phase 1 of implementing Tony Smouse’s winning design plan. Tony, a landscape architect and Master Gardener, is overseeing the project with critical help from the Village Garden Group, an integral part of the Dairy Farm Committee. Harry Caldwell, Carole Fullagar, Maida Bilson, Rosemary Council, and Susan Smouse have led the effort.

The Pavilion provides a convenient meeting place and shade in the summer. Bayberry bushes at the front of the building feature aromatic bayberries, while the Bodnant Viburnums, in the photo at right, were planted many years ago on both sides of the building. Master Gardeners have weeded and mulched the gardens to make it attractive and welcoming.

Pruning the Bayberry bushes at the rear of the Pavilion and weeding the garden required many hands. In the end, Ed Fry of Sunrise Organic Farm (holding a chain, in the photo at right) used his machine to extricate stubborn Ailanthus saplings that had invaded the garden. The garden is planted now in native perennials, including a variety of ferns, sedums, geraniums, and Tiarella.

The Village Garden has been quite a challenge. The Dairy Farm Committee weeded it twice again this past year. Using horticultural vinegar has proved somewhat effective in holding back the growth of weeds, but the Committee really looks forward to the eventual makeover represented by the Design Plan. In the meantime, over the past two years, the Village Garden Group has cleared most of the gardens and removed vines that had covered the wall of the building across from the Extension Office. Rebuilding portions of the landscape at the front of the Office involved setting new timbers and buying plants to replace the Fennel and Helianthus that overran the gardens. At the end of March, the Extension Office moved to the new address: 97 Dairy Farm Road. Several other offices are now located there as well. It’s a bucolic setting, appropriate for people who are enamored of things agricultural and horticultural, and it’s peaceful and quiet.
As one of the highlights of the 2012-2013 Dairy Farm Committee “year,” the Village Garden Design Competition enabled us to identify the talented among us. Contributions from all the competitors went into the final design, but the winning Design, by Tony Smouse, has given us long-range goals and a new kind of patience for implementing the plan in phases.

From the start, the remaking of the Village Garden has been a lot of work. Though we cleared the area of weeds, it was never permanently weed-free, a discouraging turn of events. We got the area looking neat and clean twice, like this:

And we turned areas around the Extension Office into places that enhanced the entrance. Below left: Stage 1; Below right: Stage 2

However, the work continues, as the relentless weeds have shown no mercy, as this photo of the Village Garden on the left proves. The Extension Office is looking good, and as the photo on the right – the Finished Product - shows, it has been worth all the energy and time invested in it.
There are many Master Gardeners involved in the Dairy Farm effort. There are also many people who have helped us accomplish the weeding, gardening, planting, mulching, chipping, and cleaning. They have been there when we needed them. They have been there to help us do things that required generous and unwavering support. The Midshipmen from the Naval Academy did the kind of work only young people can do! The Girl Scouts helped get the Copse under control. Tom Dorr came often to help us spread wood chips. Chris Coates gave us advice about our trees, John Jordan and Ed Fry were reliable in making sure we had what we needed for getting our bags of weeds picked up and Ailanthus and errant saplings removed. Marian Fry worked with us to ensure we maintained the integrity of the organic farm. There is one person, though, who stood by us when we really needed to get things done. For her timely, wonderful, and unstinting support, we salute Barbara Polito, who wanted to see our efforts succeed and always went the next step to help us achieve our goals. She joined us whenever she could; she made arrangements with us for getting supplies, and she watched as the gardens came to life.
The Future! The next episode has begun. The Village Garden construction begins June 13th and consists of phases, under the management of several Master Gardeners. Tony Smouse, Harry Caldwell, Malcolm Doying, and a number of Master Gardeners who will plant and transplant for the next couple of months, are taking over what was the Marketplace at the Farm. The transformation we envision brings together the salient elements of the Master Gardener Program.

The Design provides for all the activities in which Master Gardeners are engaged: educational sessions, demonstration gardens of various types, and a really cool place to gather. This is just the beginning of the Master Gardener imprint on The Dairy Farm.