

Soak it up!

WHEN WATER SOAKS IN, WE ALL WIN

Faces Behind The Soak It Up! Project. Meet Judd Steinback, Lead Contractor.

BY AMY SMITH, NEW GROUND

Coulee Region Ecoscapes is a key player in making the Habitat ReStore property a place to learn about good stormwater management. In an interview with NewGround, founder Judd Steinback talks about how important this kind of work is for our community and why this is not *just* another job for him.

So did you know you wanted to do this project right away?

Oh yea. This is without doubt one of the coolest projects we have ever done.

What makes it cool for you?

First of all, we get to fix a space that was constructed improperly. It was done in a way that was creating pretty significant pollution from stormwater. With this project, we're reducing it almost fully.

That's insane. Almost fully?

Yea. On top of that, we're creating a beautiful space with recreational areas and edible gardens. This site is going to be like a mecca for birds, insects, other wildlife and even people.

Have you noticed changes over the last few years in people wanting to have more sustainable landscaping?

Oh yea. Absolutely. Almost all of our customers now are calling us because they don't want toxic chemicals used on their property. Our organic lawn care business is growing faster than we can keep up with it. We're literally turning people away.

What drives you crazy when it comes to things people do with their lawns?

Ugh...every time I see a flag that says "Pesticide Application. Keep Off Lawn" it's incredibly frustrating. With all the evidence out there, proving how bad these pesticides are for people and our environment I just don't understand why we keep applying them the way we do.

What are easy fixes people in our area can do to make their yards more environmentally friendly?

Use less processed, more local materials. Stop using concrete blocks that get processed and trucked around numerous times. Just use a natural rock. And, stop using colored mulch. Natural mulch has no toxic dyes and is actually less expensive.

You donated a bunch of your time to the Soak It Up project. Why?

Well, this project fits perfectly with what our business is all about, which is not exclusively about making money. We want to do work that has a direct impact on our local environment. Plus, our community needs this. We have been, and will continue to send customers to the ReStore to see just how easily positive changes can be made. This is exactly what we want to be doing with our time.

What's the Habitat ReStore going to look like in the future?

Oh man, it's gonna be great. You'll start seeing things flower next year. There will be this crazy season of interest by mid-summer. It will look amazing and you'll be able to harvest all of the edible plants! It's going to be really incredible! We'll provide food and educate our community for years to come.

Ballpark...what does something like this cost a homeowner and how much labor can they expect?

For your average family, if it's something they really want to do, it would not be a huge financial burden. There's a lot of digging, so be ready to sweat or rent a small excavator. Then you're going to have to purchase some plants. The more plants in a rain garden, the better, but do what your budget allows.



The La Crosse Urban Stormwater Group and Habitat For Humanity are inspiring homeowners, small businesses, and other property owners to *Soak It Up!* At the Habitat ReStore 4 biofilters (shallow rain gardens), 5 rain barrels, 700 native plants, 3 raised garden beds, 2 edible food plots, a berm, a small plum orchard, and a picnic area have been installed. Regrading to manage water runoff around the building has also been completed, and permeable pavement is up next!

For more information, email amy.smith@onnewground.com or visit www.lacrossewaters.org/newstormwater.asp