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Use of ‘green’ materials deemed a winning idea for home on Elkhart Lake

As winter settles in for its long stay in Ozaukee County, John Zauch of Forever Green landscaping spends much of his time plowing snow and clearing ice from driveways.

But it was work the Saukville company did this summer that earned it a national landscaping recognition.

The company received the 2009 Unilock Award of Excellence during an award ceremony held last month in Chicago.

The landscaping design competition drew 170 entries from throughout the Midwest.

Zauch has been in business for 17 years, supported by a crew that includes the expertise of his wife Janet and son Joshua.

The award recognizes work the company did on an Elkhart Lake vacation home owned by Port Washington residents Tom and Jane Veale.

The house, which tops a bluff overlooking the lake and a private park, sat unfinished for more than two years after its original owner died during the construction process.

The Veales made several visits to the property, but felt the asking price was unrealistically high.

“We were talking a pre-real estate bubble price,” Tom Veale said.

Eventually, the price fell enough that Veale could see the potential the house and lot had as a convenient getaway.

A steep grade on a 55-foot bluff made landscaping a challenge, but Veale had an idea who to turn to.

“John (Zauch) had done some work for us at our home Port and did a real nice job,” Veale said.

Working from pencil sketches and grading plans, Zauch and Veale came up with a design to create a brick walkway and a terraced patio area.

Those plans met stiff resistance from Sheboygan County officials, who keep tight reins on construction within shoreland areas. Based on the house size and lot, the county would not allow the creation of a patio on the property.

“We were told we could level the site but it could only be grass or gravel, and we couldn’t call it a patio,” Veale said.

That’s when Zauch got the inspiration to use new, permeable pavers marketed by Unilock called Eco-Priora that allow stormwater to sink into the ground naturally.

Originally designed for use in parking lots and driveways where runoff is a concern, Zauch said the permeable pavers are perfect for environmentally sensitive sites, like the lake property.

“The material is designed to handle as much as a 100-year rainfall without pooling. I’ve used a garden hose on the walks, and the water just seeps through,” Veale said.

Water flow was a crucial concern on the property, because the house was built without gutters. Drip lines were incorporated into the landscaping plan to handle the rain falling off the sloped roof.

Eventually, the county relented after Veale brought Zauch and a representative from Unilock to an appearance before the Board of Zoning Appeals.

“The county was so impressed with the permeable block, they want us to come back and give a one-year update to tell how it has worked out,” Veale said.

The initial construction process took about two months, including the creation of a substantial raised seating area, followed by another month of finish work.

“The walkway has a soldier course of red brick surrounding a herringbone pattern made from the block. There are not a lot of straight edges so a lot of cutting of stone was required,” Veale said.

Attention was given to the design, to save as many natural features as possible — including mature trees.

Among the decorative touches, lighted pillars were added along the pathways with some “nifty foot lights” Veale said.

“Everything worked out just as planned. Not only does John deserve the award because it looks so good, but it is also very low maintenance,” he said.

Zauch said he takes the greatest satisfaction is using an eco-friendly product to dovetail with the beautiful, natural setting.

“It was fixing his problem with house, but also had a green aspect which essentially recycles the rainwater before it got into the lake,” he said.

FOREVER GREEN LANDSCAPING of Saukville received the 2009 Unilock Award of Excellence for its innovative work on an Elkhart Lake property owned by Tom and Jane Veale of Port Washington. The plan included permeable block on the walkway and patio, intended to prevent surface runoff from emptying into the lake.