

Earth Day event honors Fisher, tree preservation

By **BETTY WUND**
Special to the Star and Wave

VILLAS — Encouraging a relationship between art and trees was the focus of an Earth Day celebration at the historic Fishing Creek School during an event April 22-24.

The event displayed photos of trees, tree art, poetry and a wall dedicated to Ruth Fisher, a local well-known environmental activist who died in March. She was the organizer of the first Earth Day celebration in Cape May County in 1976.

There were activities, exhibits and demonstrations to “honor” trees at the schoolhouse. Artists, writers and photographers displayed their work dedicated to trees. The walls were covered with photographs of favorite trees and tree scenes. Janet McShein read her poem entitled “Earth Day 2016.” Music was provided by harpist Teri Hislop.

Laura Babbish demonstrated the art of bonsai. On the staff at the Seagrove Garden Center in Ocean View, she was a resident of the schoolhouse when it was a summer home. She said she practiced the art while spending summers there with her family between its use as a schoolhouse and a township historic site. Her grandmother bought



Betty Wund/Special to the STAR AND WAVE

Laura Babbish demonstrates the art of bonsai during an Earth Day celebration at the historic Fishing Creek School in the Villas section of Lower Township.

the house from the school district in 1928. An avid gardener, her grandmother had a massive display of foliage and trees on the property. Babbish said she remembered a Victorian garden in the front of the building.

Bonsai is the art of bringing together life, simplicity and harmony, Babbish said. By her demonstration, it was clear even to the beginner that bonsai is relaxing and has few rules. It lets the pruner do the pruning as freely as they wish, tak-

ing into account the spots where new growth will occur. It was one of the demonstrations that fulfilled the purpose of the exhibits to be interactive, inspirational and educational, which is also the purpose of activities that go on at the Fishing Creek School.

On a wall in the schoolhouse was a tree symbol where visitors could pin bills as a donation to the Aquarian Project. The funds will be used to place plaques on trees in the area that are

100 or more years old. Members of the Aquarian Project have been documenting old trees on private properties and putting plaques in front of them to discourage future property owners from cutting them down. An oak tree that has stood from the late 1600s when the Ludlam farm of 5,000 acres was intact was recently documented by an arborist. The “Olde Ludlam Oak” on Route 47, at Delsea Drive and Oak Lane in Dennisville, is one that will have a plaque. It was found to be 12 feet in circumference at 6 feet high.

By the mission statement of the Aquarian Project, it “encourages the relationship between art and nature. By participating in the tree theme, the artists have focused on individual ways of seeing through various forms and mediums with sincere intentions to share their personal experiences and observations, encouraging a better awareness of the treasures of tree life growing among us in respect for their significant presence.”

Cheryl Crews, spokeswoman for the project, said that with more and more development in the area, many old trees have been lost. The project wants to protect as many as possible for future generations. It

even encourages the replanting of seedlings from the old trees to perpetuate their lineage.

The exhibit, about the life of Fisher and her accomplishments, filled a wall of the building. Fisher founded Sun People and organized the People’s Energy Conference in 1973. She raised awareness of the practices that would harm the environment in the county by attending meetings and questioning local authorities on decisions she felt would

harm the environment. Fisher was president of Citizens for the Protection of the Environment (CAPE), which worked to make municipalities take steps to eliminate the application of herbicides and pesticides, stop aerial spraying for mosquitoes and stop the use of glyphosate for the elimination of phragmites. They campaigned against nuclear power plants and mass burn incineration.

JCP&L containment wall complete

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removal of soil at a depth of 2 feet throughout the fenced-in containment area. The fresh soil will be seeded and temporary fencing and equipment removed. The dog park will reopen from mid-May until about mid-October, when the crew will return for the next phase of the remedial work, MacLeod said at a previous City Council meeting.

The former manufactured gas plant site is owned by Jersey Central Power and Light (JCP&L), which inherited the property through a series of mergers. MacLeod said the sidewalk in front of the worksite on Lafayette Street suffered some damage and will be replaced by JCP&L in its entirety from the corner of St. John’s Street to the end of the worksite toward Cape May City Elementary School.

Two gazebos were moved to allow the remediation work, one in the city’s dog park and another in Wise-Anderson Park.

“At the present time, there is an offer to either replace in kind with a new one or to give us some financial consideration for the city to replace either one and/or both,” MacLeod said.

From 1853 to 1937, the gas plant burned coal to provide Cape May with gas for heating, cooking and lighting. In the process, benzene, naphthalene and other chemicals were left underground.

The second phase of remediation will begin after the summer season and will be completed by summer 2017, JCP&L Environmental Project Engineer Frank Lawson said at an information session in January.

He said the overall project “would continue to do groundwater treatment basically in perpetuity.” Little will be visible above ground when the remediation installation project is completed. An above ground



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

The primary containment wall has been installed at the site of the former manufactured gas plant at Lafayette and St. Johns streets and workers now are excavating the ground surface material and soil and replacing it with certified clean soil.

structure about the size of a garden shed will house equipment, Lawson said.

“It just continually runs. We have people once a week come check it out,” he said.

Initial plans called for five subsurface vaults measuring 10 feet by 10 feet filled with charcoal to decontaminate ground water, but that has been reduced to a small treatment system housed in a 20 foot by 40 foot building.

Phase two includes remediation of the wetlands, David Caballero, an engineer with Arcadis Design and Consultancy, said in January.

Caballero said a pipe leading to the wetlands will be removed and second containment wall will be built in the second phase. Pumping will be taking place inside the first containment wall.

“Then we have these extraction wells on the outside that will allow us to collect water. It will

prevent any water from seeping down into the wetlands,” he said.

Current plans call for discharging the treated water onto land and letting it infiltrate.

“The water is under DEP permits, so it has to be clean,” Caballero said.

“That water will actually go back to feed the wetlands,” he said.

Lawson said extraction wells would pump the material back into the treatment system so anything that may be beyond what was the original site can be captured.

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