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Wednesday, August 16, 2023

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PETER CIHELKA PHOTOS, THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Marilynn Mendell enjoys the various colors and fragrances found in her pollinator garden, behind her home in downtown Fredericksburg.

Local gardener honored for protecting species, spaces

Fredericksburg woman receives gold medal for her conservation efforts

CATHY DYSON
The Free Lance-Star

Marilynn Mendell is a lot like the pollinator garden she faithfully tends at her Fredericksburg home.

She is a lifeline to birds and bees just like the fragrant viburnums and Dutchman's breeches, witch hazels and winter white camellias in her midst. She purposely picks them and other plants for her backyard — as well as for about 15 other private and public greenspaces she's helped preserve over the decades — not just for their beauty and aroma, but also for the nourishment they provide to monarch and swallowtail butterflies, Luna moths and native bees.

"I'm looking to attract, not just insects, not just butterflies



The garden's varied flowers, shrubs and trees appeal to many different species of birds, bees and butterflies.

or bees, but birds year-round," she said, asking visitors if they've seen a single mosquito during their visit. She's not surprised they haven't.

"If you plant properly and you take care of and you feed the birds, they eat the insects, which they're supposed to do and then you don't have a mosquito prob-

lem," she said. "You don't have rodent problems because the birds eat all the seeds."

Mendell's interests in life also are as varied as the color palette in her garden, which explodes in different hues each season. Amsonia has blue flowers in the spring then turns bright yellow in the fall; the paper bush

blooms in December with white blossoms on top and yellow inside, and the blossoms fill the garden with fragrance on warm winter days.

Efforts to save the earth have always topped her list, especially in her ongoing public relations work, but she's also an author and artist, activist and educator, environmentalist, fungi finder and trash-picker-upper.

"I am one of those wacko people," she said, waving her arms in the air, "a Greenpeace person because somebody's got to do it. I clean up trash every single Monday (on her regular walk through Battlefield National Park). I'm not looking for a pat on the back for doing this. I'm doing it because it's the right thing to do."

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WATCH: Marilynn's Garden. Point your phone at the QR code and click on the link.
NEWSVU

Ga. case presents complex challenges

Former president and several allies indicted this week

KATE BRUMBACK
Associated Press

ATLANTA — Putting 19 people on trial at the same time is a difficult assignment for any prosecutor — whether or not one of those defendants is a former president of the United States running to reclaim his old office.

The sprawling racketeering indictment returned this week by a grand jury in Atlanta presents a wide range of challenges. A big one is political: Finding jurors who don't have unshakeable opinions about Donald Trump and others in his orbit.

Beyond that, with so many defendants, prosecutors and defense lawyers will labor to keep the names and conflicting stories straight for those jurors over weeks or months. There will be countless legal details and basic logistics to argue or work out — even down to finding a courtroom big enough to fit everyone.

In an early example of the lengthy litigation ahead, lawyers for former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows filed a quick motion Tuesday to transfer the case from state to federal court. They said all the actions he took were in service to his White House role, foreshadowing an argument that the Constitution makes him immune from prosecution.

Please see **TRUMP**, Page A9

City murder charge sent to grand jury

Preliminary hearing held for suspect in late March slaying

KEITH EPPS
The Free Lance-Star

Gardener

From A1

Her lifetime of work has earned the 76-year-old an honor she considers the greatest of her life. Mendell recently received a gold medal in conservation from the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She's conservation chair of the Washington-Lewis chapter based in Fredericksburg.

"To get a national award from the DAR is a pretty big deal," said Susan Wachter, regent of the local chapter. "They don't give them out willy-nilly, they're pretty thorough."

Wachter submitted a packet of information about an inch and a half thick, documenting Mendell's conservation work. Because Mendell is a self-described "organized hoarder," she had saved newspaper clippings about just about every effort she's undertaken in the past 50 years. As Wachter looked over them, she realized Mendell probably qualified for national gold awards in several categories for her various achievements.

"She is a wonderful unsung hero in our community," Wachter said. "She does so much and she's not one of those people who toots her own horn."

'Lead by example'

If Mendell did want to toot that horn, just a little, she'd say how thrilled she is to be 76 and the woman in her family who's lived the longest, going back several generations. She's also proud that she continues to work with her public relations business, WinSpin CIC, which stands for Creative Intelligence Consulting. She travels to Wash-



PETER CIHELKA THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Marilynn Mendell eats breakfast every morning on the closed-in porch that looks out on her pollinator garden. Here, she describes the Edgeworthia chrysantha, or paper bush, that blooms in December and fills the garden with fragrance on warm winter days.

ington or Richmond several days a week and has no plans to slow down.

"I'm not retiring either," she said. "It keeps me alive."

She only works with clients who meet her criteria.

"If they're not doing something to save the earth, I'm not working with them," she said. "I'm not going to work for an oil company or something like that."

Lisa Delplace is the principal and CEO emeritus at Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, a Washington-based landscape architectural firm known for its focus on sustainability. In a two-page letter to the NSDAR, Delplace praised Mendell for her commit-

ment to collaborations with various partners, her keen insights and her ability to connect people with the natural world.

After Mendell's home garden in Buffalo, New York, became certified as a backyard habitat by the National Wildlife Foundation, Mendell looked to do the same, but on a much larger scale.

In 1998, she "single-handedly" approached the New York governor to allow ArtPark, a state park that links Canada and the United States on the Niagara River, to also become a certified backyard habitat, Delplace said. Her efforts resulted in the site's 412 acres being saved, in perpetuity, from development.

"She worked tirelessly to se-

cure a major citizen science grant from the National Science Foundation and organized 400 volunteers to map and complete the program's requirements," Delplace wrote in her recommendation. "Her success protected the International Bird Flyway in perpetuity and set a precedent for other parks as the first state park to be designated as such."

Mendell didn't stop there. She partnered with others, including Cornell's Lab of Ornithology, to organize an event that raised \$200,000 for the project.

While that effort is one of several on a national scale, Delplace believes Mendell's "most endearing attribute is her ability

to lead by example."

'One project at a time'

That's why Mendell regularly walks in the woods along Lee Drive, picking up trash and looking for mushrooms. She's studied fungi for 50 years and would never consider herself an expert. But she is determined to educate others about their benefits, as well as their dangers because many edible fungi look a whole lot like their poisonous counterparts.

That's why she hands out cards, printed with photos of species she's found, with those she meets in the woods or at her many speaking engagements.

She might talk about fungi to audiences as large as 5,000 people or a few dozen gathered at the Fredericksburg Food Co-op. She has a booth at local Earth Day events, more than 8,000 followers on social media and a quarterly newsletter she shares with more than 6,000 people that reviews books about nature and naturalists.

"Marilynn Mendell is an effective advocate for saving the earth, which she accomplishes by implementing a focused strategy of one project at a time," wrote Richard Piacentini, president and CEO of Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh.

He said her original inspiration came from the work of Margaret Mead and Rachel Carson, which set her on a course to spend more than half a century, working to protect threatened species and spaces.

"Marilynn not only talks about conservation, she also lives it," Piacentini wrote, "and she inspires others to do so as well."

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