

by Nicole Pensiero

Healing Gardens

Seeing more than just pretty flowers.

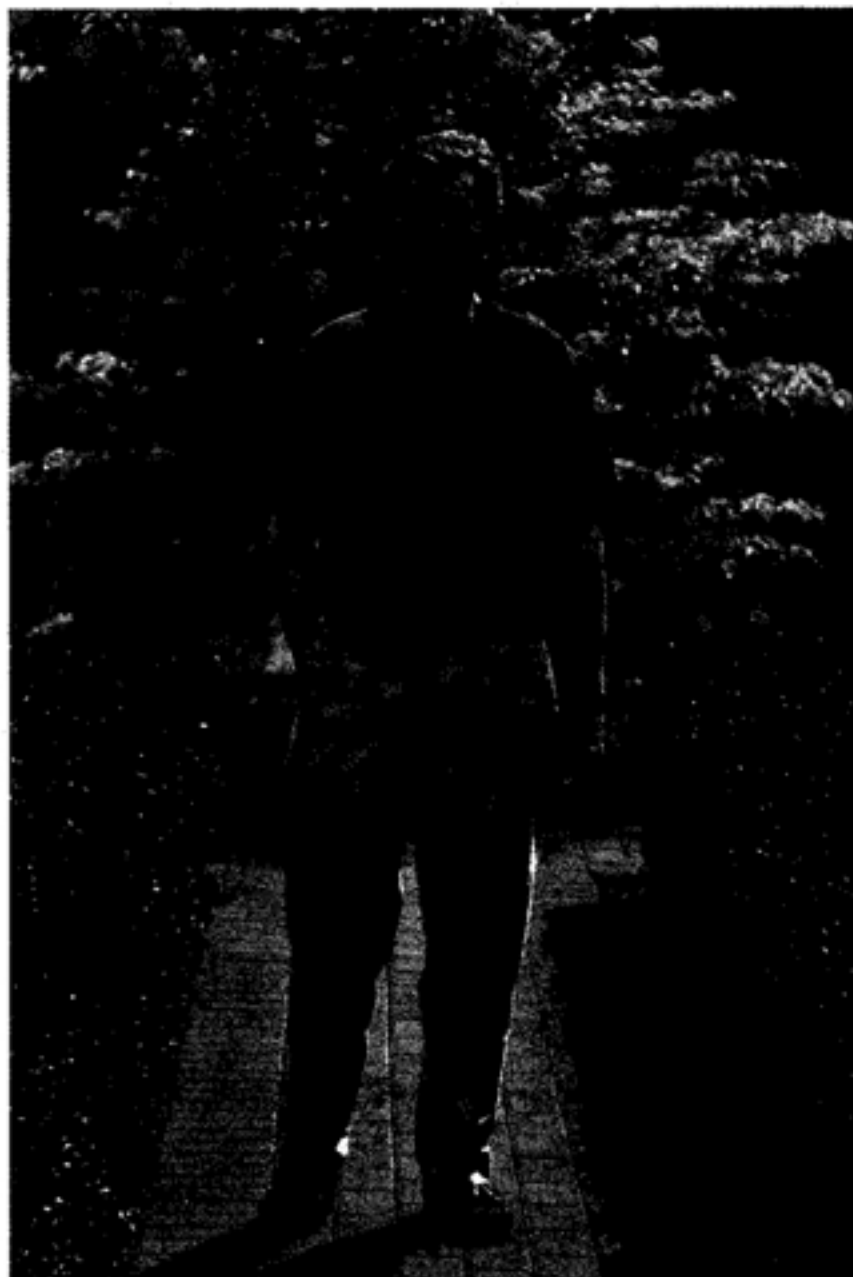
Medford resident Jack Carman is a Landscape Architect who specializes in therapeutic gardens for continuing care retirement communities, adult day care centers, as well as for private individuals. Jack spoke with us about his unique work.

1. How do you explain landscape architecture?

Well, it's the design of the outdoor environment, much like architects create buildings, landscape architects create outdoor "rooms," spaces in an outdoor environment. There's a wide variety of projects for landscape architects; I have a specialty creating therapeutic gardens in healthcare settings and for private citizens.

2. What drew you to landscape architecture?

I always had an interest in nature and gardens, something that was instilled in me by my grandfather, who was head of the Parks Department on Staten Island, New York, where I grew up. I used to work with him as a kid raising vegetables and working in his rose garden. Because of his job and his interest in gardening, we were around plants a lot, or involved in plant-related activities. But I didn't pursue the career until later. I got my first college degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Richmond (VA), and worked for several years as a middle school teacher in Staten Island. When I reached my early 30s, I decided to go back and get my degree in landscape architecture. I picked Rutgers because I'd heard the program was excellent and I was on Staten Island, so I could commute. During that time, I worked in a plant nursery to help pay for my classes.



Landscape Architect Jack Carman.

3. How did you become interested in therapeutic gardens?

I credit my wife Nancy, a gerontologist, who offered my help to work with a Cherry Hill daycare program for Alzheimer's patients. The director at the time wanted to develop a garden for the clients so they could go outside during the day. She understood the needs of patients with Alzheimer's and I understood gardens, so that's how it started. The goal was to create something safe; an attractive outdoor environment that would be pretty, and feel familiar – like their backyard, not like a public park. A garden with birdfeeders and wind chimes and birdbaths. This was back in 1998 and it was my first project of this type. With that project, I saw the need for these kinds of gardens and that was the beginning of it. I was totally self-taught. Since then, I've created more than 80 landscape plans for facilities in 12 states. This includes more than 30 specialty gardens for people with dementia.

4. What specifically makes a garden therapeutic or healing?

What makes it therapeutic are the healing properties of nature itself. There are particular benefits people derive from being in nature. These benefits are physical, psychological, social and spiritual. Research has shown that there's a lowering of stress, and a reduction in blood pressure when people have access to nature. People sleep better and eat better. Learning how to create healing gardens is a wonderful process because each project is collaborative; you take into account who will be using the garden and what their needs are. My goal is to create

