

Sunday, June 07, 2009

The green pest has landed

By Ken Francis
Staff Writer



ADULT EMERALD Ash Borer. (University of Michigan Photo.)

It was only a matter of time.

The emerald ash borer (EAB) is here in Minnesota, and it has residents all across the state guessing when the creature will show up in their own backyard.

"We're just getting bombarded with calls," says Brenda Postels, Agriculture and Horticulture Technical Advisor with the University of Minnesota Extension Service in Wright County. "I think everybody in the county who has an ash tree is concerned."

The emerald ash borer is native to eastern Russia, northern China, Japan, and Korea. Before it was discovered in Michigan in June of 2002, it had never been found in North America. But since that time it has spread to 10 states and Canada and has killed millions of ash trees.

It was detected in St. Paul May 13. Since then, the city has cut down dozens of infected trees and more healthy trees are slated for removal in hopes of preventing the spread of the insect.

The adult EAB is a beetle dark metallic green in color, 1/3 to 1/2 inch-long and 1/8 inch wide. Adults lay eggs on the tree. The eggs hatch and burrow into the wood, creating "S" shaped galleries.

The larvae continue to feed throughout the fall and spend winter under the bark. In spring, the adult beetles will create D shaped exit holes about 1/8" in diameter and the cycle begins again.

Adults are known to be able to fly at least a half mile from the tree where they emerge. But because of the rate it has spread, it is believed the EAB was helped along when people moved infested ash nursery trees, logs, or firewood into uninfested areas.

Spread Continues

Now that the EAB has reached Minnesota, it is anticipated it will continue to spread. Minnesota has over 900 million ash trees, the second highest number in the U.S. behind Maine.

Postels says the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture has trained about 200 people as first detectors. Those detectors can go out and inspect a site if the symptoms appear to be those associated with the EAB.

So far, all of the calls (and a few visits) Postels has gotten were not the EAB. A few were cases of ash flower gall, a 1/2 to one inch round growth caused by the eriophyid mite.

But most of the calls are the result of drought.

"We've been in a drought for three or four years. Our trees each year are getting more and more stressed," says Postels, "and we're seeing lot more problems because the trees are already stressed."

It's the same in Sherburne County. The most common symptom people see is drooping leaves throughout the tree - a sign the tree isn't getting enough water.

But a tree infested with the EAB will show thinning at the top of the canopy first and then migrate downward.

"The larvae feed on the inner bark and disrupt the flow of water to the tree," says Gina Hugo, Resource Conservationist with Sherburne Soil & Water Conservation District. "There is no water getting to the crown."

Hugo says she hasn't received many calls yet about the EAB. Many have been oak-related. Most ash trees in the county are in the floodplain or have been planted as shade trees in residential areas.

Replacement

But with the EAB in Minnesota, people will be looking to plant other types of shade trees.

Steve Eid of Steve's Elk River Nursery, says he started to cut back on planting ash trees a few years ago as the EAB continued its move west.

"We were aware it was possible it would make it to Minnesota," he says. "Until last year it was still several hundred miles away."

But if history is any indication of the path EAB will take, ash trees will begin to disappear from the landscape. Eid says now they are recommending a variety of other types of trees, like autumn blaze maple, emerald cluster maple and linden.

If a case of EAB infestation is confirmed, the MN

Dept. of Agriculture would set up a quarantine area and begin inspecting trees within a one-mile radius, says Hugo. Many would likely be felled, as has been the case in many quarantine areas.

So far, even with quarantines, attempts to stop the spread have had limited success. Ultimately, the EAB has continued to make its way into new territory.

After its discovery in Michigan and Ontario in 2002, it was found in Ohio in 2003, northern Indiana in 2004, northern Illinois and Maryland in 2006, western Pennsylvania and West Virginia in 2007, Wisconsin, Missouri and Virginia in summer 2008, and Minnesota in the spring of 2009.

Options

Some companies are promoting pesticides that protect ash trees from the EAB. Others claim their products will kill the adult beetle and its larvae. But people should do their homework before purchasing chemicals. Some can be costly and ineffective, says Postels. And some trees might already be infested past the point of saving, regardless of how effective a product is.

"People are pretty passionate about their trees and they want to do something about it," she says.

Getting information first is the best procedure, says Postels, and there are plenty of websites dedicated to trees, pests and the EAB. The MN Dept. of Agriculture website has an EAB Prevention, Detection and Rapid Response page: mda.state.mn.us/plants/pestmanagement/eab.htm. There is even an "Arrest the Pest" hotline for anyone who suspects they have EAB in their ash trees (888-545-6684). Information about treatment options can be found at www.emeraldashborer.info.

Or residents can make local contact with Postels at the Wright County Extension office (763) 682-7394 or Hugo at Sherburne Soil & Water (763) 241-1170 ext. 3.

Sunday, June 07, 2009

Turnout slow for DNR boat checks

By Lynn Woolhouse
Staff Writer



JASON DROHER OF BIG LAKE had the DNR Axillary inspect his boat during the free boat inspections over the weekend. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)



DNR AUXILLARY MEMBER DON SEVERSON inspected Mitchell Lake resident Bob Walstrom's boat on Saturday. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)

It was a great effort by the DNR, Big Lake Community Lakes Association and Sherburne Soil and Water Saturday as they provided free boat inspections.

Of the 20 plus expected inspections, only 10 boat owners participated in the event.

"I was very happy that all of the agencies showed up on time and were prepared," said BLCLA member Jim Ridgeway.

The Coast Guard Auxillary; DNR Fisheries, DNR Enforcement, Sherburne Soil & Water as well as BLCLA Board Members all came to assist in the day's events.

"It is unfortunate that we didn't have community interest in the plant, fish, and water ecology portion of our event," said Ridgeway.

The Coast Guard Auxillary plans to return next year and provide an inspection service if the association requestes them to.

"We were disappointed with the turnout" said Ridgeway, "But we'll keep trying to meet expectations."

All boats that received a "passing" inspection are eligible to present their insurance company with the results for a discount on boat insurance.

About five to six thousand inspections are performed nationwide by the Coast Guard every year.

In the Minnesota metro, about 500 inspections will be done this season.

"We focus on safety, safety, safety," said CG Auxillary member Tom Keene.

"We like to do the patrols so we don't have to resort to search and rescue," he says.

Keene along with Don Severson, Don Lipsey and Vern Bauer were members of the CG Auxillary performing Saturday's vessel safety checks.

Sunday, June 14, 2009

Washington Ave. greenway spruced up by Cargill helpers

By Lynn Woolhouse
Staff Writer



CARGILL VOLUNTEERS ASSISTED THE SHERBURNE Soil and Water Conservation District Tuesday as they planted along the greenway of Washington Ave. Pictured, Gina Hugo, Nohemi Morales, Chad Kozitza and Carrie Heitz. Not pictured, Sara Sparks. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)

Sherburne Soil and Water finished the last of six projects along Big and Mitchell Lake this week as they planted along the Washington Ave. greenway.

Volunteers from Cargill helped Gina Hugo plant the upland shade of native grasses, shrubs and wildflowers Tuesday afternoon.

"The erosion wasn't too bad but it (the greenway) had bare soil," said Hugo.

"What we've planted will filter the runoff from the road from the lake," she explained.

The wet zone along the beach was also treated with a buffer, mulch and vegetation.

The city-owned greenway was able to be treated through a DNR grant, the same grant received by other lake land owners who applied.

"It's just really nice to have the coordination and volunteers to get these projects done," says Hugo.

Other lake land owners who received grants for restoration were the Knaebles, Ottens, Welshs and Robert Eddy.



Sunday, June 14, 2009

Community News

The Big Lake Public Library is offering the following programs at its new location, 790 Minnesota Ave., Big Lake:

Creative Craft Wed.- We will provide the supplies so you can express your creativity!

6/24 - decorate a hand held mask; 7/8 - paint a ceramic piggy bank; 7/22 - St. John's Arboetum will present their Art in Nature program. 2:30 p.m. for ages 6 -12; limit 30.

Quilting Volumes - all area quilters are invited to join! Bring your ideas, problems, questions and show & tell.

7/9 - Bring in your finished "Unusual Fabric" Challenge piece; 8/13 - the group will begin to plan for our community quilt.

2:30 to 3 p.m.; for adults, limit 20.

For more information, contact the Big Lake Public Library at 263-6445.

Big Lake Public Library • Hours Mon. 2-8, Wed. 2-6, Thurs. 2-6, Fri. 9-5, Sat. 10-1.

Tues., June 23, the Sherburne History Center in Becker will host its 2nd Annual Ice Cream Social and Fundraiser. This year's theme is a Swedish Midsummer Celebration including a real Swedish maypole. The History Center

will provide free Schwan's ice cream while supplies last and music will be provided by Ross Sutter and Cheryl Paschke of Minneapolis, sponsored by The Bank of Elk River.

There will be a scavenger hunt for kids with a \$3 entry fee (\$5 for two). The grand prize includes a \$50 savings bond and a \$25 cash card. The History Center will also be selling tasty and reasonably priced dinners of barbecued pork sandwiches from those pork chops of Elk River and hot dogs from McDonald's Meats in Clear Lake.

For more information call the History Center at 762-262-4433.

MBLH Auxiliary Fundraiser - Book Fair Fun will be held June 18 - 10 - 3; June 19 - 10 - 2. Main lobby of hospital. See you there!

The Sherburne County Rural Living Task Force is sponsoring a Shoreland Buffer Maintenance Class at Orono Park July 8, 5:30 to 8 p.m. Registration begins 5:30 p.m.

Grilled brats and sides will be served starting at 5:30 p.m. The class will be taught by Gina Hugo of the Sherburne Soil & Water Conservation District. The cost to attend the class is \$25. Pre-registration is required. For registration information please contact Gina Hugo 763-241-1170 x 3 or visit www.sherburneswcd.org

Carefree Country Club Open House.

Carefree Country Club, Sat. & Sun., June 27, 28 12 noon to 5 p.m. Family Park - includes: 18 hole golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts and supervised children activities.

Seasonal Park - Open April 15 to Oct. 15. Low yearly fees, which includes all amenities and free golf.

For details and pictures visit our website at www.carefreecc.com or call 763-263-6050.

"Meet Us on the Green" Golf Tournament.

The Monticello-Big Lake Community Hospital District Auxiliary is excited to announce that it's annual Golf Tournament fund-raising event, Thurs. June 18 will be held at a new location Riverwood National Golf Course.

Funds raised will help the Hospital District to purchase a patient lift that can be used in the Emergency Dept. and Medical Surgical floors to improve the safety of patients.

Golfers can begin to check in at 10:30 a.m. The Putting Contest starts at 11:30 a.m. and the 4-Person Scramble Shotgun start will be at 1 p.m.

Following golf, participants can dine on a buffet dinner, find out which golfers will receive the skills awards, and learn who successfully purchased the Silent Auction items bid during the event.

Registrations fees paid after June 1 will not increase to \$90 but will continue to be just \$75 per golfer.

We still have plenty of registration slots for persons who want to golf. Register your foursome or help fill out a team and meet other golfers. Please call Sherie Danner 763-878-2086 or Marlene Stumpf-Johnson 763-271-2293 to register.

Help Stuff the Bus. For the month of June the Big Lake Women of Today will be holding a food drive, to help stuff the bus for the food drive.

Drop off locations at local businesses and churches, also will be collecting at the Spud Fest Parade.

For more information contact Women of Today: Karen 763-300-4601.

Kohls in Rogers is supporting non-profit organizations for children scholarships for up to \$500.

For any information call Deb C. 763-263-9300.

Avid Knitters, Cro-cheters, Quilters, Gathering of Needleart Crafters, 2nd and 4th Monday of every month 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The needs are many and varied; purpose is to share with those in need or special projects for US Troops, hospitals, nursing homes, etc.

New Day United Methodist Church, 790 Minnesota Ave, Suite 500, Big Lake, MN (Next door to the new library)

Catholic Charities Big Lake Senior Dining is in need of volunteer drivers for Meals on Wheels route.

Have open Friday's, and need sub-drivers. It takes about an hour, so if you have an hour to spare please call LouAnn Denny at 263-0058.

The 2009 Big Lake Hornet Football season is right around the corner and registration information is available now!!! New this year-CHEERLEADING!! We're looking for Hornet Cheerleaders from 4th grade through 12th!

Visit our new website www.biglakefootball.org for more details.

There will be a Big Lake Baseball Association meeting Sun, June 21st @ 6pm at the Big Lake Fire Hall.

"Rendezvous in the Park"

Journey Home School Co-op is sponsoring the 4th Annual "Rendezvous in the Park" this week to help promote a sense of community among the hundreds of Home Educators in the North Metro area.

Journey would like to invite your families to come together to create new friendships, discover over 25 local resources available to help Home Educators enhance their experience and enjoy games for the kids and other fun events. There are no costs for any of the activities, just come and have fun.

Tuesday, June 23rd

Otsego Prairie Park-Otsego, MN

(Hwy 101 to Cty. 39 to Nashua Ave go S.) 10am to 1pm Rain date scheduled for June 25th

Refreshments provided. Restrooms are available. For more info please call Stacy at 763-633-1023

Big Lake Al-Anon - Meetings held Tues, 7pm at Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church- 440 Lake Street N. (church basement) Contact: Laurie (763) 263-7506.

* No mail at this address *

Sunday, June 14, 2009

Shoreland Buffer Maintenance Class

Shoreland buffers help to protect water quality and improve habitat for shoreland wildlife. Native shoreland buffers have been installed on many lake properties throughout Sherburne County. Once established they are low maintenance. Proper management techniques during the establishment period will improve the success of shoreland buffer.

The Sherburne County Rural Living Task force is sponsoring a Shoreland Buffer Maintenance Class at Orono Park, July 8 from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Registration begins at 5:30 p.m. Grilled brats and sides will be served starting at 5:30 p.m.

The class will be taught by Gina Hugo of the Sherburne Soil & Water Conservation District. The cost to attend the class is \$25, and includes the "Lake Phalen Shoreland Restoration Walking Tour and Plant Guide," "Common Lakeshore Weeds - A Guide for Identification and Control in Shoreland Buffers, Wetlands and Raingardens," as well as other reference materials. Pre-registration is required.

For registration information, contact Gina Hugo at the Sherburne Soil & Water conservation District, (763) 241-1170, ext. 3 or visit www.sherburneswcd.org.

29 SOUTH LAKE STREET, BIG LAKE, MN 55309 • 763-263-3602

Tribune

West Sherburne ★



GINA HUGO OF SHERBURNE COUNTY Soil and Water Conservation District worked with Minnesota Conservation District this week planting a native shoreline buffer at James Welsh's property around Mitchell Lake. Welsh is one of six lake land owners working with the grant program through the Minnesota DNR. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)

Saturday, June 27, 2009

Butterfly garden helps pollinators

By Lynn Woolhouse
Staff Writer



AMBER LARSON HELPED PLANT 2,000 native plants for "Hester's Butterfly Garden" at the Toleno home Wednesday. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)



JANE AND TOM TOLENO WELCOMED over a dozen kids and adults Wednesday as they celebrated National Pollinators Week with the help of Sherburne SWCD and Jane's mom, Hester, from New York as they learned the importance of pollinators and planted a garden. (Photo by Lynn Woolhouse)

Warm temperatures with a slight sprinkle made perfect weather as local families planted Hester's Butterfly Garden in recognition of National Pollinator Week.

Hoping to raise pollinating awareness, Jane and Tom Toleno of Big Lake welcomed over a dozen kids and adults Wednesday morning to their home on Co. Rd. 83.

They joined with Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to plant 2,000 native flowers for a butterfly garden.

"What makes this butterfly garden so unique is that all of the plants are native," said Sangeetha Gummadi of National Resource Conservation Service.

Preparing earlier in the month for the butterfly planting, Gina Hugo of Sherburne SWCD taught participating kids about making use of their native landscape for pollinator and plant observations at the Sherburne History Center June 15.

"I am so excited to celebrate National Pollinator Week," she said. "Pollinators give us so much, over 150 food crops of what we eat is because of pollinators."

"I can't think of anything better in the world than to help people connect to what they walk on every day," said Jane Toleno Wednesday.

Jane, who grew up legally blind, said through teachings from her mother, Hester, she learned to experience the world through her senses. "It wasn't until school started, my twin sister and I realized we were different," she says. "But we were introduced to flowers, their petals and scents. We talked about the world and learned to look at it with our senses."

Toleno's mom, who visited the day's event, received her daughter's gracious words as they announced the butterfly garden was dedicated to her.

"I live in a high rise apartment in New York City and occasionally, I will see a butterfly," she said. "Bless you as you plant and ask questions," Hester encouraged the kids eager to begin planting.

The Tolenos began working with Sherburne Soil and Water a few years ago when they were interested in returning areas of their property to native cover (prairie).

"Originally, a pollinator garden was last on our list," said Tom Toleno.

"But now it's on the top," he said as he thanked Sherburne Soil and Water for all of their help in projects and Steve's Elk River Nursery for the 20 yards of mulch donated for the day's garden planting.

Plants were purchased through Prairie Restorations, Inc of Princeton. Funding for Hester's Butterfly Garden was provided in part by the Mid-MN Mississippi Resource and Conservation Development Council. The Tolenos funded the majority.

"I thought the day was a success, we promoted pollinator awareness, protection and connected kids to nature and helped them to be part of a solution to a global issue," said Hugo.

"Unlike the Colony Collapse Disorder that has significantly impacted domestic bees for reasons unknown, there are identifiable solutions to the native pollinator issue; to increase habitat, protect existing habitat and reduce chemical use." "Now the participants can go on to plant

pollinator habitat in their own yards, which hopefully will spark the interest of neighbors, family and friends," she said.

(Correction: In regards to the DNR Boat Inspections held Saturday, May 30, Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation District was sponsoring an educational presentation that same day. They were not involved in any part of the DNR inspections.)

Mom instilled curiosity in blind twins



Friday, 26 June 2009

by **Jim Boyle**

Editor

A Big Lake Township woman who has been blind since she was an infant paid tribute Wednesday to her 92-year-old mother who — among countless other things — introduced her to flowers.

Dr. Hester Turner also taught her to be curious and not afraid to try new things.

Jane Toleno shared with a crowd of family, friends and students of Sherburne County Soil and Water Conservation the impact Turner had on her life.

“She would talk to me about the world, but she didn’t just talk,” Toleno recalled. “She would say here, ‘look, look,’ so I learned to look with all my senses.”

Toleno in her remarks did the same thing for the children in attendance that her mother did for her and her twin sister, Mary Lee, who was also diagnosed as legally blind as an infant. She encouraged inquisitiveness.

“I’m here today because (my mother) taught me to learn,” she said. “One of the things she used to say is: ‘I don’t know. We will have to find out.’”

That is why you are here, she told the crowd. “You know some things, and you get to ask some questions,” she said before a dozen or so youth planted about 2,000 plants in a freshly prepared pollinator garden to mark Pollinator Awareness Week in Sherburne County.



Jane Toleno and her guide dog Pixi entered her

***pollinator garden, which was planted during
Pollinator Awareness Week.***

The Tom and Jane Tolenos' pollinator garden fits in perfectly with their mission to conserve resources spent maintaining acreage at their rural home. By adding a pollinator garden they are also

creating welcome resources.

Every third bite of food is said to be the byproduct of pollination, whether it's one of dozens of flavors of ice cream on a hot day or strawberries on top of a strawberry shortcake dessert, said Gina Hugo, a district technician with the Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District.

So how did the Tolenos come to plant a pollinator garden? Tom admits a year ago he didn't even know what a pollinator garden was. But he and his wife committed to a change in lifestyle about a year ago, one that didn't require mowing for hours.

The couple started with prairie plantings, and one thing led to another. It didn't take long and they had a list of things they wanted to accomplish.

They began thinking about feeding the birds, which led to thinking about bugs. Eventually they began to hear about pollinator gardens from people like Steve Eid at Steve's Nursery in Elk River, Hugo, and the folks at the National Wildlife Federation.

The pollinator garden was at the bottom, but somehow it found its way to the top, Tom said during a ceremony to dedicate the garden to Dr. Turner.

The engine behind the pollinator garden was Hugo. Turner was the engine that developed an appetite for knowledge in her two blind daughters as well as a thirst to experience life.

As little girls, others marveled at Jane and Mary Lee, who could play the piano in the dark. Of course, for the two girls life has always been shades of darkness.

"When I was a little girl my twin and I could see a lot, at least we thought we could," Toleno said. "We didn't know in the rest of the world's view we were legally blind and almost totally blind."

It wasn't until they entered school that they realized they were distinct and different from their peers.

But Hester, who after her divorce from Jane and Mary Lee's father raised the two girls and their two older brothers by herself, helped them experience many things other children did. And she encouraged them not to shy away from participating in life. Some of that was also translated by others as they grew up on a college campus where their mother worked.

"We would go to plays and other fun activities on campus," Toleno said.

And Hester set quite an example.

By the time Tom met Hester she was a dean of students at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Ore. When Jane and Mary Lee went off to college (the two boys had already headed off to the Air Force), she took a job

in New York as the director of the Campfire Girls.

Earlier in life she was the first woman at the law school she attended to take and pass the bar exam. She also got her doctorate degree.

At one point in her life she was the first woman to lead the American Forestry Association.

“She has done a lot of great things,” Tom said.

And with that he dedicated the garden to her, handing her the sign that he would soon proudly attach to a pole just outside the garden.

Hester came to Minnesota from her New York City high rise apartment and a trip overseas.

She can still remember not being able to talk about her children’s blindness for two years without breaking down. She set out on a mission to learn, to study education, to study special education and to study psychology.

Sadly, there wasn’t a lot to be learned about working with blind children. Often children with special needs as significant as this were institutionalized, she said.

That was not an option for Hester.

She couldn’t give her daughters sight, but she did commit to raising their awareness of the world around them. She learned to give specific direction.

“I have no idea what this looks like to (Jane),” Hester said, standing on the deck and peering over the planting efforts.

Clearly pleased while watching her daughter experience the event that did more than honor her, the things she said led you to believe she was happy to see curiosity planted in the hearts and minds of young children — the kind that can only come from first-hand experiences.

“What a tribute,” she said at one point.

Students bring life to garden



Friday, 26 June 2009

by **Kate Kramer**

Staff Intern

Surrounded by natural prairie and warmed by the sun, dozens of young volunteers worked Wednesday to create a colorful marvel for nature-lovers.

Big Lake Township residents Jane and Tom Toleno now enjoy a 2,000-square-foot butterfly garden on their property. Planning and planting were facilitated by the Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District as part of National Pollinator Week.

Several local elementary-schoolers cultivated their green thumbs by participating in the county's Planting for Pollinators program.

First, the children learned about pollination. Each researched the characteristics of a specific plant and presented it to the group.

At the butterfly garden, kids helped plant the varieties they had learned about. The garden contains 19 types of native prairie plants.

Sherburne County's pollinator program launched in 2007 and encourages learning about and supporting natural ecosystems.

"It's designed for teaching and instilling inspiration," program leader Gina Hugo said.

For more information, visit www.pollinators.org.



Jaz Brodzinski gave a report on a plant species he did a report on for a summer class.

Hester's Garden welcomes friends large and small

By Mike Schoemer

(Created: Thursday, July 2, 2009 12:04 PM CDT)

Hester Turner flew in from New York not knowing what a quick visit to her daughter's rural Big Lake home had in store for her.

By Wednesday afternoon, she was all smiles, as a community effort had created "Hester's Garden," a daughter's special gift to her mom.

"I have a garden named after me in Minnesota. How many people can say that?" Hester, 92 years young, said as kids and adults worked in the dirt and mulch below her perch on the Toleno family deck. "What a wonderful thing."



Her daughter, Jane, and son-in-law, Tom, were the driving force behind the creation of Big Lake's newest pollinator garden, according to Gina Hugo, Sherburne Soil and Water District environmental specialist.

"We don't have many individuals or residents who are as dedicated to the prairie and preservation as Jane and Tom. They're special people. So this is an amazing day," Hugo said.

Hester's Garden isn't huge, but what led to the creation of the butterfly oasis actually is. The Toleno's purchased their home in Big Lake a little more than three years ago. When they started building the home, Jane and Tom both decided to keep about an acre of the six-acre plot for home and yard, and then contacted Prairie Restorations about giving the remaining five acres back to the native grasses and blooming plants that once were prominent here, on the southern edge of the Minnesota Northwoods. The Toleno home is located on 173rd Street Northwest, about 5 minutes northwest of Big Lake off County Road 83.

"The farmer who sold the land for the development came back and helped us level the lot and pummel the dirt, and the guys kind of took it from there," Tom said. "In a couple of years, it should be fully restored."

Brad Vierkant of Prairie Restorations was part of the pollinator gardening project, as well. He said he came to check on the prairie restoration project one day, and was told by Tom of the future plans. The company provided plants for purchase, and also worked with a local company to provide mulch and soil.

Throughout the process of restoring the prairie, the Tolenos also worked with the

Sherburne Soil and Water District. That's how they got to know Hugo. And when the Tolenos were turned on to the idea of a pollinator garden for butterflies, bees, birds and other vital species that keep plants in bloom, Hugo was right there with them.

"They just have a passion for the diversity of life, which is evident when you talk to them," Hugo said. "And they instill that appreciation for life in other people."

Hugo capitalized on that, tying the Toleno's desire for the butterfly garden into an educational opportunity. She enlisted the help of a dozen or so Sherburne County area middle school students, who learned about the various species of plants, from Black-eyed Susans to Butterfly Weed, that draws and supports pollinators.

There were 16 kids who participated in the workshop. And Hugo decided to tie their project into National Pollinator Week, which is part of the Pollinator Protection Campaign.

So the kids did a presentation, each tackling a different pollinator, and took center stage for Hester, Jane and Tom.

"It was just so great," Hester said. "The kids knew so much about their assignment. They were fun to watch."

And they weren't done. Once the presentations were over, the kids got to dig in with their parents and siblings, actually helping to plant the garden. Hugo and Vierkant worked as supervisors, making sure the garden fell into place in a productive way.

Everyone got into the act. Jane, who is legally blind, played the hostess. Though she will never actually see the garden, she will enjoy the smell of blooming coneflowers and the sounds of fluttering wings. And she was proud to lead guests to her newest attraction at her Big Lake home.

"It's so great to have everyone here. This is for all of our friends," she said.

And Hester beamed when a sign was placed outside the garden in her honor.

"In five years or so, when I am gone, this will still be here," she said. "Jane and Tom and these kids can come look at it and say, 'Boy, Hester would be proud of that.'"