

Licensed to design

By JENNIFER A. CLARK

Ask George Hargreaves why he went into the business and he'll tell you of an epiphany on a mountaintop when he was 20. Ask Lynn Wolff to describe her purpose and she'll talk about community, people, the cultural expression of city dwellers. Others in their profession speak with passion about the poetry embodied within the contours of a hill's slope or along a stretch of undeveloped woodland.

Are they artists? Painters, perhaps? Yes and no. They're landscape architects, a group of professionals who sometimes believe their work goes unrecog-

Landscape architects shape your environment

nized and unappreciated.

Many confuse landscape architects with landscapers, envisioning both as suntanned workers armed with hedge clippers and bags of fertilizer, tending lawns from spring to fall. Landscape architects are licensed professionals with a range of technical skills not usually found among unlicensed landscapers.

Paul Maue of Maue Associates in Andover, occasionally feels the sting of misunderstanding. "Peo-

ple think that I get to ski all winter," he said, laughing ruefully, "but most don't realize that it takes 12-18 months to plan a big project. I love to ski but you spend most of the winter designing."

Landscape artists often collaborate with other professionals — engineers, environmental scientists, architects — in projects ranging in size and focus from small residential properties to public parks to Boston's ongoing

Central Artery construction. Firms may specialize, or deal with a range of projects.

Hargreave's company, Hargreaves Associates, often focuses on public parks and college campuses, but currently the company is involved in the planning of the site for the Olympics in Sydney, Australia.

Lynn Wolff Associates collaborated with John Copley Associates on the design of public spaces in Boston, including the recent renovation of the Frog Pond in the Boston Common. Paul Maue Associates usually designs residential properties but also works on the occasional equestrian site.

"It's about creative expression," said Wolff. "I want human impact on the environment to be integrated so that the impact is less obvious and people are able to enjoy it, whether it be urban or naturalistic."

When a site is developed, Maue said, the contours of the land are forever altered. Without proper knowledge of the physical world, water can be contaminated or foundations could shift, endangering those who live in the area.

"In New England you can't get away with anything because the weather will come back and prove you wrong," Maue said. "You can't cut corners in the outdoors."

Forty-two states, including Massachusetts, stipulate that licensed landscape architects meet requirements set by the Washington, D.C.-based American Society of Landscape Architects.

ASLA requires that a



TAKES PRIDE IN HER WORK: Lynn Wolff visits Boston's Frog Pond to check landscape renovations. Staff photo by Michael Fern

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Landscape architects give it shape

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degree in landscape architecture be completed from an accredited program; 50 schools nationwide offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Coursework includes design, environmental sciences (such as geology, topography and natural processes), engineering, mathematics, psychology, literature and history.

The next step is an apprenticeship with a certified landscape architect with more than 10 years experience, followed by a harrowing three-day certification test. Less than half of all applicants pass all sections the first time around. Individual states may add sections specific to their geography — Massachusetts has two extras — but the yearly test is virtually the same around the country.

"When applying the services of a landscape architect," said Hargreaves, chairman of the landscape architecture depart-

Have designs on this career?

If you're interested in becoming a landscape architect, you should talk with somebody in the business. Most landscape architects are more than willing to discuss the requirements and knowledge necessary, while offering insight into the job.

Harvard University, the University of Massachu-

setts, the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island School of Design all offer landscape architect programs at either the undergraduate or graduate level.

More information can be found at the Web site of the American Society of Landscape Architects: www.asla.org.

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ment at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, "you're dealing with someone of professional level and accomplishment, who has the knowledge to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public."

"Anyone who might know five plants can say, 'Well, I'll do that,' but it's as complicated as the creation of any road or building. If you make mistakes,

people can get hurt," he added.

The job is also about pleasing the senses of the people who use the site. By designing open spaces that are both beautiful and practical, landscape architects create functional art aimed at improving the quality of life.

A sense of designing for social significance drives Wolff. She wants to integrate the his-

tory and culture of the people with the landscape of Boston's diverse communities, as she did with such projects as the Dudley Town Common and the Holborn Street Totlot in Roxbury.

During the projects, community meetings were held so residents could participate in the process.

Holborn Street's neighborhood kids were invited to draw their favorite things, and these images were then cut from steel and used in the tot lot main entrance arch.

The community can not only use the playground but can also claim to have helped create it to reflect their culture.

Landscape architecture, said Wolff, "is not about using a cookie-cutter approach. We're supposed to design specific to the place, whether it be urban or the wilds, and to the people who use it."

"We're part of the expansion of human settlement," said Hargreaves.