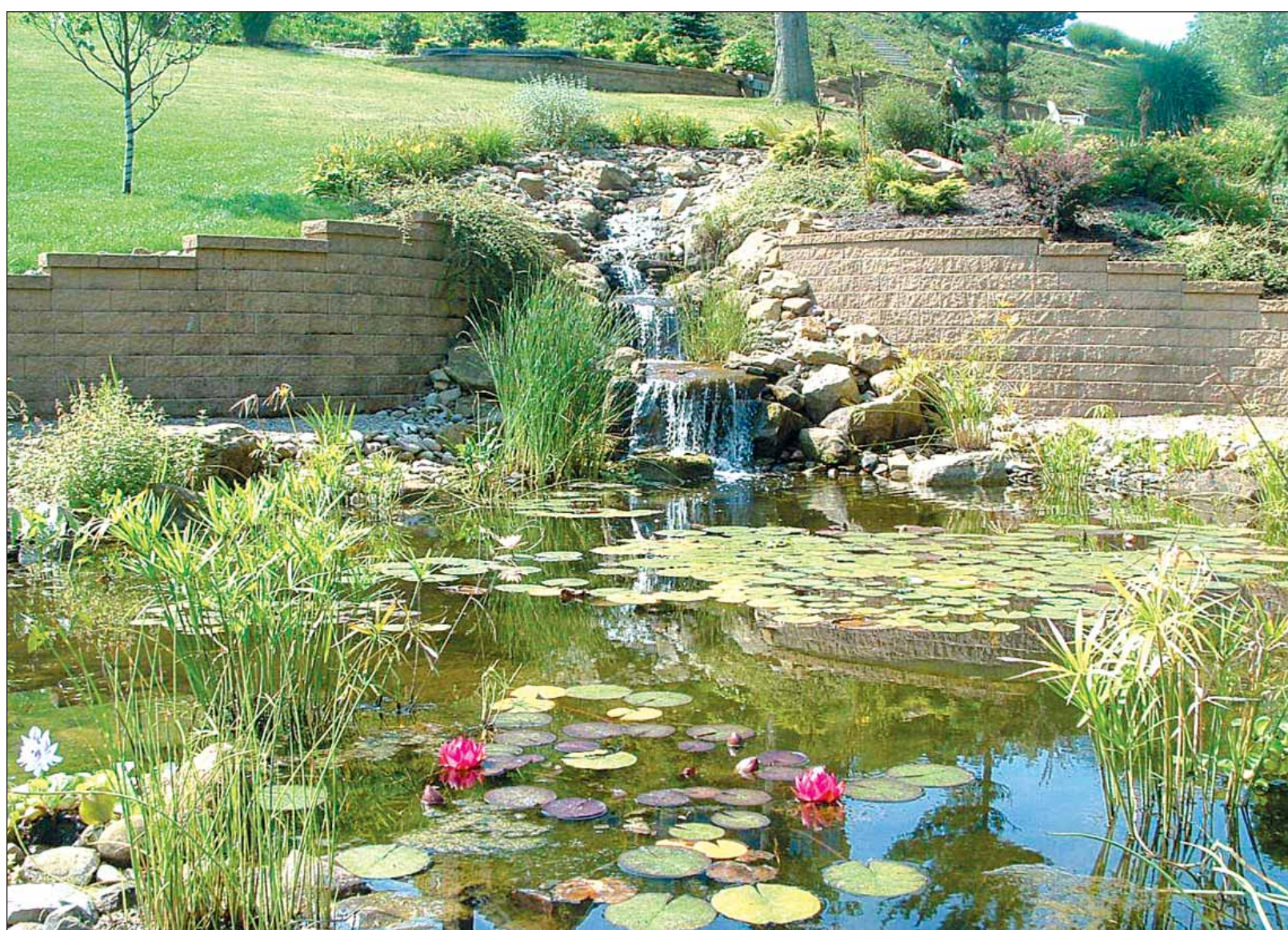


THE ALMANAC  
**Home**  
AND GARDEN

SECTION  
**B**



A 40 feet-by-30 feet koi fishpond, waterfall, and Versa-Lok standard walls in Nevillewood.

# 'Eye-popping projects'

By PJ Rittiger  
For The Almanac  
writer@thealmanac.net

Area residents who think that their home's exterior is ready for an update will have an opportunity to get expert advice, look over a variety of eye-popping projects and learn about many of the new home exterior products.

They can do it all at Pittsburgh Stone & Waterscapes' First Landscape Tour Benefit to be held on Saturday, May 3.

The benefit tour, which runs from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., will feature 10 home project sites in Peters Township, Upper St. Clair, Bethel Park, Mt. Lebanon, West Mifflin and Nevillewood. At each stop a representative of Pittsburgh Stone & Waterscapes will guide visitors through a variety

## Landscaping tour gives first-hand look at great ideas



A Stratford paver patio and pondless waterfall in Peters Township.

of home exterior projects, highlighting retaining walls, patios, walkways and driveways, waterfalls, ponds, pondless waterfalls, drainage solution projects and landscaping ideas that are as beautiful as they are functional. Some homeowners and manufacturers representatives are also expected to be on hand to talk with visitors.

According to Jeff Blunkosky, chief of operations at Pittsburgh Stone & Waterscapes, one of the most important reasons for doing the benefit tour is that all proceeds will be donated to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

"It's something I have always wanted to do and it's a great way to give back to the community," said Blunkosky, who explained that he

## USC builder has big plans

### Deal to yield luxury homes

By Karen Mansfield  
For The Almanac  
writer@thealmanac.net

Father and son builder and developer team William E. Thomas and Jeff Thomas, co-owners of Williamson & Jefferson Inc. of Upper St. Clair, have acquired a large parcel of land in Upper St. Clair for a planned multimillion-dollar development.

William Thomas, a veteran Upper St. Clair homebuilder who also owns Thomas Homes Inc., and Jeff Thomas, who owns JT Thomas Homes Inc., recently closed on 85 acres in Deerfield Manor — composed of 60 undeveloped acres and 21 buildable lots — at the corner of Boyce Road and Route 19 that they purchased for \$5.4 million from sellers Fairgreen Development Co. and Anvers Corp.

The transaction is the largest amount of land transferred in Upper St. Clair since the 1950s.

A majority of the undeveloped parcel will be set aside for residential development, said Patty Thomas of Wellington Real Estate of Peters Township, which specializes in new construction, resale homes, corporate relocation and is a buyer seller agency.

The 21 lots are priced from about \$250,000 and, with a new house, will run from \$1 million and up. A \$4.5 million home is being built on one of the lots, and plans for a \$7 million home are being finalized.

"It's the nicest ground in the South Hills," said Jeff Thomas, who is used to building on the region's hilly, steep topography. "This is so unbelievably level I may not know how to develop it," he quipped.

Bruce Fife of Century 21 Frontier Realty in Peters Township represented Williamson & Jefferson in the transaction.

"These will be upscale houses that, when completed on the lots will be anywhere from \$1 million to \$3 million and up. These builders are premier," said Fife of the Thomases, who have been in the building industry for five generations. "They've been building quality homes in the South Hills corridor for more than 50 years."

With this latest deal, Williamson & Jefferson adds to its portfolio another development project in Upper St. Clair, one of Southwestern Pennsylvania's most desirable suburbs. In addition to Deerfield Manor and Fox Chase in Upper St. Clair, the team is responsible for the Waterford Farms and Dominion communities, Crossgates in Peters Township and has begun work on a multimillion-dollar development at Lone Pine Country Club.

The land transfer was significant for Fife, whose family were the original settlers of what is now Upper St. Clair Township and were titled to the property under the original William Penn Land Grant in 1763.

Until the Williamson & Jefferson purchase, the largest land transaction in Upper St. Clair took place in 1957, when Fife's grandfather, Sam Fife, sold the last 90 acres of the original Fife farm.

Purchase price for 85 acres in Upper St. Clair, the township's largest land transfer since the 1950s:  
**\$5.4 million**



Front yard landscaping in Nevillewood



A Unilock Roman Pisa wall and Heritage paver driveway in Bethel Park

## How to find the right contractor

According to Jeff Blunkosky, chief of operations at Pittsburgh Stone & Waterscapes, anyone who is considering hiring a contractor should take time to do their homework in order to avoid disappointment later.

He offered the following tips for homeowners seeking the services of anyone who will be working on their property and will be offering similar information at Pittsburgh Stone & Waterscapes' Landscape Tour Benefit to be held on May 3.

■ **Make sure that the contractor or company is fully insured.**

As Blunkosky pointed out, a homeowner can be held responsible if a contractor is injured while working on their property, unless the contracting company is fully insured.

■ **Get references and check them out.**

Blunkosky advises obtaining three or four references where work has been completed by the company you're considering within the past five years and going to see as many of the completed projects as possible.

Blunkosky said that anyone who is installing hardscapes should have special certifications to do the work. If a contractor is doing work on retaining walls, Blunkosky recommends that he or she be certified by the National Concrete Masonry Association. If a contractor is work-



Versa-Lok mosaic steps, pillars and walls in Upper St. Clair

ing on or installing pavers, Blunkosky says they should be certified by the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute.

■ **Research on the materials that will be used for your project and make sure that your contractor**

**knows how to use them.**

Blunkosky suggested contacting the manufacturers of the materials when possible to ask if they know anything about the company or individual you plan to hire.

■ **Get a written guarantee for the work, as well as a written contract before any work begins.**

Blunkosky said that a written five-year guarantee should be mandatory.

■ **Check out how long the contractor has been in business under their current business name.**

Blunkosky explained that it is best to go with an organization that has been operating successfully for at least five years.

Further information is available through the Better Business Bureau of Western Pennsylvania, www.pittsburgh.bbb.org. Once at the site, consumers can follow the links: "Consumers," "Resource Library," "Tips," "Home Improvements." To contact the local Better Business Bureau, call 412-456-2700.