



Creating Tangible Results: *Karen Siciliano*

by Judy O’Gorman Alvarez

Whether it’s designing a perennial bed for a local family’s backyard or creating a meditation garden for cancer patients and their families, Karen Siciliano understands the transformative power and beauty of nature.

When Karen took over the helm at Siciliano Landscape Company, she was continuing the tradition of the Red Bank-based company her grandfather started in 1935.

Since then, she has placed her own mark on the third generation family-owned business that brings beauty and functionality to homes and businesses throughout Monmouth and Ocean counties. In the meantime, she has also brought heart and beauty to the community.

After graduating from Purdue University, with little interest in the family landscaping business, Karen went on to an 18-year career on Wall Street, working in mortgage-backed securities, where she gained knowledge, confidence and a comfortable living.

“But I always knew I had a second career in me,” Karen said. “I wanted to own my own company.” By the time she turned 40, in April 2001, she was thinking about her next move.

“Then 9/11 changed everything,” she said.

Karen lost friends and colleagues among the 2,600 people who died in the World Trade Center that day. “When the towers went down, I could see their faces.”

She thought about the offer her father, Paul, had made to her months earlier: to join him in the family business. So Karen plunged whole-heartedly into the Siciliano Landscape Company. “I began to enlarge the size and scope of the business and develop the design/build division at that point,” she said. “What’s unique about our company is that we are a landscape architect firm that installs and maintains what we design.”

The Red Bank-based company increased its employees — growing to 46. In 2010 Paul Siciliano retired and Karen is now the president and sole owner.

“In 12 years, the size of the business has quadrupled,” she said.

When Superstorm Sandy hit the Jersey Shore the Siciliano forces were called into action.

Meeting customers' demands have changed over the years, and events like Superstorm Sandy have significantly reshaped property needs. As customers look for more than the usual designs, they've become concerned with aspects that include drainage and elevation. "Now those are commonplace words in our vocabulary," Karen pointed out.

Shortly before Sandy, Karen hired Alan Tufts, a landscape architect who had previously interned with the company while in college. With the landscape architecture element in place and customers newly aware of flooding concerns, "We were well positioned to help those people."

But beautifying people's homes and businesses is not the only way Karen lends her talents to improving lives and the community.

She sits on the boards of trustees of Monmouth Medical Center, Count Basie Theatre Foundation and the advisory board for Investors Bank. In addition, she is an active alumna for Purdue University.

"I got involved with Monmouth Medical Center because of my mother," she said. Anne Siciliano died in 1998 from breast cancer and as a result of a missed diagnosis at another hospital. "They didn't catch the breast cancer so an otherwise healthy woman died at 60 after eight years of fighting."

Karen believes that if her mother had access to a center like the Jacqueline M. Wilentz Comprehensive Breast Center at Monmouth Medical Center, her fate might have been different. "I vowed I was going to right that wrong," she said.

Since joining the board, Karen has helped the hospital raise money, helped create and maintain the breast center's meditation

gardens and supported the annual garden tours that directly benefit the center.

In addition, Karen has sponsored a room at Valerie Fund Children's Center at the Unterberg Children's Hospital at Monmouth Medical Center.

As a member of the Count Basie Theatre Foundation board, she was inspired to donate "Count's Court," the outdoor patio garden at the theater.

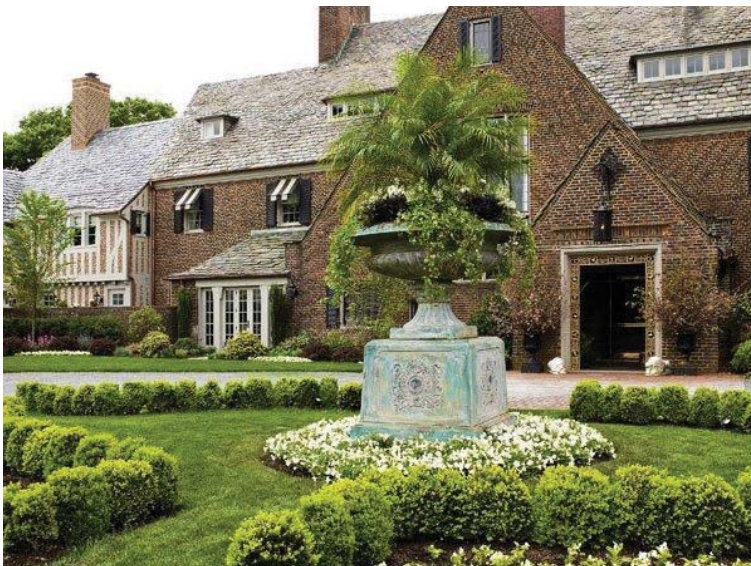
Although she missed the Atlantic Ocean and the Jersey Shore during her four years landlocked at Purdue University in Indiana, Karen, who was the first female student body president, says she is indebted to the university. "It was a great experience in my life," she says. "It afforded me a lot of opportunities."

As a result, she has helped fund the Center for Student Excellence and Leadership, and is donating to the student collaboration lounge which is named in her honor.

That same dedication to leadership and excellence is deeply rooted in the 80-year-old business that bears her name.

"Corners are the only things we don't cut," she said. At Siciliano Landscape, "proficiency, integrity and loyalty" is cultivated. "Our employees embody that and it's what our clients expect of us."

What Karen enjoys most about the landscape field is the creation of tangible results. Whether it's meditating in the garden, socializing on a patio or making a business environment more attractive, "We create something people will enjoy." Best of all, it keeps coming back year after year.



VNA Showhouse



Monmouth Medical Breast Center Garden