

2B COURIER-POST, Friday, August 13, 2004 SOUTH JERSEY

Teahouse/Wenonah manufacturer built original

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and other environmental commission members have spent decades acquiring a "ring of green" encompassing 135 acres that now encircles the square-mile town.

Environmental trust fund grants and tax credits helped the town gain one of the largest municipal conservation area percentages in the state. The woods have more than five miles of trails that are maintained by volunteers.

"What's so nice is every resident, no matter where they live, is something like 800 feet from a conservation area," said Forsman.

The last private owner of the two-acre teahouse property turned it over to the borough in 1993 in exchange for a federal tax credit, said Forsman. The wooded glen became part of Wenonah's preserve of walking trails, streams and ponds.

In 2000, the teahouse finally collapsed. A band of volunteers carted off tons of wreckage. But it lived on in the mind of Forsman, who wanted to restore it.

Not everyone agreed. Forsman said people would ask him why he was spending money on a "piece of junk" out in the woods?

Friends and fellow Wenonah residents John Schad and Bob Bevilacqua understood. Bevilacqua and his brother Dan volunteered to replace some concrete footings, and Schad, a contractor, spent about a year of spare time rebuilding the 24-foot-by-24-foot teahouse, completing it in May 2002.

The work entailed hauling an electric generator as well as construction materials over wooded trails. Forsman raised several thousand dollars in donations for lumber.

"This guy moved some heavy duty timbers by himself to get this thing up," said Forsman. "I was amazed."

Schad said he handled most of the work alone, relying on Forsman's measurements and photos. "My daughters came out a couple of times and played in the woods and helped a little bit," he said.

The resulting building, with its distinctive sloped double roof, "is not exact, but it's very close," said Schad. "It's all volunteer work. But it's not work. It's pleasure."

For his efforts, the borough honored Schad as 2003 volunteer of the year.

With the teahouse rebuilt, hikers picnic there, Forsman said. It's a popular wedding picture setting. Scout groups and the historical society have held meetings there and local artists are being invited to paint the scene, he said.

"You feel the history around it, even though it's a new building," said Wenonah Historical Society president Rocco Doto.

A piece of southern pine from Comey's arched bridge was salvaged and is displayed near the original span, which has not been rebuilt. "That's a long-term goal," Forsman explained.

Reach Bernia Weisenfeld at (856) 251-3345 or bweisenfeld@courierpostonline.com



Wenonah residents John Schad (left) and Chuck Forsman stand outside the Japanese teahouse that they built.

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garet Coladonato, who lives in Laurel, Del., near Seaford. "I'm

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bob_thomas_wk
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