



This dramatic project by diStefano Landscaping, Inc., located on Spear Street in South Burlington, earned the company both the Best Landscaping Award and the People's Choice Award from the HBRANV in their annual Better Homes Awards. "It turned out better than any of us could even have imagined," says company president Chris diStefano. Photos by Susan Teare.

A Winning Effort All Around

"We just listened to them, to try to find out what they wanted to do," says Chris diStefano, owner of diStefano Landscaping, Inc. in Jericho. "We walked the property with them. It was just a raw piece of land. They were taking their time. They wanted to get it just right.

"This is where they wanted to raise their family. This was going to be part of their family for generations to come."

Clearly, diStefano and his team—which includes designers, masons and horticulturalists—"got it right." The result was not only clients who were delighted with the result, but members of the general public as well.

The project, which includes an outdoor fireplace, a pool, an outdoor kitchen and much more, earned diStefano Landscaping the "People's Choice Award" from the HBRANV in its recent Better Homes Awards competition.

The People's Choice Award was added to the list of honors given out by the HBRA in 2013 as a way "to inform and educate the public about our association, our members and what we do," according to the association. People were able to vote in the Burlington Free Press' online edition, Facebook or Linked In. HBRA members who had already entered projects in other categories had to pay an extra fee to have one of their projects considered. The same project also earned diStefano the Best landscaping Award.

"It was a pretty intense project," says diStefano. "We were floored that we won both awards. It was very satisfying."

Lengthy Planning Process

The project itself took around eight months, or a full building season (2013), to complete. But the strategizing



In addition to this pool, the project also included an outdoor kitchen, patio, fire pit, vegetable gardens, a pool fence, fruit trees, lawn and garden irrigation and outdoor lighting.

beforehand, longer still.

“We spent 10 months just developing the master plan,” diStefano says. “It started with once-a-month meetings, then bi-weekly, then weekly.

“It’s a really unique spot, due to the topography. The view is unbelievable. There are a couple of condominiums down below, but you can’t see them. When you’re standing in the backyard, you cannot see anything except the view, an unbelievable 180-degree view of Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks. So things were oriented to take full advantage of the view. We also wanted to be mindful of the view of the neighbors as well. We studied the elevations of things. We collaborated with the neighbors and we chose trees that wouldn’t grow too tall. You’re talking 20, 40, 60 years down the line, after we’re all gone. We didn’t want to plant things that would impede anyone else’s view.

“We started with just a few conceptual drawings, on scraps of paper. Then we worked through the concepts, decided what features they wanted: a fire pit, vegetable gardens, a pool and a pool fence, fruit trees, lighting, irrigation for the lawn and garden. And then, where were all those things going to be. We did a lot of modeling, a lot of revisions.

“We also worked with the builder, Bob and Joy Reap of Reap Construction in Richmond, on things like the driveway layout and to make sure the house and the outdoor space fit together, worked together. The outdoor living space needed to be in proportion to the size of the house. One challenge was the sheer size of the space. It’s very big, but they didn’t want to have anything that wasn’t going to be used.

“The owners are very kid-oriented. They have three daughters. One consideration was that they wanted to be able to see the pool from the fire pit, or the deck, keeping it open, and separate, but also integrated together. To help achieve that, there’s a glass, see-through partition on the back deck railing.

Operational Challenges

“It was a big site, but on a busy street with a very narrow driveway,” diStefano continues. “So we had to work very closely with the builder and other contractors to keep things going smoothly. It was a line dance. There was a lot of scheduling and coordination.

“It’s a leap of faith going into a project like this, with so many parts. Fortunately, we were on this job from the start, right



A look at the street side with retaining wall, plantings and landscaping by diStefano’s.

through fruition. Most of the time, the landscape design firm is hired too late in the process, but that was not the case this time. Things like downspouts, splashdowns, outdoor kitchens, patios. They all turn out best when it coordinated and planned ahead of time.”

The result, says diStefano, was “spot on.”

“We’ve been back to spend time there with the owners, and they’re thrilled. We

created some boulder walls, and to sit on the patio and see the kids climbing on them was very fulfilling. There’s only so much you can you on paper and on a computer. You never quite know how it will work until it’s done.

“Sitting there, we said, ‘Here’s all that planning, all that work unfolding right here before our eyes. It turned out better than any of us could even have imagined.’”