

Environmental Concern sells plants, protects wetlands

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ST. MICHAELS - Green thumbs traveled over stone driveway and oyster shell walkways to Environmental Concern's (EC) native plant sale and open house Saturday, Sept. 23, located at the head of Domingo Creek.

In addition to plants, the non-profit also had tours of its nursery available.

Not simply a nursery, EC is "all about wetlands," as president, Suzanne Pittenger-Slear says. EC is a public corporation dedicated to wetland education, restoration and research. It maintains the nation's first wholesale wetland plant nursery, currently cultivating 120 wetland plant species native to the Northeast U.S. It has restored 34 miles of shoreline.

In growing plants and trees, Environmental Concern works to "mimic nature," as Pittenger-Slear puts it, by growing everything from seeds. These seeds are collected from shorelines around the area and sorted in a potting shed. Then, the plants and trees are grown in greenhouses or waterboxes around the facility.

EC's once flat backyard was turned into a "demonstration wetland" for use with students, teachers and visitors. It is used as an example to give an up-close look at wetland construction.

A boat ramp and dock sit on the creek next to cord grass, where EC takes canoes out or a electric boat to collect seeds or take out educators and kids that visit the site.

"We're always experimenting," Pittenger-Slear said.

EC has 19 greenhouses on its site, including the first greenhouse that was built in 1972.

EC was founded in 1972 by Dr. Edgar Garbisch. The corporation provides shoreline erosion control, wetland mitigation designs and construction, habitat restoration, stormwater and wastewater management, pond design and construction, invasive plant control, wholesale wetland plant nursery sales, community education and outreach, professional wetland training courses, teacher training, youth programs for grades K to 12 and wetland publications. EC has a full staff of 31 workers and is "still growing."

EC will host an "Evening with Wetland Wild Things" from 5 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 30, at its campus in St. Michaels. The cost of \$100 a person will include hors d'oeuvres, silent and live auction and an open bar. All proceeds benefit wetland education initiatives.

Tours may be arranged on a daily basis by calling ahead of time. For more information, to schedule a tour or to RSVP the event, call 410-745-9620 or visit www.wetland.org.

