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Solving storm water problems, one basement at a time

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Valerie Solitrin, owner of Valerie Designs, LLC in Wyncote, offers storm water management options for homeowners in addition to garden design and installation. In this photo she stands on her smallest model of the EcoRain box, an eco-friendly storm water drainage cell she uses often in her line of work.

by Christine Wolkin

The day we brought my son home from the hospital was the day my husband and I learned a hard lesson about the importance of residential storm water management.

While I was in labor, our sump pump (a pump used to remove water that has accumulated in a water-collecting basin normally found in the basement of homes) was laboring just as hard to keep an influx of storm water out of our home. When we returned two days later, it was to a finished basement with several inches of standing water. My husband spent the first week of his paternity time removing water from our basement, ripping up the carpet and throwing away furnishings.

To say we were unprepared would be an understatement. "Water in your home destroys furnishings, undermines the integrity of your building, promotes growth of black mold and ultimately makes a living space unusable," said Valerie Solitrin, owner of Valerie Designs in Wyncote, during an interview last week.

Storm water management isn't crucial just for the integrity of your home. Water in your yard creates standing water, which kills landscape plants, breeds mosquitoes and mold and is just plain messy, according to Solitrin.

Valerie Designs has been designing and installing residential gardens for the past 20 years, and about a quarter of Solitrin's business has evolved to include storm water management.

"What that means is helping the land around a home effectively cope with heavy rain and keeping it outside of the home," said Solitrin.

Solitrin boasts an impressive resume; with her 20 years of experience in managing Solitrin General Contracting, LLC, a residential renovations company, and as a Horticultural teacher at Abington and Cheltenham Adult Schools. Coupled with her educational background (Longwood Gardens Master Gardening Program, Morris Arboretum/Continuing Education for Horticultural Professions), Solitrin is committed to using new and innovative methods.

Additionally, Solitrin is affiliated with the Chestnut Hill Conservancy, which has close ties to the Friends of the Wissahickon, whose goal is "to educate home owners on more sustainable land management practices."

These types of practices include: upgrading gutters and downspouts, extending above ground downspouts farther away from the foundation, installing sturdy window well covers of Azek and Plexiglas, correcting the grade and porosity around the home, relieving hydrostatic pressure on exterior foundation walls and installing water retention boxes, such as EcoRain boxes. Solitrin also installs permeable driveways, such as green driveways, which are a green alternative to paving that prevent runoffs.

Valerie Designs got involved in storm water management and more sustainable options in response to the permeable and impermeable code restrictions being put on home owners throughout the Delaware Valley, especially Montgomery, Bucks and Chester Counties, where they tend to have clay like soil, which makes for poor percolation.

"There were new residential codes about impermeable surfaces, surfaces where water cannot go through," such as asphalt and cement. These led to Solitrin finding more permeable solutions for residents, which not only benefit homeowners but our environment and communities as well.

Impermeable surfaces create storm water runoff, which is a problem for our municipals and for taxpayers, Solitrin explained. "The reason that this impermeable surface is a problem for municipals is that the density of our population in our building was creating a lot of storm water runoff, which is overwhelming our local sewer system."

As global warming brings about more atypical weather patterns and more rain, Solitrin insists it is more important than ever to protect your home and yard from storm water.

For more information: 215-356-8010 or valeriedesigns.com (<http://valeriedesigns.com>)

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