

## BREN LANDSCAPING

# Brighten up with color

by Isabelle Ghaneh

Dennis Leahy likes the outdoors. He likes trees, he likes plants and he likes fresh air. After spending 17 years in a corporate environment, Dennis changed his career and opened his own landscaping and masonry business six years ago.

He was born and raised in Connecticut and is an alumnus of UConn. He lived in California as a developer of educational technology back in the mid-1980s. His gig out West lasted for over 12 years, and then he was sent to England for two years.

"In one year I traveled 150 days for my company, and I was getting very tired of all the constant traveling and wanted to spend more time with my family," Dennis said.

Finally in 2003, he found himself at a crossroad. He had the option of continuing to work in software development, which would mean moving back to the West Coast, or going into business for himself.

Dennis's family is in the excavation business, and while he pondered his options, he worked for his family, mostly outdoors. He also was a production manager on several small software jobs. A good family friend, Ed LaFlamme, owner of a landscape company, suggested that Dennis go into the landscaping business. On March 15, 2003, Dennis put an ad in the paper to see what response he would get.

"I received 40 calls in 10 days, and 20 of those callers became my customers. By June, I had five people working for me," he said.

Dennis discovered he loved working outdoors, but he still did software jobs in the winter. He picked up a job in software development as a consultant. "I was at a meeting for a technology group in the early months of 2004, and I swear that meeting took place in a room that was 12 feet by 12-feet, with no windows. Ten of us were in there. The whole time I was inside all I could think of was being outside working on trees. I loosened my tie, I rolled up my sleeves, and I finally stood up and said I had to go outside. I said to myself, 'That's it, I shouldn't be here.' The meeting was starting to sound like a Charlie Brown cartoon with everyone going yak yak yak. At that point I made my decision, and I concentrated on my landscape and masonry work exclusively. Now I do snow plowing and winter maintenance during the off season," he said.

Dennis usually has around seven employees working for him, and he works closely with Leanna Kearney, his landscape designer and



Bren Landscaping's team has the expertise to transform the mundane to the marvelous.

the head of his planting crew. "Leanna does all the purchasing of the plants. She has a master's degree in art therapy and she is a true artist. When she was growing up, she lived near the White Flower Farm in Litchfield, and several of her aunts worked on the farm. Leanna has a great love of flowers and plants, particularly their colors, textures, shapes and sizes," he said.

Dennis has an ongoing project with a client who lives in the backwoods of New Canaan on 10 acres. He handles all the landscaping, and he has developed several small gardens around the property. "Leanna and I wanted to have big and bright swatches of color in the client's gardens. We used boxwoods, hydrangeas, weeping Atlas cedars, along with lilies, astilbes, and redbuds," he said.

An unfortunate problem developed shortly after he took on the New Canaan project.

"My clients bought the property because they wanted to have privacy, and in the second year of their ownership, the land next to them was sold. The new owners built their new house within 70 feet of my clients' home. When my clients were on their back porch, they could see and hear people entering their neighbors' front door," he said.

Dennis was asked to sound- and vision-proof their yard. He planted 25-foot dogwoods and a row of 20-foot Fat Albert spruce trees to create a buffer for their back porch.

Dennis knows that in today's difficult economy many homeowners are holding back on services and are trying to do some household projects on their own. He recommends that they concentrate on doing a lot of weeding, pruning and deadheading of flowers, since "flowers need to use their energy wisely." He also suggests putting down hay if you have a vegetable garden, since it acts as a natural weed inhibitor.

"Homeowners can buy flats of flowers for \$8 to \$12 from any nursery in the area. They can spend time with their children out back planting, weeding and cleaning up their landscape. Planting colorful annuals and perennials gives your garden variety and lots of color. Many nurseries have great sales before the summer months of July and August," he said.

Dennis does small projects as well as large ones. As long as he's outdoors, he's happy!

*Bren Landscaping is at 98 Bulkley Drive in Fairfield; call 203-373-1327 or visit the Web site, [brenlandscaping.com](http://brenlandscaping.com).* ■

# HOME

13th year Number 6 © Hersam Acorn Newspapers

June, 2009