



SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Sunday, February 24, 2019

SEARCH

Home Local Sports Nation/World Editorials Opinions-Letters Obituaries Real Estate Classifieds Special Publications Archives

Life

Home >> Life



Rebirth

Landscape architect to present message of hope in Montecito

By DAVE MASON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER
February 23, 2019 2:52 PM

Landscape architect Thomas Woltz's company restored the Somerset County, Pa., field where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed on 9/11.

"That project was led by my former business partner. He retired five years ago. He used native grassland plants to take up the toxins in the soil from coal mining," Mr. Woltz, 51, told the News-Press by phone from the New York City office of Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects.

"The native grasses have a very deep root system

Share Story [facebook](#) [Tweet](#)



Landscape architect Thomas Woltz's firm, Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, designed the Flight 93 Memorial Park on the Somerset County, Pa., site where a United Airlines jet crashed on 9/11.
FLIGHT 93 - ERIC STAUDENMAIER PHOTO



Mr. Woltz and his company restored the wetlands during the Orongo Station Conservation Project in New Zealand.
COURTESY THOMAS WOLTZ - ORONGO

Translate This Article

Select Language
Powered by Google Translate

Related Stories

- Wells Fargo Bank staff, including, from left, Chad Smart, Ryan Woltz, Erica Huntzinger, [ARCHIVE](#) Sep 12, 2006
- Laughing through grief : Marian Hospice's new Humor-Comfort for the Soul grief support group uses humor and storytelling to help members cope with the loss of a loved one [ARCHIVE](#) Feb 22, 2012
- OT goal sinks Gauchos : UCSB last in division after defeat [ARCHIVE](#) Oct 20, 2012
- Westmont has graduation [ARCHIVE](#) May 4, 2008
- Senate approves renaming of Postal Office after fallen SEAL [ARCHIVE](#) Dec 7, 2016
- Advice to Gen-Y: Start saving now [ARCHIVE](#) Oct 1, 2006
- IN BRIEF : Man trapped on rock makes it to shore [ARCHIVE](#) Jan 3, 2009
- Get your flu shot [ARCHIVE](#) Jan 22, 2019
- Battle named to YMCA board of managers

that can go 10 to 15 feet in the ground," he said.

"The results are quite beautiful there," Mr. Woltz said of the site, now called the Flight 93 Memorial Park. "The metaphor for healing the site and healing the wounds of the nation are a good parallel to make."

Mr. Woltz will discuss "Cultivating Hope in Damaged Landscapes" at 5:30 p.m. March 12 at Westmont College's Global Leadership Center, 955 La Paz Road, Montecito.

"Land that feels lost may not be lost forever," Mr. Woltz said, citing his restoration projects of everything from drained wetlands in New Zealand to a drought-damaged park in Houston.

The Garden Club of Santa Barbara is presenting his free talk.

Members of the club, which is part of The Garden Club of America, invited Mr. Woltz to give a local address after hearing him speak at the national nonprofit's annual conference in April in San Francisco.

"We were so incredibly moved, as was everyone in the audience, virtually to tears. He was so inspiring and so hopeful as he talked about what he had made out of damaged lands, what he had created," Carol Newman, program co-chair of the Garden Club of Santa Barbara, told the News-Press.



"Land that feels lost may not be lost forever," said landscape architect Thomas Woltz, who's giving a Montecito talk on "Cultivating Hope in Damaged Landscapes."
WOLTZ - COURTESY THOMAS WOLTZ



Mr. Woltz and his firm restored Memorial Park in Houston, which suffered from four years of drought.
MEMORIAL PARK - MIR FOR NELSON BYRD
WOLTZ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

ARCHIVE Oct 27, 2001

• Flags and free speech

ARCHIVE May 2, 1999

Ms. Newman said her club is excited to present Mr. Woltz's positive message about the rebirth of damaged landscapes. The landscape architect, who visited Montecito in 2011 and compared its beauty to that of Italy, is presenting the talk one year after the Montecito mudslides and the Thomas Fire.

"We feel our community is in a dire need of hope," Ms. Newman said, noting that recent rains have added much greenery. "But I think there still needs to be some purposeful planning and discussion about the areas that we still see are very, very damaged."

Mr. Woltz developed an appreciation for landscapes as a boy. He grew up on a farm in western North Carolina and in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

He went on to earn three bachelor's degrees - architecture, architectural history and fine art - at the University of Virginia in 1989. He earned master's degrees in both architecture and landscape architecture at the same university in 1997.

At Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects, Mr. Woltz has worked to restore ecosystems in damaged landscapes.

"I like to think of it as restoration but with a deep commitment to design," said Mr. Woltz, who has homes in New York City and Charlottesville, Va.

In New Zealand, Mr. Woltz and his company have been working for 18 years to restore wetlands, which previous owners had drained for grazing, during the Orongo Station Conservation Project. New Zealanders use the word "station" to mean "farm."

"We worked with a hydrologist and a wildlife biologist," Mr. Woltz said.

He said the design included deep waterways as well as shallow water for plants and high ground for the habitat and the safety of animals.

"It's like a living painting of biodiversity," Mr. Woltz said. "It attracts birds from Antarctica to Australia. It has become an essential habitat for most of the endangered animals in New Zealand."

Mr. Woltz also worked on restoring Memorial Park, a Houston site that suffered from four years of drought and had lost 80 percent of its natural canopy.

"We were hired to come up with a new vision, a new master plan, for the park," he said. "We restored 1,600 acres to the hydrology and plant community that would have been there 400 years ago. It's a mix of indigenous and pine forests, which were resilient before European settlement.

"We looked at those (past) ecologies for inspiration for what could resist drought and flooding in the future," Mr. Woltz said.

He noted Memorial Park now has six large lakes that can serve as reservoirs for storm water.

"Our process is to look very deeply at the long ecological and cultural history," he said. "Our design landscapes try to capture the essence of ecology and culture."

Mr. Woltz's other projects vary from the Virginia War Memorial to Hudson Yards in New York City and Aga Khan Garden in Edmonton, Alberta.

Mr. Woltz said his work is humbling.

"I realize right now, with projects that can take 10 to 20 years to construct, that I'm in the prime position of taking on some of the last

commissions I will live to see," Mr. Woltz said. "In some cases, they take a half century to come to maturity, so I won't live to see that happen.

"It's a highly humbling realization and a deeply motivating realization. I'm excited to get up every morning because I want to get these projects done."

email: dmason@newspress.com

IF YOU GO

Landscape architect Thomas Woltz will discuss "Cultivating Hope in Damaged Landscapes" at 5:30 p.m. March 12 at Westmont College's Global Leadership Center, 955 La Paz Road, Montecito.

The Garden Club of Santa Barbara talk is free. Seating is limited, and reservations are required. Contact the club at gardenclubofsantabarbara@gmail.com by March 1.

For more information, go to www.gardenclubofsantabarbara.org.
