

# Green is the color for arts center

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Volunteers put water permeable eco pavers into the courtyard at Perkins Center for the Arts in Collingswood. / JAN APPLE/For the Courier-Post

## IF YOU GO

Perkins Center for the Arts is at 30 Irvin Ave., Collingswood and at 395 Kings Highway in Moorestown. Visit [perkinscenter.org](http://perkinscenter.org) for exhibitions, hours, events and more.

Green is the color of an innovative project under way at Perkins Center for the Arts in Collingswood.

Though plans have been in the works for about a year, in late April, a metamorphosis of sorts began. Twenty-seven truckloads of earth were removed from the front of the multidisciplinary arts center on Irvin Avenue and construction crews have been working diligently to ensure that the soil and surface are to exact specifications.

The result will be an Eco-Plaza and courtyard. The project is slated for completion sometime this summer.

The new look will feature all things eco-friendly and educational, including a rain garden, eco-paver courtyard, landscaping and several handmade tiled benches, enabling visitors to relish the open-air ambiance.

Renovations also will include installation of thermal windows to doors outside the first floor gallery of the two-story facility. Visitors will soon be able to enter the gallery through the courtyard.

“The most amazing thing is that it all started with a patch of earth,” said Alan Willoughby, for 22 years the executive director of Perkins, which has its main site in Moorestown and opened the Collingswood location in 2002.

“Perkins Center for the Arts has garnered the invaluable support of individuals from both the public and private sectors who have a passion for the planet. It takes a village to raise an Eco-Plaza.”

Willoughby credited partnerships with Woodbury-based EP Henry, Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station and Water Resources Program, Leonberg Nursery & Landscaping, Inc., Cairone & Kaupp Landscape Architects and the Borough of Collingswood with making it all possible.

Willoughby said the borough is very involved with green activities. In keeping with that commitment, as the center evolves and devises plans for renovations and new programs, it will consistently examine things with “a green mindset. We want to be as environmentally friendly as possible.”

According to Paul A. Canton III of Moorestown, who has been treasurer and on the board of trustees since Perkins moved into the Collingswood site, there were some rainwater issues to be addressed. There was too much moisture in the building and after water traveled through the downspouts, it collected in a puddle on the ground. Looking for ways to remedy the situation led to the idea for a rain garden.

“I was really excited about the fact that we were able to do this project,” said Canton. “The rain garden helps us to handle in a responsible way our water runoff.”

With the assistance of Cairone & Kaupp and the Rutgers Agricultural Experiment Station and Water Resources Program, Perkins will be able to reduce water pollution and minimize the impact of storm water runoff.

“Rain gardens are about realizing that we are a part of nature,” said Willoughby.

“A rain garden is a landscaped depression that captures, filters and infiltrates storm water runoff at the source. A rain garden removes pollutants while recharging ground water and (is) an important tool for communities and neighborhoods to create diverse, attractive landscapes while protecting the health of the natural environment.”

Visitors had a preview of the project in April at Collingswood's Green Festival.

On a recent weekday morning, as Pat McCrindle of McCrindle Paver Systems MPS, Inc. and crew worked to ready the site, Willoughby pointed to the eco-pavers (2,000 square feet of them, designed and donated by EP Henry), describing their function: "Eco-pavers are an environmentally friendly design alternative used in an area that would traditionally be covered with an impervious material.

Eco-pavers allow water falling in the courtyard to percolate down and recharge the ground waters rather than being directed, unfiltered, to storm water drains and our waterways."

Willoughby, a Deptford resident, who holds an masters of fine arts degree in ceramics from Clemson University, is enthusiastic about the project from a functional, aesthetic and educational perspective.

The borough has supported the project in multiple ways. "They are totally behind the potential for us to be an educational tool," said Willoughby, adding that the Collingswood Farmers Market location flows into Perkins. "Our gallery is open Saturday mornings because of the farmers market. The courtyard will also be a great place to have a seat and take a rest; as water is renewed, perhaps individuals will be renewed.

"We are an arts center; we are first and foremost about art. What does that mean? We are really about community, people and doing what is right. I love seeing the way the arts are working as a bridge to the environment."

That bridge encompasses a residency program with schools — Arts Reaching the Students (ARTS), with custom-designed programs in the visual, performing and literary arts. "We are very much integrated with the community," said Canton. "The arts center is part of the fabric of the community and really adds to the quality of life — both in Moorestown and Collingswood."

Willoughby underscored the importance of that process. "This project will be done but the process will continue because art is an integral part of life.

"Our project is one small example of preserving water quality. We hope to serve as an example, which ultimately will result in a greater impact."