

Protecting Nature's Beauty

From tree planting to wetland creation, Land Care Niagara's outreach programs promote responsible land stewardship

By Wendy Helfenbaum

REINFORCING THE LINK between humans and their environment takes commitment, persistence and passion—all of which Land Care Niagara (LCN) has in spades.

This land stewardship organization is focused on creating, promoting and enhancing healthy and sustainable rural and urban environments. "We're trying to help people understand that the land is not specifically ours to own and that we should all help to take care of it, as well as all the wildlife, flora and fauna," says LCN's executive director, Michelle Karam.

With the help of volunteers, in 2023 the organization restored or protected 126 acres of private and public land in the Niagara region in 2023 through initiatives such as stream-restoration work and endangered-species conservation. It also planted 31,795 trees, bringing its total to more than 1.2 million trees planted since LCN started in 1995.

LCN also engages youth through hands-on learning programs that teach them how to make a positive difference in the environment and in their own communities.

"Our Woodworking for Nature program creates habitat structures for different wildlife species," says Karam. Young kids start with easy-to-assemble kits for structures, including boxes for bluebirds, bees and barn owls, as well as butterfly houses. Youth are given access to a woodworking



Family practice: Executive director Michelle Karam, husband Robert Karam, and their daughters take part in LCN's tree planting projects.

shop to build things from raw materials, too. "It's great to run workshops and have people [know] they're making something wildlife can use."

Land Care Niagara staff visit schools to talk about ecosystems, species at risk and habitats that may need conservation help. The group also encourages young people to get involved with its Re-Leaf Community Tree Nursery—an initiative that teaches participants about the different species of Carolinian trees in Niagara.

"Tours help them identify tree species and find something that links them to the trees or to nature to make them feel some kind of connection," says Karam.

"It's the perfect combination of helping people connect with the natural environment, fostering stewardship and educating them on how they can join a community and do all that together." **CAA**

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Is there an organization in your community that people need to know about?

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