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Coastal Woman Magazine
Fall 2007

GARDEN GUYS



Owen Dell

Billy Goodnick

Garden Wise Guys' Plot Thickens

BY NANCY SHOBE PHOTOS BY NATHAN WELTON

Musician Paul Simon once said, “If you can get humor and seriousness at the same time, you’ve created a special little thing...” Owen Dell and Billy Goodnick have done just that with their CITY-TV, Channel 18 television show, *Garden Wise Guys*. Combining their professional experience with their comedic natures, the two locally renowned landscape architects interweave the very serious subject of sustainability and water conservation into a 30-minute garden show that has

in San Diego and saw a television show by some gardener landscaping guys...and thought we could do it for Santa Barbara,” says Dell. “Billy and I used to do a thing called the Sustainable Landscape Fair...and we did a couple of other crudely produced films...so, she asked us to come together to do a television show.”

“Another 15 minutes of fame, and another...” says Goodnick, with a chuckle.

The show was born with funding from the Santa Barbara County Water

“Right Plant, Right Place—the inaugural episode—is about picking the right plant for the right place,” says Dell. “Usually people start with ‘Oh, I like these flowers’ and plant them,” adding that there isn’t much thought put into the process. Gardens soon wither because the plants were placed in the wrong sunlight, soil or other conditions. The goal is, as their first episode states, to have a garden that’s beautiful, functional and sustainable.

After the first couple of shows aired, Dell and Goodnick decided they could do better if they actually created a plot. “We ended up creating storylines that spoofed television or movies,” says Dell. One of the episodes, *Journey to the Center of the Dirt*, is one such example.

“There’s only so much specificity you can put into a show like this,” Goodnick says. “There’s not a tremendous budget or pre-planning... We have only about 20 minutes to impart our knowledge. We really can’t go into any depth... the value of what we do is demystify the general topic and put it in an ‘everyman’s’ language.” “We bring clarity

“WE BRING CLARITY TO A CONFUSED WORLD.” – OWEN DELL

viewers giggling at their amusing shtick. Owen Dell owns County Landscape Design and teaches classes at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, and Billy Goodnick works for the city of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation Department and teaches classes at Santa Barbara City College’s Adult Education.

Alison Jordan, a water resources specialist for the Public Works Department of Santa Barbara, conceived the idea for the show in fall 2005. “Alison attended a conference

Agency, the Santa Barbara Public Works Department and the Goleta Water District. New episodes are shot quarterly, on a seasonal schedule. Their sixth episode was just completed.

Taking on the personas of a salt-of-the-earth farmer—played by Dell—and the buttoned-down professor—played by Goodnick—the first episodes were created in an impromptu style with talking points quickly jotted down on a bar napkin and then played out in front of the camera.

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to a confused world," says Dell.

Sustainability is often a meaningless or misunderstood word for people who are not avid environmentalists. "If you apply the strict definition of sustainable, of nothing needing to be brought in or nothing ever going away, that's pretty hard to do," says Dell. "The word sustainable is shorthand for trying to do better, using fewer resources, and even generating some foods from your yard."

Currently, Dell and Goodnick are filming a four-episode series on the Firescape Garden, a 1.7-acre demonstration garden located at 2411 Stanwood Drive directly across from Fire Station No. 7. "We've stripped it (the garden) down to zero and filmed the whole process of rebuilding it, including demolition, design and how to manage your garden for firescape safety," Dell says. "The last episode will show what worked and what didn't."

The entrepreneurial spirit is nothing new for Goodnick and Dell. A landscaping career began for Dell after a youthful stint as a television repairman and contractor. For Goodnick, it happened after a not-as-successful-as-hoped-for drumming career with a band. Even though his band opened for The Doors and went on the road with the Jackson 5 (ask Goodnick about his purple velvet bell bottoms), it was Goodnick's love for bonsai, and the inspiration from his then-girlfriend and now-wife, Lin, that eventually inspired him to go back to school. "Lin convinced me that at age 32 I was not too old to go to Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo and get my degree in landscape architecture."

Goodnick's mother influenced him in a different way. "Some of us achieve greatness because of our upbringing and some of us in spite of it," he says. "When I lived in San Fernando Valley (originally, Goodnick was from New York), my folks had a large jade plant right outside of the picture window looking out over our backyard. My mom didn't like the flowers it produced from October to November, so she would go buy the cheapest fake-looking flowers and wrap it around the stems: three tulips, a couple of sunflowers and a couple of roses. I would ask her, 'Mom, what are you doing?' And, she would say, 'It's colorful.' I thank my mom for the inspiration."

And inspiration is what happens while listening to the Garden Wise Guys impart their helpful tips on creating a water-wise garden. To catch the Garden Wise Guys, tune in on Sundays at 9 p.m. to CITY-TV, Channel 18.

To glimpse Billy Goodnick in his former musician's life, you can see him play with his band, King Bee, at various locations through town. The band's web site is www.kingbeesb.com. And for more information regarding Owen Dell's award-winning landscape designs and his workshops and classes, visit owendell.com.