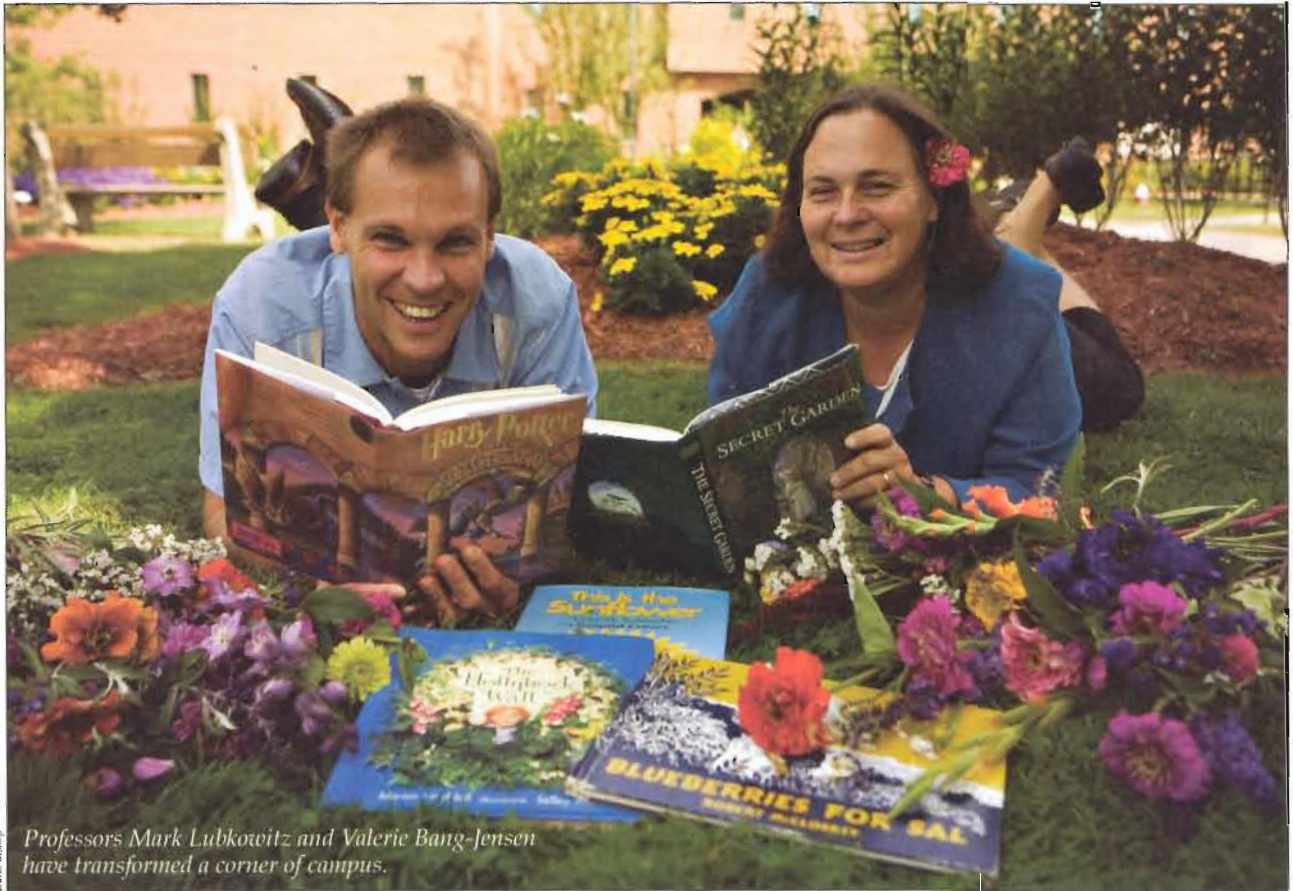


# THE HILLTOP

Saint Michael's student, faculty, alumni and campus news



Professors Mark Lubkowitz and Valerie Bang-Jensen have transformed a corner of campus.

## Taking Root

The Teaching Gardens of Saint Michael's are growing a new sense of educational collaboration

The new privet hedge that graces the green along the pathway between Saint Edmund's Hall and Klein Hall is beautiful, yes, but its aesthetic qualities are not the primary reason why it was planted this past spring. Rather, it was the presence of its name as the street where the Dursley family lives in the popular Harry Potter book series.

In fact, the thistles, the lupines, the iris and the chrysanthemums that are growing in this sunny patch on campus were

all chosen as representations of flowers in other children's books (Eeyore's snacks in *Winnie the Pooh*, the flowers planted in *Miss Rumphius*, the main protagonist in *As Long as They Are Mountains*, the title character in Kevin Henkes' *Chrysanthemum*), as part of the Books in Bloom Garden, one of the gardens created and planted by education professor Valerie Bang-Jensen and biology professor Mark Lubkowitz as part of a collaborative teaching effort that is taking root on campus. Together with the

Native Plants of Vermont garden and the Arboretum, which catalogs and labels the 50-plus varieties of trees on campus, the pair are transforming the campus landscape into an opportunity for not only education and biology students to learn from the gardens, but for them to learn from each other and for the greater campus community to learn as well.

The Teaching Gardens of Saint Michael's first began in 2003 when the trees on campus were catalogued and labeled to create the campus Arboretum



and foster an environment of “incidental learning,” says Lubkowitz—a way for the campus community to learn about the botanical surroundings as they walk across campus. With Lubkowitz and Bang-Jensen, the students catalogued and inventoried trees on campus, created signage with a tree’s common and Latin names, and wrote descriptions of them that would be targeted to the hobby naturalist and children between the ages of 5 and 12.

“The first step of learning as a scientist is observation,” says Lubkowitz, a plant and garden enthusiast. “It changes the relationship with a tree if you can identify it. With the Arboretum, Jeff Trumbower, dean of the college, recently told me, now that these trees are all labeled, ‘I finally know what a Pin Oak is.’”

This is incidental learning, and it’s important. With the Arboretum successfully completed by Lubkowitz’s biology students and Bang-Jensen’s education students, he and Bang-Jensen set to work planning the gardens, which they’d conceived when co-teaching a course a few years ago. “I was visiting Valerie’s class and she was discussing children’s literature and I was offering them a scientist’s perspective on the children’s book they were reading. It was a story about what goes on in a barn in the winter, including a mouse being chased by a cat, and while the class was responding to the writing’s general perspective that this was a warm, pleasant story, I told them as a scientist what I saw was a story about the harsh reality of winter survival that is embedded in the life cycle of many organisms. It became apparent to both of us that we look at life through different lenses. This is a multi-disciplinary world, and the creation of the Teaching Gardens gives us a common platform for students to sort out what that means.”

The Teaching Gardens are actually three separate learning environments: the Arboretum, Books in Bloom, and Native Plants of Vermont. The Books in Bloom garden, which was designed to

look like an open book is, as far as Bang-Jensen knows, the first public garden planted specifically to represent plants found in children’s literature. The students identified children’s books in which flowers and plants play a critical role, either as the names of characters or as plot points, and the garden was planned accordingly, then planted in mid-spring on the green outside Klein Hall. An A-to-Z garden, which is part of Books in Bloom, includes plants ranging from asters to zinnias. Native Plants of Vermont, adjacent to Books in Bloom, encourages campus-wide awareness of the native and naturalized plants of the Vermont. “We took a shady spot and planted it with woodland species,” says Lubkowitz. The garden includes jack-in-the-pulpit, wood ferns, Christmas ferns, ostrich ferns, fiddleheads, Solomon’s seal, American bittersweet, dogwood, butterfly weed, wild ginger and trillium.

With the gardens now in place, Bang-Jensen’s education majors can create age-appropriate learning materials for their young students to use in the garden. Lubkowitz’s biology students can teach the education majors about how to understand the scientific aspects of the garden. The professors are excited about the potential in the gardens for both students and the greater community. Different professors are already creating lessons based on the gardens, including professors of education, geography and even theater.

The gardens were a gift of sorts to the community, and from the community as well. President Marc vanderHeyden was an early and enthusiastic supporter. Alan Dickinson, associate grounds director and certified Vermont horticulturalist, arranged donation of all the Physical Plant’s staff time in creating the planting areas. And many of the college’s faculty and staff donated plants, labor and financial resources to help complete the gardens.

“Our long-term goal is to make the campus a destination for learning about plants,” says Lubkowitz.

—Caroline Crawford

### Growing in the Teaching Gardens

#### Books in Bloom

- Dahlia
- Hyacinth
- Iris
- Asiatic Lily
- Lilac
- Marigold
- Petunia
- Phlox
- Peony
- Violet
- Privet
- Coreopsis
- Columbine
- Iceland Poppy
- Ox-eyed Daisy
- Lupine
- Bee Balm
- Cornflower
- Dianthus
- Blanketflower
- New England Aster
- Bachelor Button
- Butterfly Weed
- Chrysanthemum
- Coneflower
- Cosmos
- Delphinium
- Gentian
- Hollyhock

#### Native Plants Garden

- Delphinium
- Gentian
- Hollyhock
- Dogwood
- Ninebark
- Coreopsis
- Globe Arborvitae
- Red Twig Dogwood
- American Bittersweet
- Black Chokeberry
- Columbine Fern
- Goldsturm Rudbeckia
- Black Chokecherry
- Joe Pye Weed
- Meadowbrite coneflower
- Jack-in-the-pulpit
- Lily of the Valley
- Butterfly weed
- Ostrich fern
- Wild ginger
- Lupines
- Lambs Ear
- Cornflower
- Cardinal Flower
- Solomon’s seal
- New England Aster
- Christmas fern
- Marginal wood fern
- Intermediate wood fern