

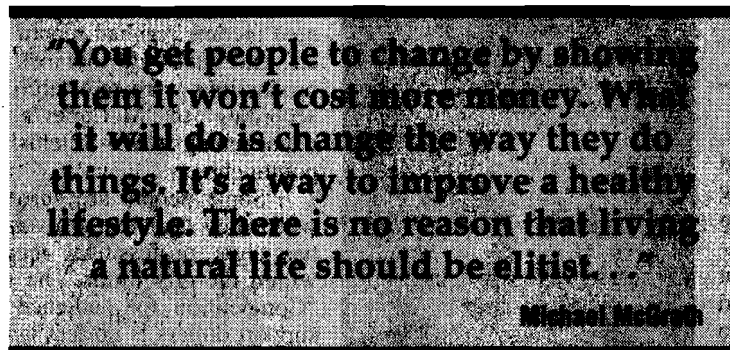
Bees and Society Hill residents benefit from natural fertilizers

By Lea Kahn
Staff Writer

If the grass is greener at the Society Hill at Lawrenceville condominium complex off Gordon Avenue, it's not because the landscaper has dumped tons of chemical fertilizers on the lawn.

It's actually because the landscaping contractor has dumped tons of compost on the lawn, instead — 110 cubic yards, to be exact, according to resident James Alexander. He is a trustee on the condominium association's board of directors.

"Some residents asked for (the shift to organic material)," Mr. Alexander said. "The community is very conscious of environmental concerns. When I came onto the board two years ago, the board had already started to introduce organic fer-



tilizers (and shift away from chemical lawn fertilizers)."

That switch is being completed this fall. The entire development will be treated with organic fertilizer and non-chemical weed control methods, under a plan devised by Michael McGrath. A nationally known expert on organic lawns and gardens, he is the host of National Public Radio's "You Bet Your Garden" show and the former

editor of Rodale Press' Organic Gardening magazine.

All of the organic material being used at Society Hill at Lawrenceville is available at the Joseph H. Maher Ecological Center on Princeton Pike in Lawrence. The ecological center is jointly operated by Lawrence Township and Princeton Borough and Princeton Township.

Mr. McGrath was contacted by the Society Hill at Law-

renceville condominium association after members learned that he was going to speak on sustainable lawn care at The Lawrenceville School in June. Sustainable Lawrence arranged for him to speak on the topic.

"Jim (Alexander) sat through the presentation," Mr. McGrath said. "I agreed to take a look (at Society Hill). I came over and I looked at the property. I was very pleased. It is already better kept and more environmentally sound than other communities."

Mr. McGrath agreed to take on the project, adding that he admires the commitment of the Society Hill at Lawrenceville community. He is working with Joe DiGiovanni of landscaping contractor DeVries Landscaping of North Brunswick Township, which maintains the development.

The plan calls for aerating,

reseeding and applying leaf compost to four courts, or streets, in the condominium complex. A combination of composted poultry manure mixed in with worm castings will be used on three courts, and the rest will get composted poultry manure.

"The grass in those four courts will be significantly lush-er," Mr. McGrath said.

Non-chemical means of controlling weeds also will be implemented, Mr. Alexander said. Corn gluten may be used as a pre-emergent to prevent weeds from growing at the beginning of spring, and borax may be used as a weed-killer later in the season.

Mr. McGrath and Mr. Alexander pointed out that using locally obtained organic material is less expensive than using chemical fertilizers, which are petroleum-based. It costs \$9 per cubic yard to load the organic material onto the landscaper's trucks at the Joseph H. Maher

Ecological Center, plus the labor cost to spread it, they said.

"You get people to change by showing them it won't cost more money," Mr. McGrath said. "What it will do is change the way they do things. It's a way to improve a healthy lifestyle. There is no reason that living a natural life should be elitist or expensive. Every year that you didn't expose yourself to insecticides is a year on the side of angels."

Mr. McGrath said that even if the risks of using agricultural chemicals are low, there is no benefit from using them. He added that he does not believe the risks are low, and that using chemicals is unnecessary.

"The things they are doing here (at Society Hill at Lawrenceville) will benefit the community," he said. "There will be more oxygen in the air, storm-water will be processed more efficiently and there will be no negative run-off. You'll see more bees and lightning bugs."