

SUMMER DINING: SAVORY SALADS, SPICY WINGS, AND BERRY DELIGHTS

# Hudson Valley

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## GOING WILD!

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EDITED BY VALERIE HAVAS

## Creek revival

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, Newburgh residents seeking solitude picnicked on the shores of Quassaick Creek, dubbed the "Vale of Avoca" for its resplendent beauty. Then, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the creek served as the city's manufacturing mecca as factories and mills sprang up along its banks.

"It's where the City of Newburgh started," says Jean Wort, vice president of the Orange County Land Trust. By 1842, the city had attracted over 30 industrial plants, including grist, plaster, and woolen mills; candle makers; rug, carriage, and furniture producers; iron foundries; shipbuilders; and a brickyard. But as the municipality prospered, the creek became fouled with manufacturing waste and raw sewage.

"We can't just leave pieces of land that have been abandoned, misused, and polluted to clean themselves up. We have to do something about it," insists Wort. So the Quassaick Creek Estuary Preserve Coalition — a

grassroots volunteer organization made up of representatives from the trust, the state, and the city — has been established to restore the creek to its former grandeur.

The coalition aims to create the Quassaick Creek Estuary Preserve, which will provide fishing access, picnicking spots, and a hiking trail stretching from the mouth of the creek at the Hudson River to Robinson Avenue. (It is hoped that the trail eventually will extend all the way to Algonquin Park in the Town of Newburgh.) Plans to include a streamside museum are also being discussed. "The possibility of a working mill/museum complex is exciting, but we are only in the dream-environmenting stage," says Elizabeth McKean, the city's liaison to the project.

"It's worth reclaiming this creek," stresses Barbara Oliver, a Newburgh resident and member of the coalition. Stroll along the Quassaick today and remnants of the past are everywhere: broken bricks dot the path, a 19th-century double-arch pedestrian bridge stretches across the stream, and the foundations of old mills peek from beneath the ground.

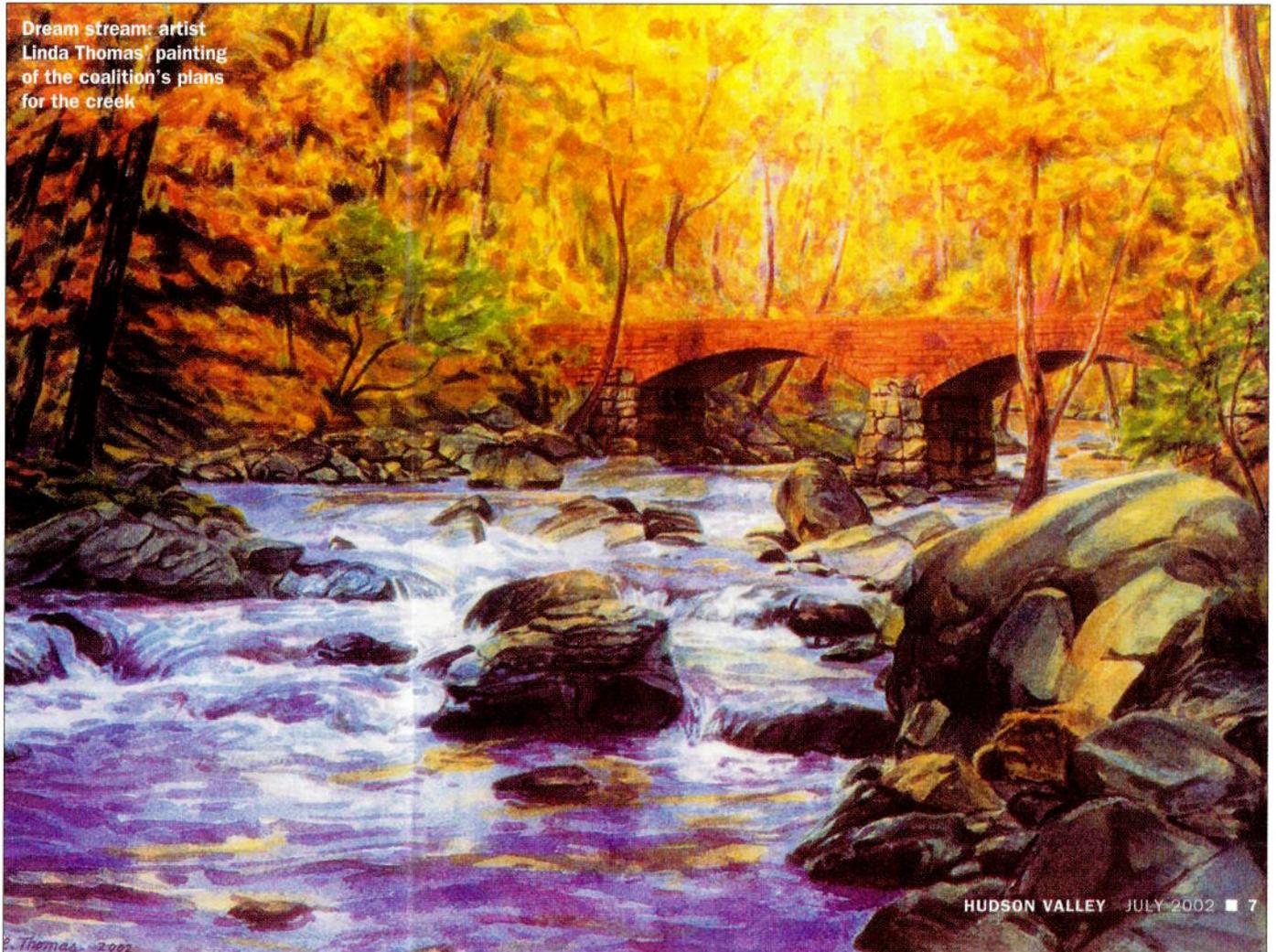
"The Quassaick Creek is an amazing area

for wildlife," adds Fran Dunwell, coordinator of the Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program. Along with the state's Greenway Conservancy, the Estuary Program has provided grants to research the history of the creek, develop a master plan, participate in community outreach events, conduct fish and habitat studies, and secure property rights.

"The Quassaick Creek is a forgotten little stream in a very urban area that has great importance to the Hudson River as an estuary," says Dunwell. "We want people to understand this is a tidal creek and that there is a connection between Newburgh and the ocean. There are over 35 species of fish in a one-half-mile stretch of the tidal creek." Besides acting as a spring spawning ground for river fish, it is home to great blue heron, bald eagles, turkey, grouse, orioles, warblers, coyotes, frogs, and turtles. "It's a little oasis. It's just one of the most beautiful and vibrantly dazzling places I've ever been," admits Dunwell.

The Estuary Preserve project germinated in 1999, shortly after Central Hudson

Dream stream: artist Linda Thomas' painting of the coalition's plans for the creek





One of the proposed trailheads, on Walsh Road

Gas & Electric agreed to award the Orange County Land Trust a \$100,000 grant toward the creek's revitalization in reparation for violating environmental laws. Within the last two years, support has increased tenfold. "As we go along, there have been other organizations that are showing an interest," says Wort. The coalition now includes the Newburgh Heights Association, the Historical Society of Newburgh Bay & the Hudson Highlands, and the Orange County Sportsmen's Federation, among others. So far, it has garnered over \$172,000 to create the preserve.

"When we heard about the Quassaick Creek Estuary Preserve and Trail, it was a natural fit for us," says Jean McGrane, director of the Mid-Hudson Land Revitalization Partnership, which was awarded \$10,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct an environmental analysis of the site, explore historical aspects, measure contaminant levels, and perform any necessary clean-up. "We have these old sites that are contaminated, and a lot of developers are afraid to get involved, but the remediation is quite feasible and achievable," states McGrane. The Quassaick Creek Preserve "has the potential of serving as a model of brownfield revitalization. I think that this has world-class potential as an urban park."

The road ahead is long and winding: more funding must be obtained to purchase the land, clean it up, and construct hiking paths, access roads, and parking lots. But Wort is optimistic. "Now that we have a proper plan, I think we should be able to move forward," she says. McKean cites one sign of progress: "The existing twin-arch stone and brick pedestrian bridge is being stabilized with a \$14,800 grant [from the Hudson River Foundation]. That stabilization work should be completed by the end of the summer."

Securing land for the formation of a corridor surrounding the creek may prove more challenging. "One parcel is owned by the city, one by the county, and six are privately owned. We are hoping to acquire the parcels within the next year," says McKean.