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MEMBER PROFILE - NOVEMBER 2004

Susan Billingsley

Like many WBO members, Susan Billingsley spent years on one career, only to discover later that she had a passion and an innate ability that led her down an unrelated career path. Susan took the skills she had developed and used as an entrepreneur in accounting and administration and adapted them to the totally different field of landscape design. A lifelong gardener, Susan completed classes several years ago to become a Montgomery County Master Gardener. The broad, ongoing education required for volunteers in the program helped Susan to focus on her particular interests in horticulture. In a USDA class she became hooked on residential design. She is now working toward plant and design certifications at George Washington University. Susan's passion for her new career resulted in an offer to work with her landscape contractor. The contractor, who has thirty years' experience, sponsored Susan for her MHIC license. He mentors Susan and installs and builds her designs. Susan also freelances landscape consultations and designs.

Thirteen years ago, Susan designed her own home and business on a woodland lot. The property is comprised of three acres of wooded terraces, lawns and a cabin. It enabled Susan to create garden rooms with varied styles and include a swimming pool as well as fish and wildlife ponds. Thus, she named her company "HillTop Gardens," where clients are invited to see her gardens and mature plant specimens growing in their natural form.

What does Susan like best about her work? "I love visiting the clients' home to observe their decorating and lifestyle preferences. Do they want an intimate space to relax as a couple or is their preference for entertaining large groups? Do they, their children or their dog require recreational features? Is low maintenance important or are they avid gardeners? Do they dream of growing cut flowers for arrangements or growing herbs for cooking? Once I have answers to questions like these, I can create special gardens that will enhance the beauty of their home and lives."

Susan joined WBO in 1997 to participate in the MasterMind program and became the program coordinator soon after. MasterMind meets twice a month, currently with a pot luck dinner and a breakfast meeting, and has 5-6 members in each group. "It's important for women in business to know they are not alone," says Susan. "As owners, we all have the same issues and challenges; yet each individual has different strengths and weaknesses. Members share their expertise, brainstorm solutions and prod each other toward their goals." Susan particularly likes WBO's educational opportunities. Praising the group for its warmth and support, Susan appreciates the chance to "meet women who are talented, have a positive attitude, and are willing to take risks."

Susan has lived in Montgomery County since she was thirteen. When she is not working, Susan loves swimming, landscape photography, and downhill skiing.