# Volunteer crews mobilize against invasive vine problem

By David Maggiotto

A movement to preserve one of the village's most prized natural resources — its trees — is under way in Hastings. It is not a threat from axes and bulldozers that is concerning residents, but an incursion from other members of the plant kingdom, namely invasive vines such as porcelain berry and oriental bittersweet.

In an effort to relieve trees on public property from being overtaken by these vines, more than a dozen residents teamed up each of the last two Sundays to remove the offending plants by hand. A third vine-cutting effort will take place this Sunday, from 2 to 3:30 p.m., on Stanley Avenue between Ravensdale Road and South Clinton Avenue, adjacent to the Saw Mill River Parkway.

Hastings residents Susan Harris and Haven Colgate are leading the vine-removal charge. Earlier this year, each woman separately contacted the Yonkers-based environmental nonprofit Groundwork Hudson Valley regarding the removal of invasive vines from the village. Groundwork put the two activists in contact and lent them equipment, such as hard hats, clippers, and loppers, to be used in a vine-cutting project.

Colgate is vice-chair of the Hastings Conservation Commission (HCC), and last month invited Harris to attend an HCC meeting to determine how to best attack the vine problem. "What's exciting is how a concerned resident can start something that's helpful for the entire village," Colgate said in a phone interview this week.

The pair needed to organize their movement quickly, as by early April the reemergence of poison ivy renders vine removal more perilous. After scouting locations together, Harris and Colgate decided to focus their effort on a swath of woodsy land along Stanley Avenue that Colgate called "an area that had been neglected." She was drawn to it over a year ago when she was volunteering with Groundwork on a vine-removal site across the parkway.

Colgate explained that vine control requires the ongoing stewardship of local citizens. "This is going to have to be a maintenance project for the next 100 years, because the vines come back," she said. Residents' efforts have benefited the trees from which vines have been removed, and Colgate hopes that the effects will multiply, as vine-cutting volunteers "can bring that skill set to other parts of Hastings that need it."

Recently, other concerned residents have undertaken vine-removal initiatives of their own. This past Saturday, Mount Hope Boulevard resident Susan Lopeman spent the day cutting vines in her neighborhood, focusing on a swath near the corner of Mount Hope and Cliff Street. In an e-mail message to Harris and Colgate this week, Lopeman wrote that prior to her efforts, "those trees looked so shrouded — they looked like ghosts, or Cousin Itt from 'The Adams Family.'"

To promote the Sunday vine cuttings, Colgate made fliers, sent e-mail blasts, and set up an informational table

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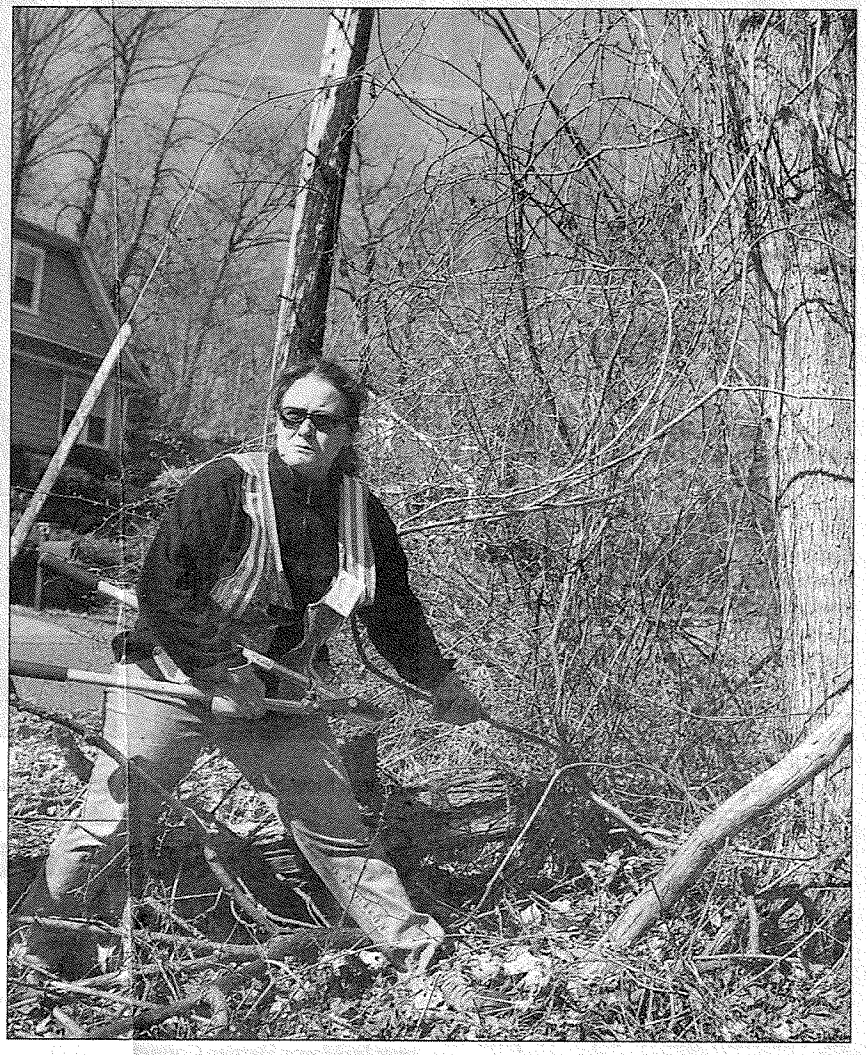

TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

**Haven Colgate shows participants how to remove vines on Sunday, March 11.**

# Vine cutting

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utside the community center on March 10 to coincide with the monthly winter farmers' market. Residents ranging from kids to senior citizens met to join the charge each of the past two Sundays. Two village officials, Trustee Niki Armacost and Village Clerk Susan Maggiotto, were among the volunteers wielding workgloves and cutting tools.

Before they commenced cutting and pulling down vines, Colgate said volunteers who needed it got "an educational tutorial," and all signed liability waivers and were instructed on safety measures, such as how to avoid getting struck by a falling vine. The crew was also instructed on which plants exactly to remove — "There's wild grape that should be left because it's a native plant," Colgate explained.

Property owners introduced vines and other non-native plants, in some instances more than 100 years ago, to enhance the landscape. While aesthetically pleasing to some, Colgate explained that plants imported from different parts of the world "change the ecological balance." She said the vines climb and cover the trees, thus depriving them of sunlight, and can lead to their doom if left unchecked. Vines can also cause trees to grow unnaturally lop-sided, leaving limbs more susceptible to breakage.

Colgate called the vine-cutting measures "the least we can do to give back to the trees." Vines are living plants, too, and Colgate conceded there are nuances to the argument of how to intervene with the environment. "It comes down to what kind of eco-system we want to see," she said.