

HEROES OF THE SAW MILL RIVER

Norma Silva

Question: Let's start with you telling me about your background and what motivated you to get involved in environmentalism.

Norma Silva: I was a special education teacher, I retired back in 2011. I was teaching down in the Bronx, and had my students, planting and doing all sorts of things. I've always



Norma Silva has always loved plants and the environment. When it comes to the communities around the Saw Mill River, she has helped implement pollinator pathways to create beautiful places where wildlife can thrive.



Norma Silva, with the help of other volunteers planted the first butterfly garden along the Saw Mill River.

liked working with plants and dealing with the environment to keep it clean. I had heard about Groundwork Hudson

Valley and the work they do, so I contacted them and got involved with the Saw Mill River Coalition. I thought it was great because I bike along the South County Trail and saw Steve Pucillo working along there. I thought it was awesome because nobody even knew there was a river there. You knew it was the Saw Mill River Parkway, but where was the river!? I went in there with the Saw Mill River Coalition to get rid of the invasives. I helped plant some trees in one of the meadow areas, which are quite large now. Then we came up with the idea to do butterfly gardens. Steve said he thought it was a wonderful idea, and so he selected certain areas for us to put in some seeds. Now we have about five butterfly gardens. We started off with two, but now there's five of them. Steve Pucillo discovered the cave, which is along the South County

Trail, which I never knew was there. Once we cleared that area out, we got it ready for another

butterfly garden. So, we have one there and that was the last one that we've done. We also have one that was an experiment in Hastings for the high school. They wanted to learn more about the plants and the pollinators, so they also got a section along the South County Trail. So, I've been doing this for many years – I've lost track of how many years. It's even better with the pollinator pathways, which I'm involved with through the Westchester Land Trust where I'm on the board. We're trying to encourage even more of Yonkers to get on board with the pollinator pathway. The area around the daylighted Saw Mill River in downtown Yonkers is also becoming a pollinator path.

Question: How are you involved with the communities around the Saw Mill River and how important do you think the community is to the Saw Mill River?

Norma Silva: I think it's extremely important. The area around the Saw Mill River and the South County Trail gets used a lot by so many different types of people, whether it's runners, walkers, cyclists, or people walking their dogs. It's constantly being used, and a lot of people have stopped when they see us working in the butterfly gardens and say "Oh, it looks so nice!" The community is very happy to have the benches to sit on, relax and look at the river. I began my work with the communities around the Saw Mill River first with Yonkers on the Move and LYFE Coalition. I was in charge in the physical activities there, and every month I would organize a physical activity. I advertised a walk through the three spots around the daylighted Saw Mill River in downtown Yonkers. Right now, I am working with the Old Croton Aqueduct, which goes into Yonkers. I'm trying to get the community in the lower part of Yonkers involved. I have adopted one of the trails in Van Cortlandt Park. I'm part of the Vinecutters, where we clear out the invasive vines and put in native plants. So, I continue with anything that has to do with the environment.



Norma Silva enjoying one of the benches along the Saw Mill River.

Question: *What is your vision for the future of the Saw Mill River?*

Norma Silva: We are already doing the things that I have been thinking. Steve Pucillo is creating the gorgeous bird houses in there, even butterfly houses in the butterfly gardens. There



The Butterfly Gardens located along the Saw Mill River create a haven for pollinators and wildlife.

are some areas that are blocked by trees that have come down, so I would like to see those cleared out to allow the water to run more freely. I'd like to see the river utilized like it was many, many moons ago. Hopefully we will get more wildlife in there, like we see in the Bronx River. They have eels,

fish and even a beaver living there. I'd like the same for the Saw Mill River. I'd also like to have more contact with the community. The water from the Saw Mill River empties into the Hudson River, so helping the Saw Mill River helps the Hudson River. Anything to do with the environment, I'm there!



This bench, located along one of the Butterfly Gardens, provides the community the opportunity to enjoy nature along the Saw Mill River.