

BUTTERFLY RELEASES

Making 'green' memories at White Haven

By MIKE MURPHY

mmurphy@messengerpostmedia.com

The transformation from caterpillar to butterfly is a beautiful, mysterious and natural process.

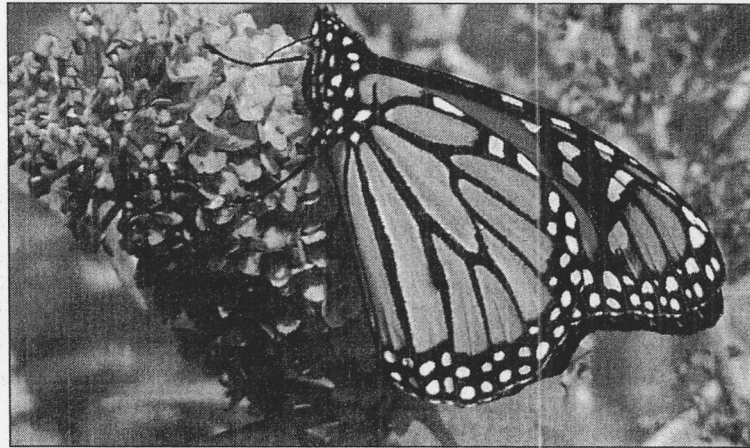
The transition of a loved one from life to death is no less mysterious and natural, and the flight of a butterfly a fitting symbol of that transition, according to Andrea Vittum, president of White Haven Memorial Park in Pittsford.

That's the primary reason why White Haven plans to offer butterfly releases at services, beginning in the spring. A butterfly release is also planned for a summertime public service of remembrance.

"The butterfly is such a beautiful symbol of transformation or reincarnation — you can look at it in any number of ways," said Vittum, a Penfield resident. "We want to help people find the most meaningful ways to help celebrate and remember their loved ones."

Having the released monarch and black swallowtail butterflies flit about the "green" park also fits in with what Vittum has been trying to do here for years.

The grounds are home to a variety of wildlife, a nature path, meadow with bluebird boxes and woods, with Irondequoit Creek forming the eastern boundary. The nature-friendly and already butterfly-friendly park is a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanc-



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White Haven Memorial Park is planning to release monarch (above) and black swallowtail butterflies to help families remember loved ones.

tuary.

Although many offer balloon releases at services — White Haven does not allow them because of the adverse impact on the environment — the butterfly release is new to the region, Vittum said.

And it does require some effort and planning, according to Nanci DeLeo, a Penfield resident who works on the White Haven staff.

"There is really quite a lot of information to know in order to do the butterfly release," DeLeo said. "These are little, live babies we're dealing with."

DeLeo had to complete training with the Association of Butterflies in order to care for the butterflies. The park has a butterfly garden, but more plants will be

added to provide them homes, DeLeo said.

"Hopefully, the butterflies will stay and make more," she said.

Obviously, the service is weather dependent — the insects can only be released if it's at least in the 60- to 70-degree temperature range, which rules out much of the year. Also, advance time is needed to order the butterflies (they cost \$115 a dozen) and have them shipped to DeLeo in time for the service.

The service may not be for everyone, but the plan is to make it available and see how well it works, Vittum said.

Others in the industry also are looking to White Haven with interest.

White Haven is known throughout the state when it



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White Haven Memorial Park staff Nanci DeLeo and Andrea Vittum, president of the park in Pittsford, are planning to offer butterfly releases to honor deceased family members.

comes to caring for the environment and trying new programs and services, said Debbie Galassi, vice president of the New York State Association of Cemeteries.

Galassi, who is with the Elm-lawn Cemetery in Buffalo, said she has not heard of other cemeteries in New York that have offered the butterfly program.

"It sounds like a great idea," said Galassi. "I think we will see more cemeteries try it, depending on how successful it is with the public."

If they can work out the kinks involved in offering the service, both Vittum and DeLeo believe it will be a beautiful and meaning-

Wildlife 'Haven'

White Haven Memorial Park officials hope the monarch and black swallowtail butterflies that are released stick around the 170 acres of park grounds, but the park is already a haven for wildlife. Bluebird boxes in a meadow provide a home for New York's state bird, but all kinds of birds have been spotted here, including wild turkeys. Deer, coyote and fox also have been seen.

ful way to remember and celebrate a loved one.

"I think it's going to be wonderful and something families can be part of, which helps the healing process," DeLeo said.