

## GARDEN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

## MORRIS LEDGER EXTRA MO 07928

## Garden grows along with a museum



A closeup of the griffin in its garden.

## Century-old griffin is centerpiece of Madison resurgence

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FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

A four-foot-tall, terra-cotta griffin that landed in a patch of weeds and scraggly rhododendrons in Madison has germinated a garden.

Nestled at the beast's toes are primrose and tucked in behind the dogwood is white-flowering bugbane. And come spring, tulips will give this scrap of land next to the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts a burst of color.

The Griffin Garden complements the more than century-old statue but also re-



PHOTOS BY PATTI SAPONE/THE STAR-LEDGER

Deborah Starker, left, director of the Museum of Early Trades and Crafts in Madison, stands in the museum's spruced-up garden with garden designer Beth Riley of Madison.

flects the architecture of the building "and signals the resurgence of the museum," said Deborah Starker, director of the facility.

The griffin — a legendary creature with the head of an eagle and the body of a lion — once sat at the top of the distinctive 1899 three-story-tall James Building at Main Street and Green Village Road in

Madison. When John Solu, the building's owner of 25 years, set out to restore it several years ago, he found that three of the creatures were in bad shape.

"One had been hit by lightning, the second one the wing was broken and the third one had been tarred because they thought it had a leak or a crack," said Solu.

Concerned about the safety of pedestri-

ans, he decided that new griffins would have to be built. Working with Garfield sculptor David Finlay, replicas were produced with a tougher mixture of terra cotta and polymers so that the new statues that emerged against the sky could last another 100 years.

One of the original statues landed [See GARDEN, Page 9]

across the street at the museum, the former Madison library built in 1900 by the same philanthropists, Ellen and D. Willis James, who built the James Building.

The 4-foot-high sculpture sat in the 11-by-35-foot plot under the railroad tracks until this spring when campers planted an herb garden there, Starker said.

When camp was over, volunteers from the museum, the Madison Garden Club and The Thursday Morning Club, helped by Florham Park-based gardener Mike DiLauri, followed instructions for a late Victorian-era garden.

Once the basics were in place, museum officials turned to garden designer Beth Riley, a Madison resident and owner of The Potted Garden shop, to bring in more plants that would be typical of the mid-to-late Victorian era.

Riley chose a Victorian favorite, lady ferns, to spread at the griffin's feet. The ferns shape an arch, as does a bed of violet geraniums at sidewalk level and a row of red-twig dogwood that runs the perimeter.

Stokes asters, a Victorian-era blue summer flower, and boxwood fill in an arch at the museum with a soft geometric pattern. Riley also brought in asters, primroses and a vine on a cross to cover the cement wall behind the garden.

The garden should keep blooming through the fall, and in the winter, the cross vine and dogwood will still supply color with their red branches. Next spring, the dogwood will bloom along with the primroses and tulips. And during the summer, the geraniums and asters will provide flowers followed by the late-blooming bugbane.

Because all the plants are native, except for the boxwood, the garden should welcome all kinds of butterflies and birds. Hummingbirds, in particular, love the small cup-shaped flower on the cross vine, Riley said.

"I tried to blend formality as well as a liberal approach to gardening that started taking hold at the turn of the century," Riley said.

Solu said the griffin, known in ancient times as a guardian, now acts as a link between the two architecturally similar buildings, bringing people's attention to features that aren't usually seen.

"One of the things we observed," he said, "was unless people were looking up at the sky, the griffins virtually remained unnoticed by the community."

Now, the winged guardians are in plain sight.