

Chapel of St. Basil

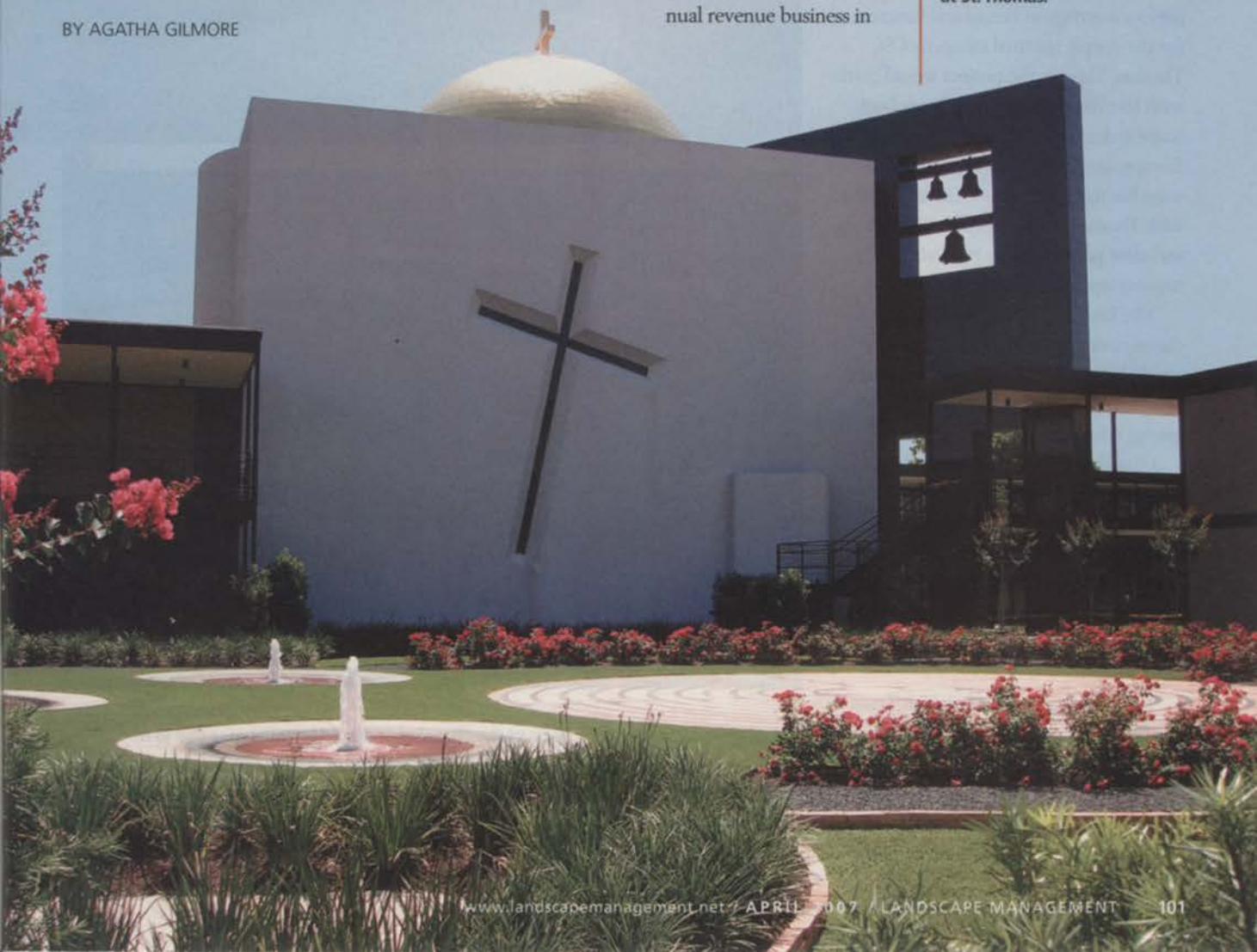
Thompson's Landscape Services overcame many challenges to build a labyrinth at Houston's University of St. Thomas church.

BY AGATHA GILMORE

When she was a young girl, Helen Grivich had a unique pastime. The countryside of her native England was littered with medieval labyrinths — snaking, circular paths that wind into their centers. These ancient motifs were meant to instill peace and promote meditation in those who walked them. And Grivich was no exception: Growing up on a tiny, secluded island off the southwest coast, she would often trace her way along the methodic trails, feeling the world slip away as she gave in to reflection.

It was an experience she carried with her to adulthood, when she became a designer and consultant for Thompson's Landscape Services, a \$2 million annual revenue business in

The labyrinth is a perfect marriage of design and function for the deeply spiritual campus at St. Thomas.



Magnolia, TX. She always wanted to build a labyrinth of her own someday. In late 2005 she got her chance.

The University of St. Thomas, a Catholic institution in Houston, needed a new design for the garden behind its Chapel of St. Basil, a unique building by major modern architect Philip Johnson. Labyrinths have existed for at least 4,000 years, spanning both continental and cultural divides. There are several different types, but regardless of design, their universal trait is that they have one entrance and one exit. They are not mazes: They are not meant to trick or confuse. Historically, people who couldn't afford major pilgrimages to Jerusalem could walk a labyrinth instead. So a labyrinth was the perfect marriage of design and function for the deeply spiritual campus of St. Thomas. Though the project would come with its own hurdles — the Texas landscape is decidedly different from that of Europe, and building at a university always has its challenges — Grivich worked with Thompson's to create a 42-ft. stone-and-slate pattern that is both visually intriguing and emblematically rich.

The first step for Grivich was to choose a design. "I had to find one that would be significant," she says. "It should be steeped with traditional symbols, inspiring refuge from urban turmoil."

Grivich settled on a pattern derived from the 13th-century labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in central France. "The one that I put in is the kindest one in the world," she says. "You don't have to worry. You take the turns where it tells you. You don't have to think; you can be introspective."

The pathway, made of pinkish Texas crushed granite against a backdrop of grey slate, divides into four quadrants and ends in a central rosette that symbolizes the Virgin Mary. This particular design also

continued on page 104



Before construction could begin at the Chapel of St. Basil, the entire area had to be drained and slate installed because part of the garden sat atop an underground classroom. (Below) The design was taken from the 13th-century labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in central France.

continued from page 102

has 13 twists and turns toward the center before reaching the end, which according to Grivich, is meant to allude to Jesus and his apostles. The outer ring of the giant circular design is flanked by 28 three-quarter moons, which Grivich suggests means labyrinths were used as 28-day lunar calendars for Easter feasts. "It was the only way back then that they could [tell time]," she says. "Talk about 'written in stone.'"

Having found a suitably symbolic design, Grivich then had to figure out how to position it in the chapel garden. Since the chapel is such an architecturally interesting building, she chose to have the labyrinth face it. "There's a cross that's slightly off-kilter," she says of the large,

continued on page 106

Is there a labyrinth in your future?

Admittedly, the design and installation of labyrinths is not exactly a growing trend in the landscape business. But, who knows, maybe someday, because they're more common than you'd think. In the Houston region alone there are at least 10 walkable labyrinths. Here's the short list with more information available at www.houstonlabyrinth.org.

The Covenant Church Labyrinth on Caroline Street is a 50-ft. setting made of crushed granite and pavenstone. It is viewable at www.covenanthouston.org.

The First Presbyterian Church in Lufkin, TX, features a 50-ft., 7-circuit labyrinth made of gravel and pavers. It is set in a wooded area near a prayer garden and is open 24 hours.

The Margaret Austin Center in Chappell Hill, TX, offers a 7-circuit, left-handed labyrinth modeled on ancient Crete designs. Visit www.macenter.org or call 800/836-4757 for availability.

One of the most famous labyrinths in the world is the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth, built around 1200 A.D., and made of limestone and blue marble. Measuring 42-ft. in diameter, its pattern is meant to symbolize the course of human life, winding its way through trial and tribulation and leading to God, symbolized by the central rosette. The rosette was once covered in copper, but the metal was taken in 1793 to make guns. Today, although the Chartres labyrinth receives many visitors, it is covered with chairs or additional seating every day but Friday.

—AG



**CHAMPA
CERAMICS**

206.762.8395
FAX 206.762.8372

- COMPLETE FOUNTAIN KITS
- FROST PROOF POTTERY
- CARVED STONE

WWW.CHAMPACERAMICS.COM

Circle 152

Seize the day.

Start your work day with the right tools from Forestry Suppliers. With more than 9,000 items to choose from, it's no wonder we're the number one supplier to landscape, grounds maintenance and parks & recreation pros around the world. Call or go online today to request a **free** catalog!

Forestry Suppliers, Inc.
www.forestry-suppliers.com
 Catalog Request: 800-360-7788
 Sales: 800-647-5368

©2006 Forestry Suppliers, Inc. All rights reserved.

Circle 153

continued from page 104

white symbol that hangs at an angle on the outer wall of the chapel. Grivich laid out the labyrinth so that "at each turn, you would face the cross, which is the

greatest symbol of the Catholic Church."

The rest of the garden was sprinkled with religious elements. Three granite fountains (meant to recall the Holy Trinity) were designed for the area behind the labyrinth. "They mimicked another



one that was on campus," says J.D. Burney, chief designer for Thompson's Landscape. "Of course, the water represents cleansing," he adds.

The project took about four months to complete and cost between \$350,000 and \$400,000.

Additionally, only the traditionally Catholic colors of green, red, purple and white were to be used. "The roses that we did around the labyrinth were all red roses," Burney says. "They represent the blood of Christ. We used a lot of white irises, butterfly irises [white with a purple center]. Those represent the purity of Christ." Giant liriopse, a grassy plant that blossoms white and purple, as well as purple crate myrtles define the borders.

Before construction could begin, however, Grivich and her Thompson's Landscape team had a special situation to assess. Some of the chapel garden was sitting on an underground university building. Though there was supposed to be about a foot of earth to work with, they discovered they had only two inches. "They had poured a slab pathway that was really thick right on top of that classroom," Grivich says. Rather than rip it out, Grivich opted to cover the pathway with slate. But it was a difficult undertaking because the entire area first had to be drained, and then the team had a hard time adhering the slate to the concrete.

continued on page 108

EASY TO USE ... PROFITABLE ...
AND NOW WITH
3D

Specifically designed for landscape professionals, PRO Landscape offers Realistic Photo Imaging, Easy-to-Use CAD and Professional Proposals - all to improve your bottom line. With more than 15 years on the market, it's the most popular professional landscape design software available today. It's simple, it's profitable - and now with 3D, it's the power you've never had before.

drafrix software in

PRO Landscape[™]

The Standard in Design Software for Landscape Professionals

www.prolandscape.com

800-231-8574 or prolandscape@drafrix.com

60-Day Money-Back Guarantee

"I sold two jobs the first week I owned the program. I'm hooked!"
Dustin Leite, Maple Leaf Farms & Nursery

"I've lost track how many times PRO Landscape has paid for itself."
Brett Seltz, Tollgate Construction

SELL BETTER | PLAN BETTER | BID BETTER

Circle 155

continued from page 106

"We had to be very careful not to disturb the classroom," Burney says. "We couldn't ride machinery on top of it." Planting trees was also not an option, so Grivich

substituted potted plants. "Design is always problem-solving," Grivich says with a laugh.

Construction finally began in early 2006. The labyrinth was built first. Thompson's Landscape subcontracted out

the masonry work, which required a special team of labyrinth experts. Grivich says much of the end product came about by trial and error. "We had to take out several pieces," she says, referring to parts of the design, like the lunar cusps, which were installed incorrectly the first time. "It became this really interesting project."

Once the labyrinth was completed, a rotating group of three to six Thompson's employees worked on the garden. The project took about four months to complete, costing between \$350,000 and \$400,000. And several more issues arose.

Labyrinths are not mazes and are not meant to confuse.

St. Thomas was, after all, a Catholic university, so "if there was going to be Mass, we made sure we shut it down," Burney says. Also, the paspalum grass that Thompson's wanted for the garden wasn't available until spring, so they put down St. Augustine in the meantime.

Grivich also made another major decision: She would use only organic materials, partly because the chapel itself "has no artificial light inside it." She aimed to conserve water by creating a permeable granite path around the garden that "absorbs sound" and "connects you with the earth." "It's crazy to be concreting everything," Grivich says. "Especially in a city like Houston, you can't do that. The more water you shoot out to the street, the more you flood the street."


The labyrinth landscape was completed in May and named The Felicie Babin Gueymard Memorial Garden in memory of the donor's mother. It has been well received by students and visitors

continued on page 110

EdgePro Ultra™

U.S. Patent Pending


PVC Landscape Border system



The sleek look of metal edging with the advantages of PVC!

- » EdgePro Ultra™ provides a high-end, finished look at a competitive price.
- » Anchoring options allow EdgePro Ultra™ to be installed in traditional planting beds or adjacent to sidewalks and patios.
- » PVC is durable and will not rust, crack, rot, or deteriorate due to weather exposure.
- » Connecting pieces of EdgePro Ultra™ is easy, with custom-designed connectors that don't require unsightly overlapping or nesting of pieces.

MANUFACTURED BY DIMEX LLC
1.800.EDGEPRO | 1.800.334.3776



28305 St. Rt. 7, Marietta, OH 45750
 PH: 1-800-334-3776 FAX: 1-740-374-2700 www.edgepro.com

Circle 127

DESIGN/BUILD LANDSCAPE OF THE MONTH

continued from page 108

alike. Students are fond of the concrete garden benches for sitting, reading or thinking. And the space has proven popular for weddings, even in the Houston heat. "They don't have weddings in the chapel, they have weddings in the labyrinth," Grivich says.

In addition, the labyrinth is "now listed as one of the top 10 things to do when you come to Houston," Grivich says. Perhaps most exciting is the approval of one particularly special guest: Archbishop J. Michael Miller, also a former president of the University of St. Thomas. "He came over and was thrilled," Grivich says. "He loves labyrinths." **LM**

— *The author is a freelance writer from New York City who is completing her work on her Masters Degree in Journalism at the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. Contact her at a-gilmore@northwestern.edu.*

The labyrinth was named The Felicie Babin Gueymard Memorial Garden in memory of the donor's mother. (Below right) The site before the installation.



MTI RAIN BIRD SALE

SPRAYHEADS

1804 BODY.....	\$ 1.25
1806 BODY.....	\$ 4.75
1812 BODY.....	\$ 6.75
STD. NOZZLES....	\$.95
ADJ. NOZZLES....	\$ 1.00

1804 LOWER PRICE

DV VALVES

100-DV & DV-SS.....	\$ 13.00
100-DV-MB.....	\$ 13.50
100-DVF & DVF-SS....	\$ 14.00

Buy the Box or Bag

ASK ABOUT QUANTITY PRICING

FREE Shipping

Order By 1 p.m. SHIPS SAME DAY

800-600-TURF (8873)

M-F 7:30-5 SAT 8-1 PDT **Call Now & Save**

www.SPRINKLERS4LESS.COM

Circle 157

Leading the Industry in Lighting Technology

50,000 Hour LEDs

VISTA PROFESSIONAL OUTDOOR LIGHTING

- Solid State Design
- 50,000 Hours of Reliable Operation
- Eliminate Frequent Re-Lamping
- "Cool Touch" Safety
- Mix and Match in Existing Systems

Call for a FREE 2007 Catalog: 800-766-VISTA (8478) www.VistaPro.com

Circle 158