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## Recognizing Excellence

By Tony Wernke

The Land Development Visionary Award program instituted by *Land Development Today* and Futurus Communications recognizes the creativity, vision, and the implementation of best practices in land development. The award recognizes not only the planning and design of projects, but also focuses on the complete development process. The July 2006 Visionary Award-winning project, was Auburn Lakes. Attendees at the Land Development Breakthroughs conference in Chicago voted on the projects along with a panel of judges. The following five projects were the finalists for the award this past summer.

### Fern Valley

#### *Tewksbury, New Jersey*

A luxury residential development community in central New Jersey located 45 minutes from Manhattan, Fern Valley's ecological design utilizes innovative concepts and technologies to improve the water supply, soils, plant and wildlife, while offering all the amenities, conveniences and luxuries homebuyers expect of an upscale, high-end development. This project was submitted by developer Anthony Sblendorio and the design team leader, Back to Nature Landscape Associates of Oldwick(NJ).

### The Challenges

Tewksbury Township had a challenging approval process indicative of the township's need to preserve nature in an otherwise densely-populated area of the country. With its surrounding area being comprised predominantly of modest houses on small lots situated off highways for which the term "strip development" might seem to have been invented, this area sought to preserve its rural character and heritage. While other "green homes" had been previously constructed, no other luxury residential development had been previously attempted in New Jersey with the land development goals that Fern Valley espoused.



### The Vision

Sblendorio and Back to Nature sought to use the development to improve, rather than destroy, soils, water, plants and wildlife. In terms of its ecological footprint, the Fern Valley development gives back to the land more than it takes. Replicating local natural systems, the vision of Fern Valley was to transcend the boundaries between humans and nature to create a truly sustainable development today, and for future generations. Sblendorio envisioned a holistic design process that included planners, regulators, landscape architects, stormwater management experts, and others, right from the beginning of the planning process to achieve the goals of the project.

### The Results

Soil cement dirt roadways that are twice as hard as asphalt, fashioned with a toxin-free glue called Poly Pavement applied to the soil at the site, created inexpensive, aesthetically pleasing, and easily maintainable roads. Roadside wetland pools and swales with oxygenating plant life purified stormwater

and recharged the local aquifer, rather than shooting the water runoff offsite through curbs and storm drains. Plastic liners form a basin and the plants grow hydroponically – without soil – naturally treating pathogens and returning water to near drinkable quality. The result - groundwater recharge is better than it was even before development.

Neighborhood hiking trails were created to meander through reclaimed native habitats. Extensive common open space was dedicated for residents to relax, recreate and explore. Native woodland landscapes feed from the rain barrels and cisterns harvesting rainwater from the roofs of homes.

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