



The Kulaks Helping Our Region Grow Beautifully!

By Jenna Caputo/ Photos by Kieran Schrader

Many of us know Kulak's Nursery & Landscaping on Route 146 as a go-to resource for all our lawn and decorating needs. We know it always looks beautiful, reflecting each season in its colorful displays, but did you know that the Kulaks have a long history in landscaping?

Karen Kulak grew up in Schenectady, NY with five siblings. Her dad was a Physical Education major, so sports were always a big part of her life, even though "girls' sports" weren't as established as they are today. Tennis became Karen's passion, and she continued to play right into her forties when she unfortunately suffered a knee injury.

John Kulak, one of six children, grew up in Glenville, NY on his family's horse farm, where he developed a strong work ethic like his family. He enjoys working and never seems to tire from it.

John remembers meeting Karen when they were in college. "We were in the cafeteria when I saw this cute girl across the room wearing a blue and white Linton High School varsity jacket, so I thought, 'Hmm, she's from home – I need to meet her!'" They both were attending SUNY Cobleskill at the time but didn't start dating until the following year when Karen transferred to SUNY Cortland where she went on to earn her BA in Education. They married after school, and Karen began teaching while John started out working for an equipment operating company. To make some extra money on the side, he began taking odd jobs for people on his own, all while also working full-time for a utility company. He

stayed on with the company for 33 years until he retired at age 55 so he could devote more time to his own business.

After a year of working, Karen decided that she really wanted to teach special needs children, so she went on to get her Master of Special Education at the College of St. Rose. Meanwhile, one thing led to another and Kulak Landscaping evolved as they started with grading and installing lawns, then added on hydro-seeding and installing plants. John always had a goal of one day opening a place to sell his plants and to use as a base to operate the landscape business. They slowly continued adding onto the business, and after 20 years of operating as a small family



landscaping business, they finally were able to open a center. They bought their current property in Rexford in 2001, taking a year to transform it into a full garden center and gift store that has become one of the Capital District choice centers. “We love the fact that we are in a neighborhood community that is centrally located for Clifton Park, Burnt Hills, Niskayuna, Schenectady, Ballston Lake and Ballston Spa,” says Karen.

They love sharing their knowledge and expertise with others, helping children learn about seedlings and bugs or building their first birdhouse through their Kidz Club, or assisting customers with their first garden or designing a whole new landscape with ponds, pools or patios. They can even help with choosing just the right Christmas tree! With all of their background over the years, they are go-to experts in everything gardening, landscaping and lawns.

As with most businesses, things changed when the pandemic hit, but they have been able to adapt and keep servicing our community despite many suppliers still being shut down and having a limited supply of products. The Kulaks have



learned to be a bit more patient with the shipment delays they weren't previously used to, while at the same time, never being busier at the store with all their neighbors now home and concentrating on their yards over the quieter summer.

Their gift store changes seasonally and is now in full fall swing, hosting gorgeous fall-themed displays in all colors along with other unique items for the garden, yard or for gifts. They always look for high-quality items to enhance and accent any home. COVID procedures are in place, including required masks and social distancing. Even though the store is open full-scale, they also are still offering pre-order and curbside pickup for those not comfortable browsing at this time.

Family is an important aspect of life for the Kulaks. Not only do they work together, they also spend as much time as possible with their children and grandchildren off-hours too.

Their son, Christopher, received his landscape architect degree at SUNY College of Environmental Studies and Forestry and lives here with his wife, Michelle, and their two children – Jaime (2) and their new baby, Travis, born this July. Chris runs the hardscape division at the center and does his own image designs and estimates in addition to building beautiful patios, firepits, walks, retaining walls and outdoor grills.

Their daughter, Pamela, also works for the family business, wearing many hats as she helps out with estimates, scheduling,





customer services, the Kidz Club and more. She is now married to Joe with two children as well – Joe (2) and her newborn, Brayson, born this August.

Chris and Pamela have always been very close, and not only ended up getting married about two months apart, they also have had both of their children only weeks apart!

John and Karen's oldest son, John III, is now serving with his wife, Catherine, in the U.S. Navy out in San Diego, CA. They have a 4 ½ year old son named John IV. John and Karen try to get out there every February for a few weeks in between the holiday rush and spring season to spend time with them as well.

The Kulaks feel so blessed to be doing something together that they care so much about. It is a passion they want to pass on to their customers as they keep customer service and satisfaction always as their #1 goal. As Karen says, "We are happy when you're happy!"

To learn more about Kulak's Nursery & Landscaping, visit <http://www.kulaksnursery.com>.

