

Barbara Schlattman named
recipient of Gutsy Gal Award

by Kim James

Barbara Schlattman is using her eye for design to transform the appearance of her community. And for that, she is the recipient of Houston Woman Magazine's 2010 Gutsy Gal Award.

Beth Eaton nominated Schlattman for her work as chair of the Green Medians Steering Committee.

"Barbara got the idea five years ago to add green medians to FM 1960. The area had become a very high-traffic, strip center-lined road, far from the quiet, beautiful area it once was. She and her committee have worked with the Texas Department of Transportation to add medians and raise enough money to add the green, said Eaton. Schlattman is the owner of Barbara Schlattman Interiors, Inc., an award-winning residential and commercial interior design firm. It was her love of beauty that drew her attention to the unattractiveness of FM 1960. Making the main thoroughfare look better had crossed her mind more than once.

"I believe everyone deserves to be surrounded by beauty," Schlattman said. "It's not just for the rich. It's for everyone."

So, she and a friend, Gary Cofran, decided to plant trees along the shoulders of FM 1960. The pair began making phone calls to determine what was required to turn that idea into reality. In the process, they made contact with Catherine McCreight of HNTB Engineers who had a bigger vision to share with them.

From McCreight they learned that back in 2003, the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce sought assistance from TxDOT and other organizations to study road improvements for FM 1960. As it turned out, TxDOT had recommended the installation of raised medians along an eight-mile stretch of FM 1960.

The FM 1960 Median Project presented a special opportunity, so Schlattman's plan changed from planting trees along the sides of the road to making the medians look great.

By the end of 2004, the Green Medians Steering Committee had two members, and Schlattman was committee chair. The committee later joined the Houston Northwest Chamber of Commerce and grew to include 14 more members. The FM 1960 Median Project was accepted and funded by the 2006 Legislature.

TxDOT agreed to allow the committee to landscape the medians if three conditions were met. Schlattman and her committee would be responsible for hiring a landscape architect, providing water and maintenance, and financing the project.

Schlattman worked with 19 different water districts, represented by 12 different law firms, to come to an agreement to maintain and water the medians. To date, the Green Medians Steering Committee has raised \$470,000 for its project. The green installation is scheduled to begin next January.

There's more to the Green Medians Project than aesthetics and scenic beauty. The landscaping is said to increase property values, revitalize economic development and bolster community pride.

"It's been such a blessing to see the community step forward and work together," Schlattman said. "Eight miles is a long stretch. It's not just about one subdivision or one water district. Each part is important."

Even the youngest members of the community have contributed to the Green Medians Project. For example, last November, 280 children (ages five to 12) submitted drawings of what they wanted the medians to look like. Their artwork was displayed at the Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts in the Green Medians by Kids Art Expo. And, a Brownie Troop donated the proceeds of its cookie sales.

Still on the project's to-do list is raising more needed funds, getting trees and plants donated and working with TxDOT to finalize the drawings and agreements.

While Schlattman is grateful for this award, she sees it more as an award for the community.

"It's not an award for me," she said, "It's an award for an idea, which is to revitalize and improve our area. It means our project is significant."

Kim James is a reporter for Houston Woman Magazine.