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Gault 'ManSpace' shocks teacher

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Richard Fuller's backyard has been transformed into a bluestone patio surrounded by green plants and flowering trees and anchored by an impressive stone-mounted gas grill, and the Norwalk teacher can thank his wife and son and some community-spirited area business owners.

Fuller, a teacher-at-large at Bridgeport Central High School, was surprised that he won the Gault Outdoor ManSpace Father's Day Competition.

The former teacher at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk and 26-year executive director of Norwalk's George Washington Carver Community Center, didn't know he was one of more than 200 entrants.

His wife, Carolyn, and son, Richard, secretly wrote and submitted the winning essay.

"It was a total surprise.



Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photographer Tony Aitoro, left, owner of Aitoro Appliances, mans the Viking grill Tuesday in the Norwalk back yard of Richard Fuller for a morning barbeque in an outdoor space built by the Gault Outdoor ManSpace Team. (Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photo)

I got a call from Megan (Smith, director of marketing at Westport-based Gault Inc.), saying 'You won your ManSpace,' " said Fuller, who didn't understand what she was talking about. "I thought she was talking about patio furniture."

Fuller on Tuesday morning celebrated the re-creation of his backyard at 100 Stuart Ave. with Smith and members of the Gault ManSpace "dream team," who donated their services and time to create the Fullers' new sanctuary.

"It's easy to say 'No.' I like to say 'Yes,' said Tony Aitoro, co-owner of Aitoro Appliances in Norwalk, as he prepared breakfast sandwiches on the Viking grill that his business donated. "They (Gault) asked me if I could do something. I love to do things for the community."

Gault,



Tony Aitoro, left, owner of Aitoro Appliances, mans the Viking grill Tuesday in the Norwalk back yard of Richard Fuller for a morning barbeque in an outdoor space built by the Gault Outdoor ManSpace Team. (Kathleen O'Rourke/Staff photo)

which operates fuel and landscape supply divisions, drew upon longtime relationships it has with several area businesses for the ManSpace competition.

"Manspaces," where the males of a household and their friends can gather, are becoming popular features in homes, said Smith, who wanted to see if a similar setting could be created outdoors.

As a devoted family man, Fuller has no plans to make the patio a male-exclusive enclave.

"He has dedicated his life to teaching and mentoring inner-city children, and he loves his plants," said Smith, joined by team members Dickson DeMarche, a landscape architect and found of The LaurelRock Co. in Wilton; Nick DiConstanzo, owner of DiConstanzo Masonry in Norwalk; Craig Kopfmann, founder and president of Green Acres Landscape and Design in Monroe; Randy Eters, owner of Connecticut Fencemen in Norwalk; Jim Donaher and Dan Beers of Gault; and Aitoro. "In these hard economic times, they wanted to be involved in this project. They wanted to give back."

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DiConstanzo and two of his employees worked for a week, much of the time under a tarpaulin during rainy June, to do the masonry work.

"I knew we had a deadline. All they wanted was a little concrete pad to put their grill on, and we give them a patio. It was nice to do, especially in this economy," DiConstanzo said.

DeMarche said he was pleased with the outcome, noting that he and two other designers challenged each other to come up with a winning plan.

"We had six weeks to design and construct it. We had a great team," he said.

Fuller, an avid gardener who has an impressive vegetable garden, will be busy pruning and weeding among the azaleas, hydrangeas and dogwood and cherry trees.

"It's a miracle how fast a community can work together," he said. 'Dream team' creates patio for avid gardener



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