

Ducks are a splash in Hills

By Tom Beer
staff writer

Around Farmington Hills' Springbrook subdivision, they call Marie Mutchall "The Duck Lady," and that's just fine with her.

"I think it's great — better than being called 'The Turtle Lady,'" said the nature-loving housewife and mother of four who has turned the family's three-acre homestead into a kind of mini-nature preserve.

Two ponds — one man-made, but both fed by numerous springs — grace the Mutchalls' property on Westmoreland. Over the years, the water and the Mutchalls' kindness have attracted as permanent residents over 200 mallard and wood ducks and two large white geese.

There are also many Canada geese who "come and go" with the seasons, although nine stay the year round, and

snapping turtles "you couldn't pick up on a snow shovel," according to Mutchall.

The fowl have the run of the property, and often halt motor traffic on Westmoreland while waddling to other ponds which dot the subdivision.

"They belong to God, but I feed them," said Mutchall with a laugh. It takes 100 pounds of corn and 50 pounds of bird seed each year to satisfy her feathered friends.

"If I'm dumb enough to feed them all winter, why should they fly to Florida and wear out their wings," she asked.

THE PROPERTY wasn't much to look at 28 years ago when the Mutchalls purchased it.

"My father-in-law wouldn't even get out of the car to look at it — and he was in real estate," Mutchall remembered. "He said, 'How can you even look at this dismal swamp.'"

But the Mutchalls decided to buy it anyway. They built their own house, a contemporary model with three bedrooms and two baths, doing everything except the plastering and brick work themselves.

"We designed it ourselves to fit the lot," Mutchall said.

The house overlooks both ponds, the man-made one (65 by 220 feet and 12 feet at its deepest) and the natural one (65 by 330 feet), which is shared with three other families.

The ponds, which have been stocked with bluegill and bass, provide the family with swimming in the summer and ice skating in the winter.

Mutchall said she counted 32 springs (it's not for nothing that they call it the Springbrook subdivision) feeding the ponds.

"At one point, the water comes out at 30 gallons a minute," Mutchall said. "That's a lot of water."

At least once a year, the Mutchalls pour chemicals, including copper sulfate, into the ponds to inhibit unwanted plant growth and give the fish more oxygen.

"When the ice breaks and you see a big bass floating, it just breaks your heart," Mutchall said.

SOME OF THE ducks were present from people who were glad to get rid of them.

"People stop and say, 'These are our Easter presents and we don't want 'em anymore,'" Mutchall said.

A big white goose, known affectionately as Mother Goose, was such a gift about four years ago. Since then, the goose has taken on the mothering duties of the ponds.

"She takes care of the mallard fami-

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Canada geese sojourn at the pond before continuing their journey.



Marie Mutchall (right) watches over the flock while a chickadee (above) nibbles on seeds for a morning snack.



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