

## Woman's efforts to save butterflies inspires filmmaker Owner of Wildflower is filmed at monarch habitat on grounds

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Wauwatosa resident Barb Agnew will share the spotlight with thousands of monarch butterflies in a documentary film on the butterfly migration.

Documentary film producer Kay Milam, who has been following the beautiful butterfly's migration to Mexico from around the world, first learned of Agnew through a story that appeared in the July 6 issue of the Wauwatosa News-Times. Someone sent Milam the story and she got in touch with Agnew at her flower store, Wildflower, 12326 W. Watertown Plank Road.

On Aug. 8, Agnew walked the Milwaukee County Grounds with Milam to show her where the butterflies congregate in preparation for their fall migration to Mexico.

Milam and her film crew captured the view — bulldozers and all.

The landscape on the Milwaukee County Grounds is drastically changing as the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District tears out dirt and rock to build a large contiguous 60-acre detention basin.

The grounds, Agnew said, are the most important gathering spot for the monarchs she has seen in this area. There they were able to feed on an abundance of milkweed.

Agnew saved hundreds of caterpillars and chrysalides from being bulldozed by walking the grounds and handpicking the tiny eggs to bring them back to her shop, where she is caring for them before they hatch as butterflies. The chrysalides can be seen on display on a tree inside her shop.

Once out, Agnew lets them fly out her front door.

## **Moved by Agnew's story**

Milam, touched by Agnew's local efforts to save the monarchs, said she had to get Agnew in the film.

"There was something so powerful about standing there and filming Barb as she plucked these caterpillars off this milkweed with these huge bulldozers all around her," Milam said.

The spot in Wauwatosa on the County Grounds where Agnew has collected most of the chrysalides is on the migratory pathway of the butterflies coming down from Canada, Milam said. She and her crew are scheduled to film in Canada in September. Then, in October, they go on a scientific expedition with the world's foremost monarch expert, Dr. Lincoln Bower, a research professor at Sweet Briar University and a Nassau scientist, to track the migration to Mexico.

So far, Milam has raised \$125,000 toward production of her one-hour documentary film, which she hopes to sell to PBS and museums around the world.

## **Incredible migration**

The fall migration of the monarch butterfly has been described as one of the truly great spectacles of the natural world, Milam said.

Millions of the fragile creatures travel up to 2,500 miles to reach their winter grounds in the rare fir forests of central Mexico.

Agnew was shocked and pleased when she got the call from Milam to be in her film.

"It's so exciting and so important," Agnew said. "Anything we can do to bring attention to the loss of this very migration area is probably not enough to stop what's happening on the grounds, but at least we can try."

Agnew is currently working to make sure a sycamore tree on the County Grounds, a major gathering point for the migrating monarchs, is not chopped down to make way for MMSD's project.

For information on the film and its progress, check Milam's Web site: [www.butterflytrees.com](http://www.butterflytrees.com).