

Poolside Paradise

BY LEIGH STUART

Gehman Design Remodeling upgrades a local backyard with a resort-worthy pool and lounge area that has become a favorite gathering space for the whole family.



A Franconia Township family now has the backyard gathering space of their dreams thanks to Gehman Design Remodeling, the Harleysville-based firm led by President and Master Certified Remodeler Dennis D. Gehman.

"There was an existing aboveground pool in the backyard that had been there for a long time," Gehman shares. "The pool was a comfortable size, but aboveground pools don't have much deck or patio space. The push for this project was that if there's going to be a renovation, let's do it right."

After a period of in-depth discussion, the clients settled on a free-form inground pool with unique curves that would not only fit their needs but also create a space for future generations to gather and play.

"The pool has a spa hot tub/whirlpool adjacent to it that flows into the main pool," he shares. "There is also a flume. There's a subtle difference between that and a sliding board because a flume is almost a full U-shape so the chances of falling off the slide are less. With a slide, you use a ladder to get

to the top; with the flume, it's built on a mound, walking up steps to the slide."

The 49-by-28-foot saltwater pool was planned to be eight feet deep, but construction changes led to a pool that maxes out at nine feet in depth.

"At the deep end, there's not a ladder but there are steps where the water is about four feet deep," Gehman says. "But, when you're coming down the slide, so you don't have to swim all the way to the steps, get out, and go back around; there's a shelf built into the side of the wall of the pool where the water is probably 20 to 24 inches deep, so you can step on that and more easily step out onto the patio area."

The pool's shallow area, which is approximately 12 inches deep, features a "sun shelf" designed to accommodate lounge chairs. Also, Gehman says the sun shelf has a built-in sleeve for an umbrella to make for "a great place for the grandkids to play."

A particularly fabulous addi-

tion for the family's youngest members: a splash pad featuring a dozen water jets that spray up into the air for children to run through on hot days.

"Lighting was important too," Gehman adds. "Lights in a pool are really nothing new, but with LED technology, colored lights can be any flavor you like. You can pick a disco kind of setting that switches intermittently from color to color, or a USA-themed one that goes red, white, and blue."

Above the pool area, Gehman's team hung string lights in a rather ingenious way.

"There weren't trees nearby to fasten the lights to, we used flagpoles," he explains. "These things are adjustable, so if a bulb burns out, you don't have to get a ladder to replace it."

As the yard itself sits upon a slope, the project included the addition of retaining wall about eight feet high. The wall complements the newly installed paver patio that goes from the backyard to the driveway out front.

"The patio is probably 20 inches lower than the sidewalk," Gehman says. "Initially we designed this with steps, but the homeowners said they have friends who use wheelchairs and elderly parents, so we decided on a ramp."

A backyard fence wraps around the pool area and outside of a shade tree. Gehman's team took care to preserve the tree by staying at the "drip line"—the tree's outer leaves and branches—when completing the curve ramp and an accompanying retaining wall that doubles as a sitting space.

The project's landscaping was thoughtfully planned, too. Low-maintenance plants coexist nicely with saltwater pools and do not need to be watered very often.

"I like a new challenge," Gehman says. "We've done a number of backyard hardscaping projects. We've done a few water features, koi ponds, a waterfall, so a pool is sort of a natural progression for us as our abilities grow. I was very up front with these folks about not having done a pool before, but I've owned a swimming pool, so I understand how they work. We also hired a subcontractor who has done many concrete pools to make sure that part was done right." ■

