

# On People

by Doris Meadows



**M**ost people who deal with hazardous waste are involved in efforts to get rid of the stuff, but St. James' **Bobbi Mastrangelo** spent most of last summer devising ways to create it! Or to be more accurate, *re-*create it.

Ms. Mastrangelo is a sculptural artist. Perhaps the most unusual piece she's ever fashioned, in an artistic career admittedly marked by the unusual, is an outdoor sculpture of chemical waste spilling from a fifty-five gallon drum with a nearby water supply in clear danger of infiltration. Her work, done on commission by the **Islip Arts Council** and exhibited as part of the Council's Arts Festival, involved, among other odd components, coming up with two cubic yards of dirt which she finally obtained courtesy of the **Islip Parks Department**. Other "art supplies" for the Mastrangelo sculptural concept included grass, weeds and small rocks embedded in the soil to assure stabilization against rain and the elements.

Bobbi Mastrangelo's interest in hazardous waste came about as a result of her specialty—manhole covers. She is one of four artists in the country whose re-creations of these pieces of street sculpture are to be seen in museums and galleries. Ms. Mastrangelo's work has been exhibited in the metropolitan area from New York City galleries out to the **Parrish Art Museum**

in Southampton. But, in the course of being out on the street to take the rubbings of the originals that are the basis for her re-creations, Bobbi Mastrangelo often found herself clearing away mounds of litter in order to get to the manhole cover.

Her concern about this environmental nuisance led to the formation, in 1986, of a grassroots Smithtown organization, **CLEAN (Committee for Litter Elimination And Neatness)**. Says the artist: "I can't do my artwork when I get angry about the environment, so now I do both." Through CLEAN, she has become more aware of the problems of medical and hazardous wastes on Long Island. So, when the Islip Arts Council approached her about this year's festival, the artist melded her civic and artistic interests into a successful proposal.

None of this is exactly what Bobbi Mastrangelo had in mind for herself as a young art student. "In fact," she says, "I loved Renoir. I thought I'd be doing flowers, landscapes and beautiful people." But, influenced by pop art, she often found herself going around in circles—the shape of her artwork. A professor, noting this, showed her a book of photographs of manhole covers. "That really spoke to me. They looked like Aztec prints I'd seen," she comments. And so, rubbing materials in hand, she took to the streets of New York

City where there are "great" manhole covers.

A clue to the future plans of this artist, who shares her St. James home with husband **Al** and children **Michael, Peter and Ann**, can be gleaned from her excited remark, "I hear that there are really great manhole covers in San Francisco!"

Bobbi Mastrangelo (Photo by Al Mastrangelo)

