



Joe Delaney of Cape Breton shows off two members of his famous scarecrow drive-in for Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell's film *Lawn and Order*.

By IAN JOHNSTON
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MOWING THE FRONT yard won't seem quite the same after viewing *Lawn and Order*.

The documentary — airing on CBC's *Witness* on Monday at 10 p.m. — takes a funny and revealing look at homeowners-turned-yard-aficionados who view their lawns as art and their front yards as a forum for personal expression.

There's the man with a croquet court in his front yard who talks seriously of shortening his grass from 7/32s of an inch to 3/16s. Another homeowner confesses to spending four hours a night working on the lawn.

Eccentric is the kindest way to describe the elderly gent who waxes poetic about his 20-foot-high rock mountains that obscure the view of his Arizona home. And then there's the 300-pound artist who has placed a life-sized cast of her naked body in her front yard, and the couple who use their yard to house a 230-pound hog.

But don't call them kooks, say *Lawn and Order* film-makers Janis Lundman and Adrienne Mitchell.

"Some of them are eccentric, but each one is totally rational,

Better lawns and gardens

phone interview from Toronto.

"They view their yards as an accepted form of individual expression, as a way of making a personal point, and that's not a strange idea at all."

Maybe not. But making a film about front yards is... well... different, especially when you consider that Lundman and Mitchell's last film projects were the hard-hitting teen documentaries *Talk 16* and *Talk 19*.

Mitchell says the original concept for *Lawn and Order* came out of walking down a one-block stretch of inner city Toronto.

"In one block you'd see a front yard that was a jungle of weeds, you'd see Elvis busts and religious icons, fountains, and these completely manicured, '50s-styled lawns with white picket fences. It was fascinating to see such diversity in one area, and we became curious about

and hours of cruising the streets to find the right yards and homeowners to profile in *Lawn and Order*.

"We hired people to ride around on bicycles and take photos of people's yards. And we scoured the newspapers for interesting lawns," says Lundman.

"We did a lot of the research in the summer, but we found that by the time we were ready to film the next spring, a lot of the people had moved away. It was frustrating."

But all the research paid off in some fascinating interviews. Though many of the yards profiled are from Toronto, *Lawn and Order* does come east to explore odd Nova Scotian lawns, including Cape Bretoner Joe Delaney's famed scarecrow drive-in. The cameras also head south-of-the-border to Arizona and its oft-misquoted desert lawn and

was different, that wasn't a traditional lawn, so we figured the best place would be a desert," says Mitchell. "And we're glad we went, because it was there we found this wonderful guy who paints dead lawns green."

THE DOCUMENTARY eventually turns its cameras beyond the yard fanatics to focus on a growing subculture of lawn ornament terrorists.

With their identities disguised for the interview, the thieves admit to stealing ceramic elves, pink flamingos and black lawn jockeys they deem racist — or just plain ugly. The thieves even leave notes behind saying that the "objects have been removed and their existence terminated."

Lundman says tracking these culturally-motivated vandals

clippings chronicling their activities and photos of what they'd stolen. It's very important to them. They think they're really making a statement."

Lawn and Order also chronicles the battle between freedom of expression and city by laws. In one scene, an elderly man is battling the city over his right to grow vegetables at curbside.

Lundman says cultivating a weed garden — a freeform lawn in which grass, weeds and plants grow naturally — was once considered a crime.

"The weed gardens are now more accepted," she says. "I think it's now seen as more environmentally-friendly."

Mitchell and Lundman say they enjoyed the making of *Lawn and Order* but there are no plans afoot to make the inevitable sequel about back yards.

"It wouldn't work," says Lundman. "Backyards are private. With front yards, you're presenting an image to the neighborhood. It's a form of communication."

An inquiry into the current state of the film-makers' own front yards reveals a startling revelation.

"We're both lawnless. We have no front yards where we live," says Mitchell. "I have a balcony where I can watch the neighbor's lawn."