

## **Church Brings Backyard Back to Life**

**Milwaukie Presbyterian gets help from Scouts, Metro to restore natural area**

By Ellen Spitaleri

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Tom Traver / Clackamas Review

Boy Scouts Fletcher Wold, Braden Croydon and Daniel Freitas remove a huge chunk of ivy from the natural area behind Milwaukie Lutheran Church.

At first the challenges were daunting — an oak tree in a stranglehold of clematis vines; impenetrable thickets of blackberries, some on a precipitous slope; and everywhere a sea of ivy.

“We didn’t know where to start,” said Shirley Stageberg, the project manager for a 3 ½ -acre restoration project in a wetland behind Milwaukie Presbyterian Church on Lake Road.

In April of 2008, a group of volunteers in the congregation decided to do an environmental project in the Milwaukie area to complement the work a partner church was doing in Bolivia. They researched natural areas, and discovered one in their own backyard, literally.

Stageberg said she didn’t even know the church owned the property, but once the volunteers found out about it, they started investigating what it would take to restore an area between the church parking lot and Kellogg Lake.

**Watershed**

“We walked the entire Kellogg Creek watershed and learned its history and geology; we canoed on the lake; and we did some water testing. When we first walked on the property it took us two hours to get to the lake, because it was all overgrown with ivy and blackberry,” Stageberg said.

Volunteers quickly figured out they needed professional help with the project, so they started asking around and found naturalist Chris Runyard, the leader of the Tsunami Crew, a group that is working to restore the Three-Creeks Natural Area near the aquatic center, just off 82nd Avenue.

It turned out that four years before, the crew had come down to the area and cut ivy off trees.

“Chris loved the property and hated to see what happened to it. He pointed out a large oak covered with clematis, and said, ‘If you do nothing else, cut the ivy and clematis off trees.’ So we made a vow we would cut the ivy and clematis off of every tree,” Stageberg said.

Once the work was underway, the group decided to restore the entire area to its natural state.

## **Partners**

When Runyard saw that the group was serious, he suggested that they apply for grants, and ultimately they received two: a soil and water grant for \$800 in September of 2008; and a Metro Nature in the Neighborhood grant for \$7,800 this past May.

The Metro grant required the restoration group to match the dollars with volunteer hours, and to partner with other groups.

“Metro is big on education and community,” Stageberg said, adding that the church group partnered with the Milwaukie Cooperative Pre-school, the Franciscan Spiritual Center, Milwaukie High School’s environmental classes, Boy Scout Troop #376 and the city of Milwaukie.

The pre-school students do nature walks in the area, while the Franciscan sisters hope to hold retreats, because for them, “care of the land is spiritual,” Stageberg said.

In addition, high school students do water and soil testing and plant identification and the scout troop holds work parties.

In mid-October, more than 20 Boy Scouts removed invasive species and put bark chips on a newly built trail until a thunderstorm forced them to quit for the day, Stageberg said.

Daniel Freitas, 15, cleared a 508-foot section of trail and built a bridge near the lake for his Eagle Scout project.

He led a group of mostly younger scouts as they cleared the trail of ivy and blackberries and covered it with shredder chips, and then put a simple bridge over an area that could overflow during heavy rains and block access to the restoration project.

Although he and his family are not members of the congregation, he said he wanted to do a project for the church. He has since taken people down to the area to look at what he and the scouts accomplished, and “they thought it was amazing,” he said.

## **Future**

Stageberg noted that the ultimate goal for the area behind the church is to restore it to its native habitat for the benefit of the plants and wildlife.

It will eventually be open to the public in the spring, but won’t be a park because the area is unsafe during the winter because of the danger of falling limbs.

“We have about two to three more years of heavy work and then a lot of maintenance,” Stageberg said, noting that the group hopes to plant 90 native trees and more than 100 shrubs before the weather turns bad.

Currently the trail snakes down to an area where there are two natural springs that form pools and then leads on to Kellogg Lake, where the congregation would like to have an area set aside for classes and worship.

Stageberg added, “The area is known as our wild space, but the churchgoers call it our Outdoor Sanctuary.”

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