

MOUNT PISGAH ARBORETUM

It sounds like the last few minutes of a made-for-television movie, but Tom LoCascio insists that the story is true.

Story by Stephanie Sisson
Photos by Anthony Forney

A young boy abused by his parents, now staying with foster parents, refuses to get along with them. One day he is sent to the Mount Pisgah Arboretum near Eugene, where he spends the day raking and blowing leaves. That night, getting into his foster mother's car to go home, he apologizes for his behavior and says that he will try to change.

LoCascio, caretaker for the Arboretum, calls this phenomenon, the "healing quality of the outdoors."
"It (working at the arboretum) really does make a difference in these kids," he said. "It really does turn them around. These kids, at-risk or troubled youth, have a sense of accomplishment. They can come back and say, 'Hey, I did this. I built this bridge.'"

The Mount Pisgah Arboretum, located in the Howard Buford Recreation Area off of Seavey Loop Road, occupies 118 acres of native Willamette Valley trees, shrubs and wildflowers. The park is



Native and imported species are clearly labeled so visitors can identify them. There are hundreds of species of native plants throughout the arboretum. There are also many imported from other areas of the United States and other countries, providing a well rounded experience.

open every day from sunrise to sunset. No admission is charged, but donations are welcome.

Although the Friends of the Mount Pisgah Arboretum consult with Lane County Parks and Recreation before making development and maintenance decisions, the arboretum is funded entirely through private donations and volunteer effort.

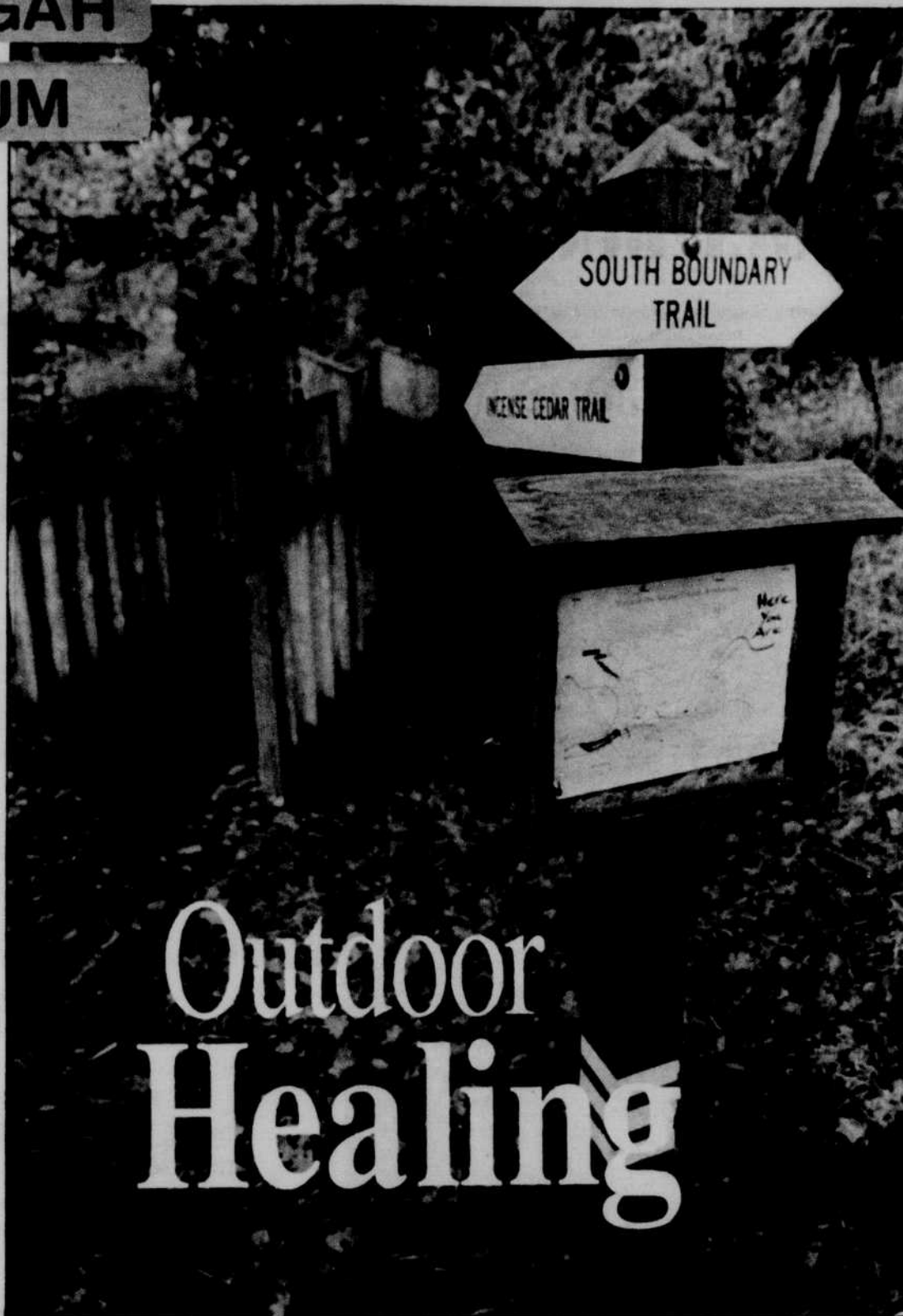
An arboretum visitor in search of the colorful splendor of the Portland Rose Gardens might be disappointed. The beauty of the Mount Pisgah Arboretum is in its peaceful scenery, featuring trees that are allowed to thrive naturally. The only visible concessions to its 35,000 to 40,000 visitors each year are sawdust trails and occasional "You Are Here" maps.

Although volunteer work at the arboretum has been tremendously successful at helping at-risk youth, the naturalistic landscape design and horticulture also allows the arboretum to serve an educational purpose. Last year, 2,500 Lane County students visited the arboretum.

With the help of the arboretum's educational coordinator and some University students who give guided tours, students can learn about things like the names of trees, the origin of mistletoe and where rainwater goes when it disappears into the ground.

LoCascio said the arboretum was not just a Friends of Mount Pisgah Arboretum project, but a Lane County project.

"The people of the community have made this happen," he said. "So often you read in the newspapers about the timber industry, and how it's bad, or it's good, and it's either black or white. In the arboretum we have many timber companies like Weyerhaeuser, which have been incredibly supportive. They've donated timber for trails. We have Boy Scouts who come out and construct bridges for badges. There are so many kids, businessmen, and people in the community who can come out and say, 'I built this bridge.'"



Outdoor Healing



Many trails weave in and out of the trees at the Mount Pisgah Arboretum, including this one (above) that leads to the watergardens. All trails are clearly marked, which makes getting around easy. Joan Mazo, Vice President of Friends of Mt. Pisgah, (left) shows there is a visible difference between pines, which have needles, and cedars, which have broad flat leaves, even though both are considered "evergreens". One of the most common mistakes by visitors is to call cedars pine trees.

One of the biggest events at the arboretum is the Wildflower Festival, on the third Sunday of May. Sponsored by the Native Plant Society, the festival features cut, identified wildflowers and guided tours of the Arboretum.

Other annual events at the arboretum include Arbor Week in April, an Outdoor Education

Program that begins in April, a garage sale every September and a mushroom festival and scarecrow contest in October.

For more information about the Mount Pisgah Arboretum or to volunteer money or services, call 747-3817.