

Life *in the* Valley

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PHOTOS BY ANNA REED / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Earl McCollum leads a guided hike for siblings, Karen Parent, 9, from left, Elisha Parent, 5, and Elsie Parent, 5, of Albany, during the 7th annual Historic Silver Falls Day at Silver Falls State Park on Saturday, July 9, 2016.

Volunteer time affords Silver Falls adornment

Sublimity resident Earl McCollum helps brighten community

JUSTIN MUCH
STAYTON MAIL

It would be easy to connect the aesthetic appeal of Silver Falls State Park to the allure of volunteering at the region's scenic wonder.

What would be less apparent is connecting certain aesthetic adornments at the park to one of the park's volunteers.

Friends of Silver Falls State Park President Lou Nelson makes that connection, and she's happy to point it out to anyone within earshot (or "eyeshot") of just such an ornamental touch.

Lou explained that each spring when visitors come to the Nature Store at Silver Falls, they notice a "lovely bouquet of spring flowers" on the table by the entrance. The flowers come from the backyard of Sublimity resident Earl McCollum.

An active octogenarian who is game for a range of endeavors, from a session of tai chi at Santiam Senior Center to a stint at the aforementioned nature store, McCollum has been volunteering at SFSP since 2005.

"Earl is a cheerful person who loves to tell jokes and work with people," Lou said. "Meeting people from all over the world is one of the things he likes best about volunteering at the store."

There's another benefit, sort of akin to maintaining an inviting backyard at your home.

McCollum feels that Silver Falls State Park is one of the most beautiful places in Oregon (and it happens to be in Sublimity's "backyard"), which in part is why he enjoys answering visitor questions about the plants and wildlife at the park.

"Volunteering at the store is a way to feel useful and give back to the community in a beautiful setting," Earl said.

Lou added that Earl works well with the other volunteers and the park rangers. He is one of the volunteers who lead interpretive walks at the park beginning with spring vacation through November, including his flower walk at 2 p.m. each Thursday, which leaves



Earl McCollum of Sublimity, center, Betty McCollum of Sublimity, right, and Susan Braatz of Scio, move during a Tai Chi class at the Santiam Senior Center in Stayton on Friday, Sept. 18, 2015.

from the main lodge in the day-use area.

Earl is also an imperative, yet thinning part of the park's vitality.

"The store is how the Friends get most of the funds to support or efforts at the park," Lou explained. "Due to illness and other (circumstances), we are down to 13 volunteers instead of the

30 that we need."

Friends of Silver Falls State Park support the educational and interpretive opportunities available to park visitors and promote the preservation and protection of park premises. Silver Falls is the largest and one of the most popular Oregon's state parks; it received 1,272,680 visitors last year. The

park's nature store is the primary source of funds underpinning Friends efforts.

Volunteers are needed. Lou stressed that anyone who would like to work with "Earl or any of the other wonderful volunteers," should contact Elaine at 503-873-8735 or admin@friendsofsilverfalls.net.