

McMullen family wants to keep Crestwood estate intact

By Polina Olsen
The Southwest Portland Post

When Kathleen Reif McMullen helped her husband Floyd build their Crestwood home, Southwest 53rd Avenue and Alfred Street were the only platted streets in the neighborhood. In 1941, nearby Taylors Ferry Road was a rural road with an occasional passing car. Logged in the early 1900's, small trees and brushland covered the now heavily forested area.

The McMullen family's one-acre site, located across from Dickinson Park, became a botanical treasure as Floyd McMullen planted *Stewartia*, *Parrotia*, and *Rhododendron*. Arborists tell the family some of their *Katsura* and *Acer griseum* trees are among the largest in Portland.

Floyd stayed until he died in 1989; sons Wesley and Eugene grew up. In

December 2007, 99-year-old Kathleen moved to an apartment off Wesley's Far Southwest home.

"We need to sell the property but have great sentimental attachment," said Wes McMullen, who is vice-president of the Crestwood Neighborhood Association. A lifelong commitment to the community and respect for Floyd McMullen's botanical contribution put the family in a dilemma.

They want the property kept in one piece and preserved; the house, old growth fir trees, and exotic plants. But, according to an appraiser, the land is valuable if subdivided -- and a tough-sell if left intact.

"It was lovely with the cows; there were dairy farms all around," said Kathleen remembering Crestwood in the 1940s.

Wes remembered an old homestead on Southwest 53rd Avenue that kept pigs. "They'd say 'don't fall into that pen now -- those pigs will eat you,'" he recalled. He walked to Mrs. Schmidt's six-cow dairy down the street, now part of Dickinson Park. "Me and my brother's chore was to go down to the dairy and buy quarts of milk. We'd walk back with those glass bottles and paper stoppers."

Wes's first memory of the house is his father at work on the terrace. "My uncle came out and told him the Japanese had

bombed Pearl Harbor," he says. "I remember he dropped his hammer."

Floyd McMullen and his wife built their home, his uncle, an architect, designed it. "We made the house together," Kathleen explains. She remembers her husband's surprise when he arrived home and found her laying the living room hardwood floor. "The joke was, he said I'd done just fine. Then he found this big pail of bent nails."

Although not a professional botanist, Floyd was a recognized expert and received the American Rock Garden Marcel Le Piniac Award in 1989. "My dad traveled in the circles of botanical and horticultural pioneers in Oregon," said Wes.

"When dad got people together at the house for dinner, Latin would just bounce off the walls." According to Wes, his father discovered several native plants. "Metro asked him to help design the flora for that new Northwest part of the zoo with bears and eagles."

"If we went on a hiking trip, why Floyd would always be looking for something that he hadn't seen growing in Oregon," said Kathleen. He read books about the flora in various countries and used all the proper terms.

The Alfred Street property is not actively for sale. The housing market downturn and preservation dilemma



McMullen house. (Post photo by Leslie Baird)



Wes and Kathleen McMullen. (Post photo by Polina Olsen)

keep action temporarily on hold. Meanwhile, the Crestwood Neighborhood Association voted to preserve the property and the Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. board remains cautiously optimistic.

The land below my mother's house on the other side of 55th is all part of Dickinson Park," Wes said. "It would be nice if this were preserved like the Berry Botanic Garden or made part of the public parks system."

"We would all feel terrible never to go there again," said Kathleen McMullen, "... to see one house after another built on it." Her fondest memories are the neighborhood children who ran through the carefully tended paths and the many people who visited, like Marcel the Frenchman from Normandy. "They're all gone now," she said sadly about her old friends. "It's so hard to figure out what to do."

<p>Garden Home</p>  <p>Updated Farmhouse on over 1/2 acre. Spacious 3500 sq ft of living space, 4 bed, 3 bath home. 3500 sq ft includes separate apt/studio over the 3 car garage. Vaulted Master & family room. \$549,000.</p>	<p>Hillsdale</p>  <p>First time on the market! Custom built in 1956. 4 bedrooms & 2 fireplaces, family room & workshop. Vaulted ceilings and hardwoods. Beautiful lot with SW views. Great location in Hillsdale. \$435,000</p>	<p>Stephenson</p>  <p>Pearched way up high on a .63 acre mostly flat lot. This mid century has a nice view, privacy and character. 3 bedrooms, hardwoods, sunroom & double garage \$398,000.</p>	<p>Ralieghwood</p>  <p>Wonderful one level home. Hardwood floors throughout. Light & bright living room with vaulted ceiling & fireplace. Master bedroom with double closet & bath. Large laundry room. \$419,000</p>	<p>Multnomah Village</p>  <p>View of the coast range! 3 bedroom, 2 bath home. 1,652 square feet. Light & bright living room w/ woodstove & slider to large deck. 2 kitchens & Oak floors. View & private deck from master bedroom. Driveway & garage below. \$399,500</p>
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