

Hillsdale neighborhood activist Phil Pennington remembered by community

By Lee Perlman
The Southwest Portland Post

Phil Pennington, a Hillsdale activist devoted to trails and crime prevention, died March 31 of the after-effects of pulmonary fibrosis at age 77.

Born in Denver, Pennington graduated from the Colorado School of Mines. He served in the U.S. Army, and then returned to school at the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned his doctorate. He taught physics at Portland State University from 1966 to 1970. After this he devoted himself to independent scientific research, usually for little or no compensation.

He and his wife Keturah lived an austere life and supported themselves through part-time jobs, while engaging in volunteer work and special projects that amounted to more than full-time work. They moved to Hillsdale in 1966.

Pennington helped develop the Hillsdale Neighborhood Association's web site, and was a particularly active member of the Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. Trails Committee.

"He was an important part of the Hillsdale neighborhood," Hillsdale Neighborhood Association and Trails Committee chair Don Baack said. "He was one of the founders of Southwest Trails, and attended every meeting he could. He was a very willing helper. Any time anything needed to be done he was there."

In addition, Baack said, "He was one of the smartest men I've ever met. He had a phenomenal memory, a photographic memory pertaining to Hillsdale. He had a complete map of southwest with all the trails. He was

very critical of any other map, and quick to point out inaccuracies. He was very much to the point."

Indeed, SWNI executive director Sylvia Bogert recalls, "The first time I met Phil was when he walked into the office in his hiking shorts and said, 'Your map's not correct.' He was a wonderful man with a generous spirit who gave a tremendous amount to the community." In addition to Pennington's efforts on behalf of organized groups, "He would take neighbors who couldn't get around on their own to grocery and shopping appointments."

Phil and Keturah organized emergency preparedness networks, oversaw twice-yearly gatherings of these groups and Phil would film meetings so that they could be shared with those who couldn't make them.

Stephanie Reynolds, once a crime prevention specialist assigned to southwest Portland and now manager of the citywide program, says, "Phil and Keturah had one of the most successful neighborhood block watches in the city. They not only dealt with crime and safety issues, but they had social events such as a summer vegetable exchange. They had a way of building communities big and small, and that's what neighborhood watch is really all about." The program named a volunteer award after the Penningtons.

"We kept everyone in touch with each other every month for one reason or another," Keturah Pennington told *The Post*. "We helped each other. If someone had a truck, they would help someone else who needed hauling. If someone had a chain saw, they would help someone else who needed something cut up. It helped that we lived on a 'loop' street because there was nobody but us; we



Phil and Keturah Pennington, hiking with Don Baack. (Photo courtesy of Lee Buhler)

were a little village to ourselves."

"I just loved the Penningtons," Reynolds says. "Phil was such a lovely man. I was so sad when he got sick. It was amazing he lasted as long as he did, probably because he was in such great shape."

When Pennington was first diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis in late 2005, the prognosis was that he probably would be dead by the following Valentine's Day, Keturah recalled. He lived through this and many other

"deadlines" before finally suffering a stroke.

Before his illness, Pennington led a walking group that met every Thursday morning, and a photography club. He devised games and puzzles for the annual DaVinci Fair in Corvallis.

In addition to his neighborhood activities, he campaigned for the preservation of Glen Canyon, the Grand Canyon and Rainbow Natural Bridge in their natural states. "He will be sorely missed," Baack said.

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