

Hillsdale mother leads effort to open outdoor classroom at Rieke School

By Jillian Daley
The Southwest Portland Post

A Hillsdale woman plans to bring an outdoor classroom to Rieke Elementary School with support from students, staff and volunteers.

If Rieke ropes a \$1,900 grant from Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. this month, the project will begin immediately on 2,400 square feet of land behind modular buildings at the school, said Jamie Repasky, project organizer and Rieke mom.

The plan includes covered seating, a path, an oak tree, storage shed and a bridge across an existing rain garden that looks like a plant-filled creek bed.

There would be a hanging vegetable-and-herb garden and a science-class-worthy nurse log, a fallen tree upon which other trees grow and little life forms thrive.

Repasky said the project abounds with teaching opportunities, such as where produce comes from.

Community members are donating construction and project design aid for the site, which will be open for public use when school is not in session. A neighbor gave two rain barrels.

Members of Missio Community, a church, are lending muscle. Hillsdale Neighborhood Association submitted a letter supporting the SWNI grant.

Repasky said several teachers and the principal wanted an outdoor classroom, and she has time to help in-between job hunting.

"The school just needed someone to help bring them together," Repasky said.

The project could cost \$7,000 to \$18,000, depending on factors including whether the main shelter is permanent or temporary.

Funds so far include a \$1,500 grant from West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District. Portland Parks & Recreation will provide trees and logs for seating.

Rieke landed a \$1,000 bonus from Portland Public Schools for its energy-



Jamie Repasky is working to bring an outdoor classroom next year to Rieke Elementary School, which her children attend. (Post photo by Jillian Daley)

saving efforts, efforts which also earned the school kudos.

On September 7, Rieke became the first Oregon school to win the Green Flag Award, the highest honor for National Wildlife Federation's Eco-Schools USA program.

Students, staff and volunteers received the award for implementing Eco-Action Plans on biodiversity education and reduced consumption, waste and energy use, said Erin Barnett, communications manager for Portland Public Schools.

Planning to include focus sessions on schools, parks, land use and transportation

HILLSDALE NOTEBOOK

By Jillian Daley
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The Hillsdale Neighborhood Association at its meeting last month took the first steps toward creating an action plan: a to-do list of improvements and projects for the neighborhood.

To determine what items to put on the list, neighbors will hold Saturday focus sessions in the coming weeks on schools, parks, land use/property development and transportation.

The first focus session on transportation will be Saturday, Jan. 12, 10 a.m. to 12 noon, at The Watershed at Hillsdale, 6380 SW Capitol Hwy.

At the neighborhood association's regular December meeting, association chairman Mikal Apenes showed the gathering of about 20 people the most recent action plan, which was from 2005-2006.

Apenes said a new plan was overdue, and the existing one gives neighbors a sense of what they've accomplished and a framework of how to approach the next plan.

Items from the old plan include keeping Rieke Elementary School open, working on Portland's Red Electric Trail and cleaning the Bertha Triangle, a swath of land that was polluted from an automotive repair and gas station facility.

"I think if you look at this stuff, the people who wanted to see something happen made it happen," said neighbor Don Baack. Baack is also chairman of SW Trails, a group advocating for improved walking and biking trails in the area.

Baack has been instrumental in the development of the Red Electric Trail, which follows the route of a 20th Century, interurban passenger train.

Once complete, the in-progress, long-term project will connect Washington County, Southwest Portland and the Willamette River with a series of bridges and trails for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Rieke is flourishing, flush with almost 400 students. The neighborhood association helped, but the primary driver for the school's survival was students' parents, Apenes said.

A developer, with community help,

transformed the Bertha Triangle from a brownfield to the Watershed at Hillsdale, home to senior housing and community space – the association holds meetings there. The site's name comes from the shape made by the roads bordering it, Southwest Bertha Court, Bertha Boulevard and Capitol Highway.

"This is wonderful, just for learning the vision a few years ago and seeing which (items) we can tick off," said

neighbor Arnie Panitch.

Apenes inspired neighbors to hold the focus sessions to figure out their next steps.

"We can distill it down to bullet points and present it to the neighborhood," he said.

Neighbor Michael Reunert said organizers of the plan should focus on goals the whole neighborhood wants. Reunert suggested a survey or another

way to sample a larger portion of the population.

Glenn Bridger joked that he knows one way to attract more people to meetings to weigh in on decisions. "Controversy is what drives participation," Bridger said.

Rick Seifert said the neighborhood should start simple. "First identify what are our assets and what are our deficits," he said.



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