

## Gaddis' dream at April Hill Park is getting closer to reality

By Lee Braymen-Cleary  
The Southwest Portland Post

In 2007, Maplewood resident, Jill Gaddis and some nearby residents had a wild thought: They should transform yet preserve half—the very wild half—of Southwest Portland's April Hill Park.

Nestled quietly, nearly secretly, between homes of all ages and styles, the park at Southwest 59th Avenue and Miles Court covers 9.5 acres.

A current scan of the developed half reveals a well-used soccer field. Additionally there are childrens' play areas and play equipment sprawled out among walking and biking trails, and ever-appealing grassy and soft-rolling hills.

But that wild half, comprised of casual, man-made and often muddy dirt trails meandering through cedars, maples, Douglas firs and other trees and shrubs houses a symphony of birds.

So does its wetland area, fed by Woods Creek, a Fanno Creek tributary, as it rises and falls with the seasons. Additionally, an array of small reptiles considers that moist area home.

The dream of Gaddis and her friends was to provide a boardwalk, two bridges and an observation deck, all of which protect what she calls a natural "nursery" of fragile land, while at the same time ensuring more safety and convenience for its human and canine visitors of all ages.

The addition of a connected observation deck in the marsh area would again protect the four-footed wildlife and

surrounding foliage as well facilitate wildlife study for students of the neighboring Maplewood Elementary School.

At the time, it seemed natural to Gaddis with her expertise in native plants to give up her chairmanship of the Maplewood Neighborhood Association and devote her efforts completely to the park dream.

She knew beginning such a large project was like riding a train chugging non-stop from Portland to New York; there was no getting off.

Friends of April Hill Park was soon formed and manned by a bevy of volunteers including Anne-Marie Fischer, Bill Rector, Laurie DeVos, Jean Seaman, Jeanne Donaldson, and Karen Williams.

"Friends" is an amalgamation of the Southwest Watershed Resource Center, Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. and the Maplewood Neighborhood Association.

Gaddis is quick to note that it was extremely fortunate that Sylvia Bogart and Sharon Keats of Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. donated a great deal of time outside of office hours.

Jean Seaman of the Southwest Portland Water Center and Virginia Bowers of the Columbia Land Trust donated their professional skills—many grant writing hours—raising \$83,059 of the \$250,000 Metro project.

Seaman's and Bowers' *pro bono* work, along with that of architects Brad Nile of Andersen Construction and Joanne Hogarth, a Marylhurst University faculty member, added up to \$134,000. Roughly and luckily, only \$33,000 was

left for Gaddis and "Friends" to raise.

And they have reached their goal! Three hands-on, fundraising endeavors organized and overseen by a host of volunteers did the trick.

The September "Arf in the Park" event for dog owners—complete with bandannas for the dogs—and October's silent auction held at Maplewood Coffee & Tea both received significant donations.

The third effort, Indiegogo, an online crowd funding medium for an assortment of nonprofits has also been successful.

"Business people in addition to marvelous volunteers supported us," said Gaddis. "There have been at least 30 of them. They include those from Starbucks, Alotto Gelato, Lamb's Thriftway, Western Pets, Maplewood Coffee & Tea, Paloma Clothing, Thinker Toys, and Annie Bloom's Books along with many others. Some of those private sector members even contributed twice."

While this community success story envisioned by Gaddis and friends won't undergo construction until summer 2015, educational activities centering on its architecture are already underway at Maplewood Elementary School.

Architects Nile and Hogarth are teaching third graders about architecture by focusing on April Hill Park's future boardwalk. Gaddis hopes to get a peek at the children's bridge models soon.

With initial goals met, there are still opportunities to give to this all-natural project. The enhanced site will still need new signage as well as a bench for the



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(Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)

observation deck.

If you are interested in giving, please visit April Hill Park's website and watch a video about the park's habitat at [www.swni.org](http://www.swni.org). You will find a "donate" button. There you can also see the camera-shy Gaddis as well as commentators Seaman and Bowers.

To make a tax-deductible donation by mail, write a check to Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc., (SWNI) 7688 SW Capitol Highway, Portland, Oregon, 97219. Be sure to write "April Hill Park" in the lower left corner. To contact Friends of April Hill Park email: [AprilHillPark@gmail.com](mailto:AprilHillPark@gmail.com). Or call the SWNI office at 503-823-4592.



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