

Community farm meant to be a place for people to reconnect with nature

By KC Cowan
The Southwest Portland Post

In 2005, a group of people had a dream of saving seven acres of property in Southwest Portland from becoming a 23-house subdivision.

Ten years later, they celebrated their victory with an event called "Bloom Fest" at the Tryon Life Community Farm.

"Bloom Fest" is one of three annual open houses, although the site is open for drop-in visits six days a week.

A non-profit, Tryon Life is described as a "Community Sustainability Education and Demonstration Center" whose mission is to connect people to the land and nature.



The open-air tea house is one of many places on Tryon Life Community Farm you can relax. Pamela Zigo was hosting at the teahouse during Bloom Fest. (Post photo by KC Cowan)

Located just off Boones Ferry Road, adjacent to Tryon Creek State Park, it is easy to miss the small parking area and sign next to a dirt road that pulls you away from city traffic and down into a bowl of green nature.

If you want to see the goats, you'll have to make your own path through knee-high grass to get there.

The largest area to hang out is the "village green," an open space where, during Bloom Fest, some families sat on blankets enjoying live music. It's surrounded by the 30 foot yurt, the composting toilets, a large sauna and fire circle.

Rustic? Yes. But that's how the members of this space designed it. It's meant to be a space for people to reconnect with nature.

Brenna Bell, a board member, said although 15 people live there, everyone is welcome to come and make themselves at home.

"We have a farm, inside the forest, inside the city," explained Bell.

"Just by getting people on the land, in a place that's very different from the typical urban landscape, with other people they can meet, talk to and share food and drink, it's a way of making those connections."

A lot of what the folks on this farm want to do is re-introduce people back to the land that nurtures us, Bell added. And that is absolutely the vibe.

According to Bell, "One of the things we're working at is to counteract to the alienation of industrial culture, where everyone's in their own box, doing their own thing, looking at their own screen."

At Bloom Fest, there was not a cell phone to be seen, and children made their own entertainment, hunting for bugs and playing in the yurt, unconnected from modern technology.

Doing your own thing is the intention. However, there are many community workshops and hands-on sustainability programs.

Among those are fermenting wild foods, cheese making and carpentry for women. The farm even offers immersion programs of two to eight weeks to study sustainable living skills.

There is a Waldorf-style preschool called the Mother Earth School. Classes are held in the large yurt.

In a covered outdoor kitchen area, kindergarten teacher Traci Jo was baking biscuits for the Bloom Fest dinner in the hand-built, wood-fired cob oven.

The nearby open-air tea house was decorated with festive lights and scarves and created a cozy place to hang out. It offered not only tea, but also kombucha and herbal tinctures for sale.

Jenny Leis was the capital campaign coordinator to save the property. The farm raised \$400,000 in order to get a loan and to match city and state funds.

Leis said they try to be accessible to everyone, but agrees it's not your typical park. Instead, it's a place for people to enjoy a yoga class or dig in the garden at a Saturday work party.

"We're proud of being scrappy. It's open to everyone and anyone to connect and weave the human world and the natural world."

Leis is also a member of Cedar Moon, the "intentional community," where 15 people share housing in the two original houses on the property.

Each member is required to spend 16 hours a week in contributing to the



Traci Jo, kindergarten teacher at the Mother Earth School, also baked biscuits for the Bloom Fest dinner. (Post photo by KC Cowan)

community in such ways as fundraising, gardening, cooking and cleaning and participating in workshops.

Leis explained that Tryon Life members make their mortgage payments in part through renting the site for retreats. They can accommodate up to 100 people. "We've never missed a payment," she said proudly.

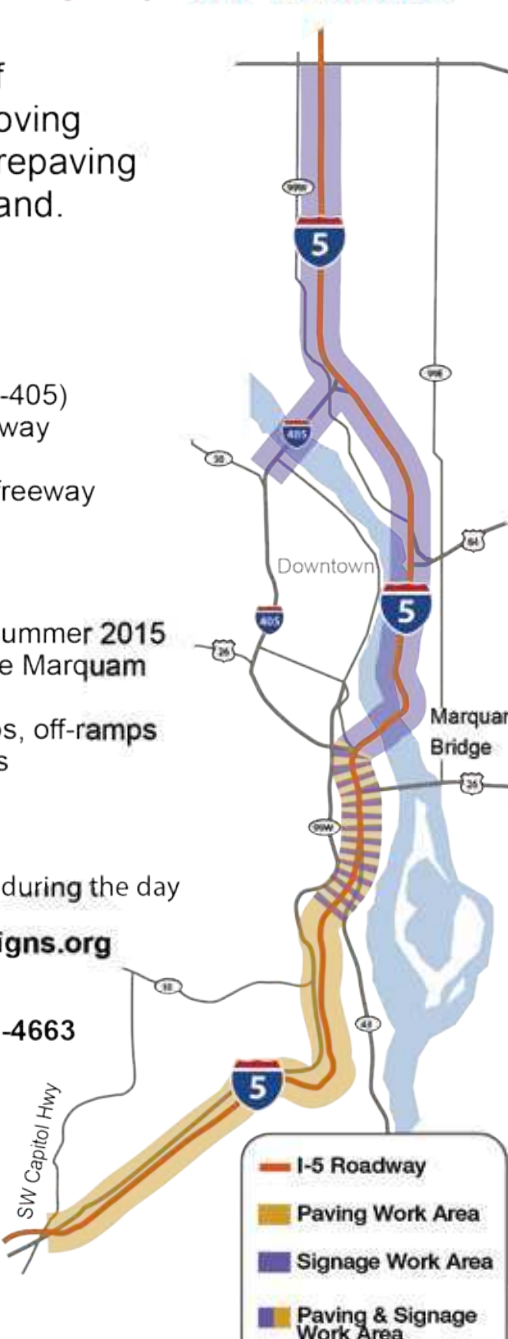
How does it all run? Aside from the members who live on site, there are a host of volunteers and a board of directors. Everyone is dedicated to the proposition of creating a haven of sustainability and social change.

As Jenny says, "You never know who you're going to meet here, because everyone shows up. There's something that feels really good here."

Tryon Life Community Farm is located at 11640 SW Boones Ferry Road. It is open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. The next open house will be the Apple Fest this fall.

I-5 Paving & Signs Project

Capitol Highway to Lombard Street



Oregon Department of Transportation is improving highway signage and repaving sections of I-5 in Portland.

SIGNAGE WORK


- SW Corbett Avenue to N Lombard Street (I-5) and the Fremont Bridge (I-405)
- Improves or replaces freeway signage
- Will require full nighttime freeway closures

PAVING WORK

- Begins late spring/ early summer 2015
- SW Capitol Highway to the Marquam Bridge (I-5)
- Includes work on on-ramps, off-ramps and some freeway bridges

GOOD TO KNOW

- All lanes and ramps open during the day
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- Project info line: (503) 731-4663
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