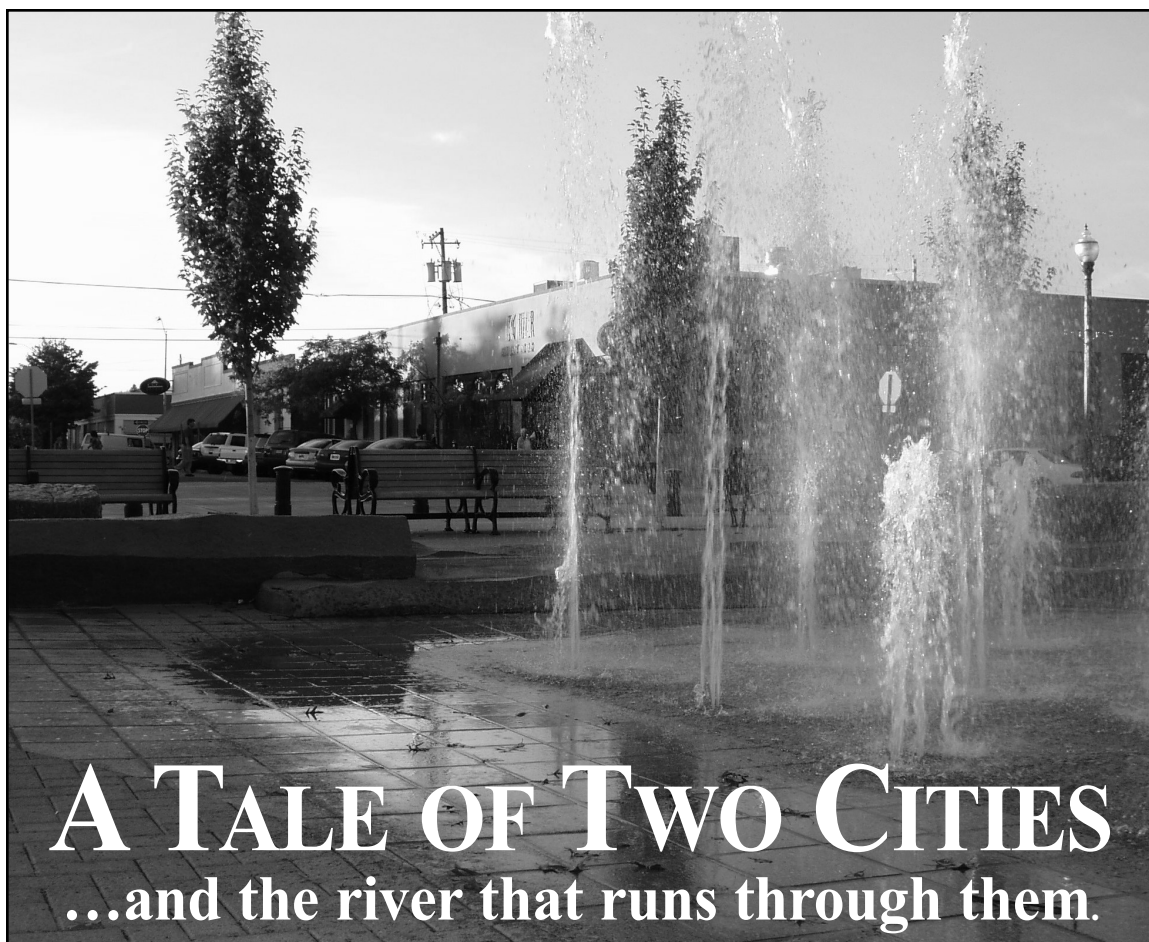




by a landfill in the 1950s, operated on the riverfront land that is now Eugene's treasured Alton Barker Park and the UO's embattled Riverfront Research Park project.

"Parks improve quality of life, in terms of open space" said Johnny Medlin, director of parks for the city of Eugene. Alton Baker Park and Skinner Butte Park have riverfront access and total more than 500 acres.

On a sunny Thursday afternoon Jessica Fichtel was enjoying Alton Baker Park with her 3-year-old god-daughter. The two were standing in a sea of hungry geese, who watched eagerly as Fichtel tore off pieces of bread to toss their way. Fichtel said

for the last 12 years she's gone running in the park every weekend. "In an urban area, it's nice to go some place where you aren't surrounded by concrete," she said.

Farther up the river, Elvira Patterson walked briskly along one of the riverfront trails. "I walk every day on my lunch hour," she said. Patterson has been walking these trails for five to six years, ever since she moved to Eugene. "I like it because it's scenic, near the river, and the path is kept up well," she said.

Parks such as Alton Baker Park, offer many recreational activities. Besides, the riverside trails, other features include the Cuthbert Amphitheater, which draws nationally known musicians every summer, a BMX track, and the Science Factory Children's Museum and Planetarium. The park also is home to the Hays Memorial Tree Garden, a boat launch, and a canoe canal. The canoe canal begins east of the I-5 corridor in Springfield, snakes along the length of Alton Baker Park, and enters the Willamette River near the Ferry Street Bridge.

The UO's Riverfront Research Park project began in the early '80s and will soon in-

clude a large research complex. Right now all the buildings are far from the waterfront but Diane Wiley, director of the park, said future development will happen closer to the waterway. According to Neil Bjorklund, senior planner for Eugene Planning and Development Department, that could be controversial. Currently Eugene has very few regulations aimed at protecting the waterfront and the riparian habitat that supports hundreds of plants and animals living on the river's edge. Bjorklund said that under the current zoning rules, developers could literally build right up to the water.

In the '70s Oregon adopted 19 statewide planning goals. Goal 15 is the Willamette River Greenway, an effort to protect the river by setting up buffers and easements to make sure "businesses and developments don't impact the scenic nature of the river and wildlife," said Eric Adams, Corvallis Planning Department. Both Eugene and Corvallis need to develop stricter controls to protect the river in order to meet Goal 15.

Travis Williams, director of Willamette Riverkeeper, a non-profit organization that works to protect the Willamette River, said that Greenway is seeing mixed results. "Greenway is administered at the county level," he said, which leaves the protecting of the area up to each county.

This means that in some areas, the program has been implemented better than others. "In Eugene you will find good and bad examples [of implementation]," he said, adding that it varies from location to location. Williams said that this has inspired an analysis by the Oregon State Parks, Willamette Riverkeeper, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Farm Bureau, along with other groups.

The Willamette River Greenway in both Eugene and Corvallis provides a place for families to relax and spend time together, for people to enjoy the outdoors. Over the next few years both cities will continue to grow and planners and environmentalists will work to make sure that the growth happens in a way that sustains the livability of our communities. That includes increased efforts to protect our rivers so people can continue to enjoy them.

"Our lives are so hectic, it's important to have a safe environment for people who want to get away," Williams said. ■

Omie Drawhorn and Melissa Bearn contributed to this story.

BY D.D. BIXBY

For centuries rivers have been as integral to the survival of cities as blood and oxygen are to the body. Like veins they carried supplies, life-sustaining water, and provided transportation long before our interstate highways whisked us across the country.

Both Eugene and Corvallis have grown up alongside the Willamette. The river winds through the very personalities of our cities and has shaped how our communities have developed. We name our teams after water-dwelling animals, ducks and beavers. We build trails and parks to bring us closer to the water. We build restaurants with decks overlooking the flowing streams, and our cities invest huge sums to develop and redevelop the riverfronts to make them business and cultural hubs.

For centuries we took our rivers for granted. Now we struggle to balance development and growth with recreation and environmental protections.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries rivers were used largely in transportation between port towns. Corvallis was one of these port towns, with the Willamette River running right through the heart of the city. Corvallis' riverfront was the industrial heart of the little steamboat town, said Mary Gallagher, collections manager at the Benton County Historical Museum. "Pretty much, year-round boats could reach Corvallis," she said. Until the middle half of 20th century, First Street, which runs along the Willamette, was lined with creameries, grain warehouses and saw mills.

Eventually as the creameries dried up and more efficient ways of shipping replaced the steamboat, the Corvallis riverfront businesses vacated. In the '50s the city of Corvallis purchased the area alongside the river to build a bypass meant to alleviate traffic congestion.

By that time the environmental movement was beginning to work its way into the national consciousness. For both environmental and aesthetic reasons, Corvallis residents didn't want a highway so close to the river. Instead the city built Highway 34 on the east

side of town.

Now the property is one of the ritziest downtown areas, drawing higher rents and crowds of people who come to shop, stroll along the riverfront and eat at the many restaurants that grace its banks. "It went from industry to vacant, to now," Gallagher said. "It's really had three lives."

The development of today's riverfront began about 10 years ago with the Riverfront Commission, said Jackie Rochefort, Corvallis park planner.

"The idea was Corvallis should not turn it's back on the river," she said. "But should be celebrating the river." In the planning process, the commission got a lot of feedback from Corvallis residents: Public meetings and hearings had large turnouts — usually about 500 people. "It was a very controversial project for a long time," she said.

The city owns a big chunk of the land along the Willamette, the Mary's River and Muddy Creek and faces the challenge of meeting development needs as well as protecting the waterways. At 11.7 acres, the Riverfront Memorial Park, completed in 2002, helped transform the old industrial streets into a vibrant district where business and community are beginning to thrive.

"It's beginning to have new life. You see a lot more people hanging out than before," said Mary Nolan, public affairs director for the Corvallis Chamber of Commerce, who said the economy in the area is booming. "You can't help but think they're frequenting these businesses. Certainly there are a lot more businesses going in than we've ever seen before."

Another big project is the Renaissance on the Riverfront — Corvallis' first private residential green building, with sustainability incorporated into the buildings' planning and construction. It includes a seven-story condominium tower with space for restaurants and shops.

Upstream from Corvallis on the very same river, Eugene has had a similar evolution and also struggles with many of the same issues. In the late 19th century a gravel quarry, followed

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