

Living Locally Gala & Auction

The Lower Nehalem Community Trust's eighth annual gala celebrates the Nehalem area's food, land and people

The Lower Nehalem Community Trust formed to preserve land in its natural state and instill conservation values among community partners in the Nehalem region of the North Oregon Coast. When it comes to celebrating the joy and fulfillment LNCT staff and volunteers derive from that mission, there's no better forum than the eighth annual Living Locally Gala, taking place Saturday, June 6.

LNCT originated in 2002 with seven long-time community members: Tom Bender, Doug Firstbrook, Lane DeMoll, Judy Sorrel, Vivi Tallman, and Gareth and Georgene Ferdun. These community stewards shared a vision of preserving area properties to protect their ecological value.

"There was a ramping up of development that was occurring during that time," Firstbrook recalled. "Those of us who had lived here for a number of years felt that it (preservation) was important to get going."

The group approached several conservancy groups, but had difficulty finding a good fit.

"We tried to interest larger groups in significant properties here, but we didn't fit their format as far as the types and size of land they were wanting to conserve," Firstbrook said.

Using the North Coast Land Conservancy in Seaside as a model, the group made its own path, rather than risk losing the properties to development.

"At that time, the NCLC had a much smaller working area," Firstbrook said. "We sensibly realized that if we wanted to get land set aside, we'd have to form our own trust."

Thirteen years and numerous acres of preserved land later, the LNCT remains committed to a multitude of conservation and education projects around the Nehalem Valley area; the community garden at Alder Creek Farm, estuary cleanup groups, and bird monitoring to name just a few.

Childhood education is a priority, evidenced in the Forest To Sea Camp. Each June, LNCT hosts local marine biologist Peter Walczak, educator Gary Seelig, and a group of grade-schoolers at LNCT's various parcels. At these outdoor classrooms, kids learn about such topics as land restoration and organic gardening. "Kids intuitively feel connected nature," Seelig said.

LNCT Executive Director Dale Cramer Burr realizes the importance of involving people in the trust's growth. "We're an unusual land trust because of the focus we've placed on community engagement," she said. "People are really important to the conservation of this part of the coast."

LNCT's Living Locally Gala encompasses all these ideals in an annual gathering that honors and celebrates good food, good land and good people.

The gala arose from LNCT's desire to create more people-centered events. The positive response to the community garden was the impetus.

"It's a very comprehensive educational tool, as well as producing quality organic food," Firstbrook said. "The idea grew out of that."

Living Locally Gala unites a wide variety of local-flavored food and fun; a farm-to-table dinner prepared by Netarts chef Tom Flood, desserts by 2014 Clatsop County Iron Chef champion Jonathan Hoffman, craft beers, wines, organic coffee and teas, a silent auction,



Submitted photos
Left: A former dairy farm located west of Nehalem, Alder Creek Farm hosts the Lower Nehalem Community Trust's Coastal Food Ecology Center and most of the trust's education projects.

Below: Neah-Kah-Nie students work as part of a conservation crew at LNCT's Alder Creek Farm to dig up invasive blackberry plants.

and a live "Experience Auction" featuring renowned Portland auctioneer Misty Marquam.

"Dinner will be coho from the community supported fishery in Garibaldi, vegetables from farms in Tillamook County, Netarts oysters on the half shell, and we are launching the new Ninkasi seasonal brew," Cramer Burr said. "It's an exquisite meal."

The titles of the "experiences" to be auctioned are tantalizing, including "My Heart Belongs To Ashland," "Insider's Portland," and "The Art Of Fermentation."

They also include off-the-beaten path experiences, such as "Undiscovered Ancient Forest Of Fox Creek." Here, at the base of Saddle Mountain, the winners will spend a day absorbing a natural part of Oregon seen by few. "Its ecological value is quite rare," Cramer Burr acknowledged. For the experience, LNCT and NCLC provide naturalist guides, a gourmet meal, and even act as sherpas.

The Golden Ticket Raffle offers the choice of a trip for four to Mexico or Tuscany, or first choice of any experience in the Live Auction.

Finally, a silent auction offers a chance at artisan gifts, crafts, fine art and more.

In short, attendees are bound to go home full, happy and feeling good about helping out.

"We have amazing support from our community to put all this together," Cramer Burr said. "It's an opportunity to shout out good works around conservation and stewardship."

An important part of the evening is granting the Ferdun Conservation Award. Named for founders Gareth and Georgene Ferdun, the award singles out individuals who exemplify LNCT's values.

Firstbrook was selected as the 2015 recipient and Cramer Burr agrees with the selection wholeheartedly. "We had numerous nominations for Doug, and we really paid attention



Donated to the Lower Nehalem Community Trust in 2005, the 8.5-acre parcel of Vosburg Creek is located on the southwest edge of Wheeler. A forested wetlands area that supports coho, chinook and chum salmon, the land also includes two buildings and a trail for LNCT educational programs and public use.

to that," she said. "The conservation work he does is done so quietly and so powerfully."

Funds raised at Living Locally go toward land acquisition, stewardship projects, supporting LNCT staff or what Firstbrook calls, "anything it takes to run an organization like this." That includes three recently donated parcels in Wheeler and a wooded upland area adjacent to Alder Creek Farm dubbed Sorrel Woods.

LNCT's Living Locally Gala takes a moment to celebrate what dedicated community groups can accomplish together. Whether it's setting aside land for future generations or donating produce grown at Alder Creek Farm to the county food bank, giving is what makes the LNCT heart beat strong.

"You can hear the spirit of generosity from the community," Seelig said. "Every piece of that generosity builds on itself."

Living Locally
Gala will be held from 6 to
9 p.m. Saturday, June 6 at North
County Recreation District, located
at 36155 Ninth St. in Nehalem. Tickets
cost \$75 for LNCT members and \$95 for
non-members. For information or
to purchase tickets, call 503-368-
3203 or visit www.nehalem-trust.org

Coastal Life

Story by DAN HAAG