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WEEKEND BREAK



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BRANCHING OUT

Retired landscaper uses branches from a burn pile as focal point for his own yard project

BY LYNDA LAYNE
For The Astorian

OCEAN PARK — John Fugitt has moved around a lot in his lifetime. He was a nomad of sorts, changing locations and jobs seemingly at the drop of a hat. But one constant always held true and that was his love of designing and installing landscapes for other people.

But now that he has retired and feels settled on the Washington Peninsula, he is finally realizing his dream of designing his own yard. From the curved brick-lined pathways to a creative arbor and fence made from discarded shore pine branches, he has put together what his girlfriend, Carole Barger, calls “John’s landscape artistry.”

Barger, also an Ocean Park resident, is a well-known area artist in several mediums from fiber arts to mosaics. Over several years, she has watched Fugitt express his creativity in other ways and those efforts have helped him give back to the community.

He has been a member of Bayside Singers, has performed in Peninsula Players productions and in mystery theater; all volunteer efforts. He has even been a solo vocalist at the Loyalty Days Follies. Aside from the singing and acting, Barger said Fugitt has an artistic side that has helped him bring his current project, “to a whole different level.”

Getting down and dirty

As a child, his parents didn’t dress him up in Little Lord Fauntleroy duds and threaten him with bodily harm if he got them filthy. Instead, they told him to go play in the dirt and be happy. They believed a child needed to spend a lot of time outside, playing in soil, to be healthy and content.

It worked. Fugitt recalled, “Early on, my folks fortunately had the philosophy that as a child you need to roll around in the dirt a little bit to get healthy. I firmly agree. They got me used to dirt. Even as a kid, I always enjoyed just sticking my hands in it and playing in dirt piles. I just loved it.”

It stuck. When he was in high school, he said he got a summer job in Longview with Melody Landscaping. “I really enjoyed it. It was outside and it was physical.”

Over his entire adult life, whatever job he was sidelined into working, he always seemed to return to what he calls, “professional landscaping. It was always kind of a fallback thing.” He said that he worked in over a dozen other career fields, including a short stint as a teacher after earning an elementary education degree from Western Washington University.

Admitting that he is sometimes held back by Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), which makes it tough to concentrate and focus, that wasn’t the only reason it took him, “seven years and two quarters to get a four-year degree. That was back in the ‘70s and I was having a lot of fun.” Plus, he enjoyed the beauty of the Bellingham area and was in no hurry to leave.

Working for others

Over the years, the landscaping jobs he always returned to saw him designing and installing both inside and outside environments that had aesthetic appeal.

One he particularly remembers is the Ciri Building, a huge business complex in Anchorage, Alaska. Inside, he said, “The first story and a half was an atrium. We brought in soil and banked it all up.” They also made a free-flowing water feature. “People would bring their lunches to work and sit and listen to the waterfall. It was so rewarding to see and that’s kind of why I love doing it.”

He finds the entire creative process gratifying.

Landscaping, he said, is “like a picture that’s never done, so there’s always something for you to do, always something you can improve upon, change or alter. Landscapes are always growing, always changing.”

Now his own yard

Looking back, Fugitt said, “With me moving around a lot, I never did have a chance to landscape my own place. I’d been doing other people’s landscapes my whole life. Now, at this stage of the



Photos by LYNDA LAYNE/Chinook Observer

John Fugitt dragged branches of shore pines one at a time from the beach approach area, past Pacific Pines Park, to his home and stacked them alongside his house for future use. That future use turned out to be an artistic garden arbor and fence for his front yard.



To keep things as natural as possible, Fugitt often wove branches together. Here on the railing for the arbor, one branch has two horns that lopped over the rail and interlocked.



A closeup of the mosaic birdbath.



An old boot and colorful potted plants add color and interest on and around an old tree stump. “I like goofy little yard art things,” Fugitt said.

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