

River

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sun and 80-degree temperatures.

Last year's event set sail under a cloudless blue sky. Photos show participants in costumes (one man wore a ballet tutu and an Elmer Fudd hat); large, wildly-shaped inflatables, including two friends with giant seahorse-shaped pool toys; and one floater playing blues music on a handmade dobro.

Still, what most people want to know about the Big Float is: Will you die from EColi if you get in the Willamette?

The answer is: absolutely not.

Completion of the Big Pipe sewage project in November of last year is a major reason for the upswing in Willamette River health – at \$1.4 billion in money paid completely by city taxpayers without any federal or state assistance, it is considered the biggest public works project in Oregon history and took some 20 years to complete.

Community organizers add that many, many people have worked hard for years promoting bioswales, green roofs and water gardens to limit road and pesticide runoff into storm drains.

"The river is dramatically cleaner than it was and the opportunities for water contact and recreation have ballooned," says Dean Marriott, director of the Environmental Services for the City of Portland.

Marriott's bureau keeps a table on its website that tracks the results of weekly bacterial tests at key points in the river; for each one, green numbers mean the bacteria levels are considered safe by federal standards – red means unsafe.

Since the Big Pipe was completed, Marriott says, there have been three combined sewer overflow events triggered by heavy rains – two in January and one on Memorial Day weekend, which saw an inch of rain fall in less than an hour.

"Before completion of this project, we would have had raw sewage in the river on about 100 occasions a year," Marriott says. "The majority of winter days would have been above the bacterial safety threshold."

He, too, took his family down to the Big Float last summer.

"It was a magic day, blue skies," Marriott said. "I think this is an indicator of how the city's relationship with the river has changed."

Rick Bastach, of the City of Portland Office of Healthy Working Rivers, says his staff is small, and their charge is big: helping coordinate a slate of priorities established to maintain the Willamette as a working harbor; bird-dogging development along the river and the issues that brings; making livability a priority for river neighborhoods; and just generally making sure that all parts of the city that touch on



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river systems coordinate in the interests of clean water.

And if you're interested in learning more about the Portland Harbor Superfund site, Bastach's website is a goldmine.

The Office of Healthy Working Rivers regularly holds free activities including a River Walk with Oregon Historical Society Chair Emeritus Chet Orloff on July 24 – picnicking encouraged.

"We have become kind of disconnected from the Willamette, especially as a city," Bastach says. "In a way

it's understandable because for so many years the Willamette was a river of problems, and now it's a treasure more than it is a problem."

Bastach noted that the Portland Bridge Swim, held this year on Sunday, July 22, and covering 11 miles through the Willamette – has already been up and running for some time without a lot of fanfare or hang-wringing.

In fact the Bridge Swim participants – who organizers say come from all over the country – will be wrapping up at the St. John's Bridge during the Cathedral Park Jazz Festival.

"The idea is that we now have a river worth reconnecting to, and that's why we're helping a little bit with the Big Float – because it's a direct fun introduction for a lot of people," Bastach says.

"We get a lot of pushback saying, 'you're just sort of trying to minimize problems and greenwash what has happened,'" Bastach says.

"There are enough facts out there for people to make up their minds about whether they're ready to think of the Willamette in the way I would think of the Rogue River.

"Let's take a moment to appreciate what we have as we get ready to recommit to making it better."

For more information go to www.thebigfloat.com.

Center

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A committee set up to create a legacy to Jordan decided proposed to rename University Park Community Center as the Charles Jordan Community Center. Built to house shipyard workers who arrived in Portland during the 1940s, the center is a relic of Vanport, the low-income multi-racial community lost to flooding when a dike broke on the Columbia River.

When Jordan became Parks director in 1989, the center was a run-down building in a crime-ridden neighborhood. Against advice to tear it down, Jordan sought money to renovate the building, and turned it into one of the best-used community centers in the city.

"He was determined to make sure the families who came to that center felt that they had a safe place to play that was as good as any in the City," the committee wrote in its proposal. "He often walked the halls of the center to watch the children play and to show that this place was special, just like the children who played there." A towering figure at 6ft 8' tall, Jordan was a talented basketball player. He won a scholarship to Gonzaga University, where he earned a bachelor of science's degree in Education, Sociology, and Philosophy. He also served in the U.S. Army.

Earlier, he spent much of his youth living on a reservation near Palm Springs. The experience gave him a special feeling for

the natural landscape, as well as a burning desire to make sure other people of color had opportunities to feel the same sense of ownership and belonging.

As city commissioner, Jordan created Portland's first police accountability body, the Police Internal Investigations Auditing Committee (PIIAC). He brought police into

Jordan didn't back down, but in a now-familiar process, the officers were rehired.

People were at the heart of all Jordan's projects. He was the force behind landmarks such as Pioneer Courthouse Square, the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, Delta Park, Southwest Community Center, renovations to Tom McCall Waterfront Park

the country to beat me at crime prevention. We have thousands of young people playing on fields and courts, and when they are with me they are not hurting themselves or anyone else."

Last year, Portland won the National Recreation and Parks Association's top honor – the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management. Fish says he and his team wouldn't dream of taking all the credit. The award was 150 years in the making, and many people contributed. Jordan was one of the most significant.

A big picture thinker, Jordan's charisma also placed him on the national stage. His legacy includes five years as parks director for Austin, Texas, and five years at the helm of the Conservation Fund. Wherever he went, he fought to bring people of color to the table. "He was the person who took Portland Parks and Rec. to the next level," Fish says. "He was a first in terms of his public service here in Portland. He was a champion for the environment and conservation statewide. And he was a national leader for the Conservation Fund in making sure that historically significant African American sites were preserved and protected for future generations."

As police commissioner, Jordan fired two officers for dumping dead possums outside an African American-owned restaurant

schools to create positive relationships, pushed for equity in city recruitment, and championed citizen involvement. Charged with the Fire Bureau, Jordan created an outreach training program to recruit people of color.

As police commissioner, Jordan fired two officers for dumping dead possums outside an African American-owned restaurant. That spurred a police march on city hall.

and Matt Dishman Community Center and more. He helped bring about popular programs, such as, Pot Luck in the Park, Movies in the Park and too many youth initiatives to mention.

Famously, his love of young people fueled his work. "I am in the business of crime prevention," he said about his mission at the Parks bureau. "I challenge any police bureau in