

I Remember When.....
Every Day is Earth Day in Nora's Woods

By *Rich Appleton*, Columbia and 29th

April 22 is Earth Day. If you would like to show your love of the environment and your connection to the Madrona neighborhood, come to a special work party in Nora's Woods, a special place in our community with a very special history.

In 1987, Madrona resident Nora Wood set out to find a patch of greenery on the west side of the Madrona ridge that hadn't been given up to development. She loved Northwest native plants and hoped to preserve and promote them in an urban setting. Pickings for open space were slim but Nora was determined. She and her husband, Fran, went so far as to fly over the area in a small airplane reconnoitering possible sites.

The Wood family eventually bought a plot at 29th Avenue and Columbia Street. The land was ripe with the treasures of neglect, and required massive clean-up. It was overgrown with blackberry, ivy and all the usual invasive suspects, but it had promise. Some wanted it developed into four skinny homes. Nora had another idea--a small bench and trail that would coax a would-be visitor in for a moment's respite.

Years went by, Nora Wood passed away, and her family continued to try to see her vision through. Despite their efforts, the project didn't begin to get traction until they turned the property over to the non-profit Trust for Public Lands. The Trust, accustomed to bigger, rural land preservation efforts, took on Nora's project as an experiment in preserving urban green space. The Trust and the Wood family agreed that if the community showed no interest in developing the park, they would sell the property for seed money.

Luckily, that did not happen. An anonymous donation of \$15,000 paid for a landscape architect to draft plans for the park. Neighbors, the Madrona Community Council, and Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods guided the project through the matching grant process. Chris Rogers, the project manager for the Trust, had grown up in Madrona and so took a special interest. Today, Chris is providing leadership for the new sculpture park adjacent to Myrtle Edwards Park, and in the process of moving back to Madrona.

Shirley Solomon, a Madrona civic leader, spearheaded the grant application process to Department of Fish and Wildlife and is largely responsible for the salmon “Homecoming” sculpture that graces one of the park’s entrances. The Coho salmon recalls the salmon runs up local streams lost now to urbanization. At the installation ceremony in 19???, wildlife sculptor, Tom Jay, spoke poetically of the history and significance of salmon runs in the earliest development of our natural environment. He cited research that finds salmon DNA in our oldest living evergreens, suggesting that decomposing fish provided critical nutrients to plants pioneering the gravelly terrain left by receding glaciers.

The heavy wooden corner steps with their inset bronzed leaves are the work of landscape artist Bruce Myers. Bruce is also the artist behind the landscape art at Discovery Park’s Interpretive Center. Jonathan Overman and his Madrona Boy Scout troop installed the cedar rail fence as his Eagle Scout project.

Yolinda Ward and Lynn Watkins, who now live elsewhere, were two of the initial volunteers who built chip trails, and mulched and pruned. Thousands of ferns and assorted smaller plants have been salvaged from Eastside development sites and added over time. This time of year is a good time to visit while Trillium and red flowering currant are blossoming and the sword fern fiddle heads are beginning to uncoil. The false solomon seal blooming on the Columbia St. embankment exude a scent that transcends French perfume. There’s twin flower and twin berry, vanilla leaf and inside-out flower, incense cedar, Alaska yellow cedar, silk tassel and lots more.

Today, Fran Woods is leading the development of the Leschi Natural Area on 36th Avenue. At 29th and Columbia, the little park named for his late wife is maintained primarily by neighbors in conjunction with the Department of Parks and Recreation. Yolinda and Lynn still return regularly for work parties and that’s the level of involvement and caring prompted by a little neighborhood park named Nora’s Woods that is the heart and soul of Nora Wood’s vision.

You can be part of it too. Join us on April 22 between 9am and 2:00pm. Just bring your enthusiasm—and your gloves.