

Neighborhood Tree Steward

Stories of Citizen Volunteers in Portland Neighborhoods



Eastmoreland

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I have been working on street trees – pruning, planting, removal, elm inoculation, research and education – since 1997. In late 1996, my neighbor down the street, Darlene Carlson, asked me to join the tree committee she and her husband were forming because they wanted a neighborhood group to tie into Friends of Trees *Seed the Future* Campaign. I planted trees in our first FOT planting in 1997, and in subsequent years as well. When the Carlsons and others joined Save Our Elms, Richard Ross came to a Tree Committee meeting, and explained the elm inoculation combatting Dutch Elm Disease in Ladd's Addition. I thought we should allow the

elms to die and replace them as rapidly as possible; listening to neighbors and experts over time, I realized not only that the sudden loss of 300 elms would be catastrophic to the neighborhood identity, but also to stormwater mitigation, heat reduction, and carbon sequestration. I have shifted to a hope for evaluation and the removal of elms in poor condition.

When Don and Darlene Carlson moved out of Eastmoreland, I volunteered to chair the Tree Committee which had become a standing committee in the Eastmoreland Neighborhood Association (ENA). From 2003 until 2007, I set the agendas, hosted many of the meetings, and a convivial and hard-working group of neighbors did an amazing amount of work – garage sales to raise funds, plantings with FOT, educational tables on July 4 and at the school, outreach to classrooms, mowing

around and weeding young trees at Duniway Elementary School, offering a bulk rate pruning, recording empty tree spaces, tabulating elm deaths, reporting events and activities, and getting and spending to the IRS. Much of this work I talked over behind the scenes with the other Eastmoreland Tree Steward, Karen Williams; we have also done many of the jobs together. The ENA Tree Committee received the 2007 Bill Naito Community Trees Award.

After my 2008 Tree Steward Training was complete, I thought I would inventory all the elms, but a more pressing issue arose: neighbors in an ENA meeting raised the issue of correcting the dying turf in the seven block long allée that we know as Reed College Place. I went to one of their planning meetings and said I thought it would never do to try to correct the turf until you addressed doing maintenance pruning on the lindens. This led me to the work on the 256 Reed College Place trees.

I joined the Reed College Place Committee in the Spring of 2008. Then Commissioner Adams had come to an ENA meeting and members were sure that the City would pay to have the turf restored. I simply could not see how the turf could be restored when many of the trees (253 lindens, a Homestead elm, an ash, and a katsura) were hanging down only six feet above the street, well out of street clearance compliance which is 14 feet for a one-way street. So I offered to organize an inventory of the trees as a way of beginning the process of assessing what a restoration would cost. We began the inventory in late summer. Karl Dawson introduced me to DBH tapes, and we measured all of the trees, noting when droplines were passing



Catherine Mushel photographing a tree. This photo was used to promote PP&R's first Arbor Week Photography show.

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through them, when they were cabled, and where the streetlights were located in relation to the trees. As a part of the inventory, we wanted to know about the condition of the trees. Amazingly enough, I was able to walk the length of the allée with four experts: Ned Sodja, Urban Forestry Inspector for SE; Pam Sodja, Arborist for PGE (there are high voltage lines on the west side of the street); Stephen Peacock of Peacock Tree Preservation; and Chris Ritchard of Collier Arbor Care. Then I walked the allée with my garden design mentor, Liz Marantz. Everyone thought the trees were in good condition, with very few trees showing signs of decay. The arborists all agreed that it would be good to get climbers into the crowns of the trees and clean up old storm breaks and clean out deadwood; it was obvious that the truck traffic was doing a poor pruning job, and street clearance pruning was also a good idea. Liz said she thought the trees were coppice trees in England and Pam said that PGE pruned them less frequently (every two years) and less severely than other trees because they suckered heavily when pruned hard.

This led me to a period of research. I found that lindens were indeed coppice trees in England and had been used as such to make poles and even charcoal since Neolithic times. I wrote to a friend in France familiar with historic gardens in Europe and found that the allée most like ours is the Clumber Park allée in Nottinghamshire. There are pollarded allées (one in the Chicago Botanic Garden) and the famous, very wide allée that begins at the Brandenbourg Gate in Berlin. Liz also had noticed that long branches that had been long on the ground were separating into strands, and sure enough, linden is soaked and stranded, and used in weaving. The flowers are famous for their perfume and in spring wines. But what was important to my understanding for the neighbors is that if the trees are pruned hard, especially if they are pruned in early spring, they sucker heavily.

After I did the inventory and reported

back to the committee, they decided to hire a landscape architect to get the big picture in their sights: Carol Mayer Reed's firm drew up a plan after I walked the allée again with Ryan Carlson from her firm. That plan suggested that the drainage be corrected with drywells set periodically throughout the allée, that the irrigation be checked and repaired, that



Reed College park blocks

the trees be pruned, and that a walking path, perhaps made of hardwood chips, be put down the center of the parkway.

The committee members all contributed hundreds of dollars to pay for this plan. At every step of the way, we contacted the City to ask for help, but always with the same answer: no money for maintenance. No money to turn the water on to test the system, no money to seed grass, no money to aerate, no money to prune the trees. Ned Sodja's services would be provided though. Neighbors on the street were invited to a show-and-tell and many said the City should pay for a restoration and very, very few liked the idea of a path. The committee had reported back to the ENA Board saying that the City was not going to fund a restoration. It was decided that Reed College Place residents should fund the initial restoration because other neighbors have been pruning their street trees for nearly a century, though the

trees belong to the City as well. This led to a discussion of getting together a neighborhood green plan.

But back to Reed College Place. We are now in the winter of 2009. We began exploring a local improvement district, which turned out to be a tricky matter: Oregon Statutes allow LID's for capital projects only, and maintenance – even deferred maintenance – is not a capital project. The lawyer on the committee and the City LID expert could see a way around this roadblock; however, the neighbors said, never, no no no to taxes and City crews doing the work. Now what? Well, neighbors thought that we had not approached the City right, and so we had to go through a lengthy process of explaining what we had done in trying to get City funds: you might say the process of convincing the neighbors was for many committee members a repeat of the process they had gone through themselves. Then we had a few rough bids and realized the pruning could cost as much as \$70,000. This would have meant asking the 138 households on the street for around \$500 apiece. If we got 80% participation, we would have to ask for around \$700 per household. That is what we did, with many members of the committee doing personal pleas, and many members talking at block meetings on each block, explaining the process and talking about the money. We raised about \$60,000. Then we had to write pruning specifications and get the language of the contract correctly. It was incredibly useful to have Robert Oringdulph write the specifications as a businessman and principle of an architectural firm. We worked on this together, but it was Bud who really pinned down what to call the pruning, a Class II pruning, which is neither as fine as a Class I pruning with an aesthetic goal, nor as crude as a Class III pruning for hazards only. We decided Class II would be best: deadwood, hazards, and street light and street sign clearance were specified. We reduced the live wood number from a possible 25% to a 15% because of the linden suckering tendency.

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We contacted 20 arborists after we checked to see whether they were certified. Ned supplied a list of companies who had trained with the City so that they knew the drill of pruning street trees. We added arborists neighbors had recommended. We had 14 arborists decide to submit bids, and then we met and looked over their bids. We had to consider what might be extra (cables and street closure fees came up) and what the extra man-hours might cost. We narrowed the list to six and checked their references. We needed to know that they were capable of a big job. Then we met with the finalists on site to see whether they had any questions and to tell them that the turf must not be harmed, that the allée had to be dealt

with as a whole, because we had to satisfy neighbors on every block. We chose Harrity Tree Specialists and they did the work while the Duniway students were on Winter Break and while the trees were dormant.

The City decided to remove one tree which Ned Sodja and I identified as a potential hazard and he confirmed as such with a resistograph. I walked the allée three times during the pruning, and Ned came out twice during the work and for the final walk-through. The Harrity crew decided to do necessary directional limbing up on the lindens that were 11-14 inches in diameter and now those trees are set to take their places as street trees out of the way of truck traffic.

Our negotiations with the City were complex in part because Reed College Place is a city street landscape and managed by the Department of Transportation and maintained by the Bureau of Maintenance. So, for example, when Ned said, take this tree down, he sent out a crew from Forestry to take it down as a hazard tree, but he did so not knowing whether BOM was going to pay. When I went to a public hearing regarding the Citywide Tree Project, I asked that city street landscapes be moved under Forestry's jurisdiction. I do not believe this has occurred, so they are still neither parks cared for by Forestry nor parking strips cared for by homeowners.



Photo Courtesy of Phyllis Reynolds

Eastmoreland Heritage Elm