

Two commissioners paint outer East Portland school

Story and photos by David F. Ashton

No, they didn't vandalize it! See why Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish and Multnomah County Commissioner Jeff Cogen – and 40 other volunteers – worked to spruce up a school they'd never before visited

...



Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish says volunteering helps him stay connected with the community he serves.

A volunteerism match-making service is taking steps toward providing more services in outer East Portland, we learned on November 15 – when we visited a "Paint with the Commissioners Party" at Jason Lee Elementary School, on NE 92nd Avenue near Rocky Butte.

"We're here working with a great organization I love called 'Hands On Greater Portland'," explained Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish, as he continued to apply masking tape along the top of the school's main hallway. In his informal survey, the commissioner said none of the volunteers with whom he spoke had ever visited the school before, including himself.

"Most of the people came here to help spruce up the school; but some folks have taken the opportunity also to make Multnomah County Commissioner Jeff Cogen and me aware of their concerns," Fish added.

"There are a lot of people out there that want to volunteer, and give back to their community, but they don't know how to go about it," explained Fish. "The beauty of 'Hands On Greater Portland' is that people can go online, find an event that suits them, sign on, show up, and get put to work for a few hours."

Started by 'do-gooders'

Fish introduced us to Andy Nelson, a founder of, and the executive director of, Hands On Greater Portland.

"We are a nonpartisan, non-ecumenical, nonprofit organization – just a bunch of do-gooders," said Nelson with a smile. "There is no hidden agenda here."

It started up about 12 years ago, with a circle of friends who wanted to work volunteering into their lives. "Now, we make 15,000 volunteer connections in partnership with 250 nonprofits throughout the area," revealed Nelson.

The organization puts on about 100 volunteer projects over the metropolitan Portland area every month, he explained. "Volunteers search on our website for projects that are convenient for them, and which also meet their interests or fits their schedule."

He went on to say that volunteers need only bring a willing spirit. "All of the tools and supplies are provided. It doesn't take any special skills. We're doing our best to eliminate barriers to volunteering."



Portland City Commissioner Nick Fish, and Mt. Hood Community College students Chelsey Lemire and Melissa Points, work with Multnomah County Commissioner Jeff Cogen, as they paint the hallways at Jason Lee Elementary School.

Increased East Portland focus

Multnomah County Commissioner Jeff Cogen put down a paint roller and joined the conversation. "We want to focus more on East Portland needs and projects. It's one of the places where 'Hands On Greater Portland' has not been as active."

Nelson added that educational and non-profit organizations in outer East Portland that need a helping hand should register at the website, to be considered for help with future projects.

"Nick Fish and I are planning to choose 'Hands On with Commissioners' events every other month, perhaps more often," volunteered Cogen.

Fish added, "They make it so easy for citizens to help their communities; check out their website, and donate a few hours this weekend."

How to take action

Sign up, and volunteer for a few hours – or donate to their cause by

visiting the website of this 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Just **CLICK**
HERE.

© 2008 David F. Ashton ~ East Portland News