



Friends and accessibility improvements welcome visitors to Washington Park

One late spring day, a crowd of 50 visitors trailed behind Kimberly Bown as she sprinkled rose facts and told stories among brilliant blooms. Kimberly is a volunteer tour guide with Friends of Washington Park International Rose Test Garden.

Other volunteers, the delightfully named “deadheaders,” do double duty: while pruning spent blooms on the 10,000 rose bushes, they’re de facto Portland ambassadors, answering questions about roses, the city, the park and “What’s the name of that mountain?”

The 4.5-acre rose garden has just one full-time employee, longtime curator Harry Landers, a remarkable fact given that 500,000+ people visit the garden and its amphitheater every year.

Thanks to the Parks Replacement Bond, their experience will be enhanced, and just in time for the garden’s centennial celebrations in 2017.

In the 1910s, the garden was built atop steep slopes that had been terraced for home sites; later, in Depression-era work-relief projects, these terraces were bisected by stone staircases—beautiful but with no accommodations for accessibility.

With the bond funds, barriers to access are being fixed: an existing downhill route from the garden’s parking area will be signed, handrails will be added and the grade improved to meet accessibility standards. Once in the garden, visitors along the main promenade will no longer have to lift wheelchairs, walkers or strollers down and up steps at the Frank E. Beach Memorial Fountain, or carefully watch their step on uneven asphalt. Instead, they’ll be able to focus on the landscape and views as they roll or walk the length of the garden via ramps and smooth concrete, a gracious Portland welcome to one of our city’s signature attractions.