

It's Only Natural

By Terri Davis, West Service Zone Manager

“Kids, Go outside and Play!” and “Mom, I’m going outside to play!” are the mantras of my youth and of a generation. We spent our childhood days, our summers, our rainy winters and the occasional snow day outside, playing in the yard, in the woods and all up and down the neighborhood with the other children on our street. Our “woods” are today just a memory, built over by Street of Dreams homes that have usurped the dreams of our imaginations. I was one of a million post-war children who grew up strong in body, spirit and imagination through the freedom of exploring the natural world that was all around. With my siblings and neighborhood buddies, we hunted imaginary game, made war upon one another, dug secret passageways to China and collected thimbleberries to sell to our fathers as they returned home from work. We were master carpenters building forts out of wood scraps, and we were circus performers swinging out of our favorite tree. It was a great and simple world which we made into whatever our hearts desired.

Since those years of my own childhood, the world has changed in many ways. The spaces in which so many kids roamed have made way for development and progress. The simple games we played have been replaced by computerized video enchantments



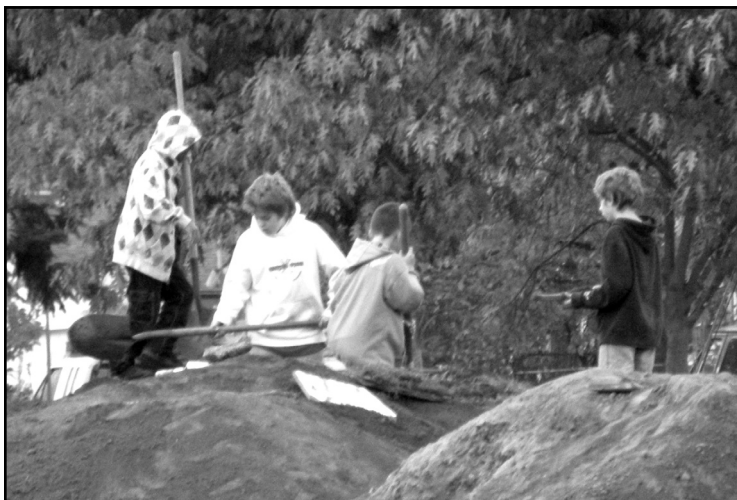
that provide a detailed picture and process for the ever developing thumbs of the youth who are captivated and captured by them. The parents in my neighborhood never had to worry about where we were, whether we were safe, or what dangers lay in the unsupervised play outside our doorsteps, something that parents today must carefully monitor. Type II Diabetes is now commonly found in children and the words “childhood” and “obesity” once opposites like “short” and “tall”, have now combined to define a national trend. “Nature” and our relationship with it has receded at an alarming pace in recent decades, prompting international concern, suggesting conditions such as “Nature Deficit Disorder” and leading to the passage of Federal acts, such as the “No Child

Left Inside” Act passed by the US House of Representatives just last year.

In North Carolina, experts Robin Moore and Nilda Cosco have spent years studying the impact of nature and its value in play and childhood

development. Their studies support the positive effect that nature has on the physical, social, intellectual and emotional development of children. Playing in nature and natural settings promotes healthy lives and lifestyles. Author of the national bestseller, *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv goes on to assert that many issues facing our youth today can be attributed, in part, to a disconnection from nature. The response to this concern about “nature deficit” is a growing national focus on providing opportunities for youth to enjoy, create and play in natural settings.

“Nature Based Play” and playgrounds with a focus on natural elements and imagination are springing up across the country and around the world. Playgrounds that incorporate Nature Based Play elements are popular with kids of all ages and on the rise. Eugene, Oregon’s “RiverPlay Discovery Village” is one such hybrid park, masterfully combining traditional playground options with elements from nature, such as the sand pit made for digging dinosaurs, which allows children to actively use their minds and imaginations as well as their bodies in play. Portland Parks and Recreation supports the concept of Nature Based Play and looks forward to incorporating this growing trend in future playground development. In SW Portland, Spring Garden Park may offer an opportunity to make the “Nature Play” concept a





reality. “Friends of Spring Garden Park” led by Lori Howell, has emerged to champion the funding and development of a Nature Based Playground in Spring Garden Park. The park’s master

plan, developed in 2003 supports the development of a playground at the southwest corner of the park, and the Friends Group is working to encourage community support and funding for the development of this playground. You can be a part of a growing national trend and support the development and good health of your children and the future by getting involved in this great effort. For more information regarding the Friends of Spring Garden Park, or the development of a Nature Based Playground in the park,

contact Leonard Gard of Southwest Neighborhoods, Inc. at 503.823.4592 or at lgard@spiritone.com. 🐾

If you’re interested in finding out more about Nature Play, check out these web sites:

- www.naturalearning.org
- www.childrenandnature.org
- www.nochildleftinside.org

Photos: opposite page top, RiverPlay Discovery Village’s Sand Pit filled with “bones” at various levels; opposite page bottom, One early Saturday morning, neighborhood friends dig deep into their imagination in dirt piles found on a vacant field. Nature play in action!; this page, Robin Hostick, Eugene City Landscape Architect uncovers “ancient” skeletal remains in RiverPlay’s Sand Pit.

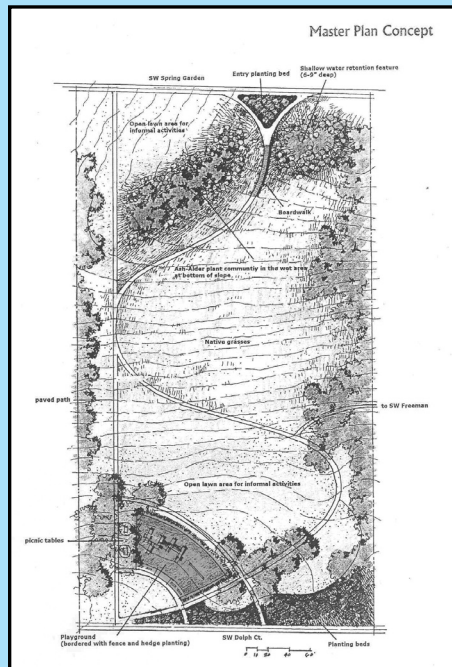
Spring Garden Park - Momentum Builds

By Leonard Gard, SWNI Program Manager

This fall the SW Neighborhoods Inc. (SWNI) Parks Committee met outside at Dickinson Park in September and in the Fulton Park Community Center in October.

Our most recent committee project is to support development of Spring Garden Park. The 4.65-acre park in the Multnomah neighborhood at SW Spring Garden St and 32nd Ave is now an open field. Portland Public Schools used to own the site but never needed it for a school. Portland Parks & Recreation (PP&R) acquired it in 1999. PP&R worked with the local community to develop the 2003 Spring Garden Park Master Plan. Park Master Plans generally set the overall shared vision for how a park should be developed (or redeveloped), but are not always acted on immediately unless specific funding is available. In this case, it wasn’t.

Now, thanks to the combined energies of Lori Howell and other local residents, a new group has been formed to support the park’s development—The Friends of Spring Garden Park. This Friends group expects to soon work under the auspices of the Multnomah Neighborhood Association, which will



make it possible for the group to get help from SWNI.

Two of the biggest ideas from the Master Plan are getting serious attention. The Bureau of Environmental Services has on their capital improvement list a project to restore the north end of the park as a natural area. A stream running through that end of the park – which is currently

underground in a pipe – will be brought back to the surface. At the south end, the Master Plan envisions a playground and sitting area. PP&R and the Friends group are talking about a play area that incorporates nature-based play ideas, which encourage creative and active play for children. 🐾

SWNI, through a contract with the city’s Office of Neighborhood Involvement, serves 17 neighborhoods in southwest Portland. The Parks Committee is one of several standing SWNI committees. All 17 constituent neighborhoods have the right to have a representative to our committee. If your neighborhood is not represented and you are interested in joining our committee, call Leonard at the SWNI office at 503-823-4592 for more information. This winter we’ll be meeting at the Multnomah Center, 7688 SW Capitol Hwy, on the first Thursday of every month at 7 pm. All our meetings are public.