Revamped entry takes First Place with neighbors

By SCOTT HEWITT
Columbian staff writer

Up above, the drooping electric cables of the Bonneville Power Administration. Down below, 200 sun-seeking arborvitaes that “somebody thought they had permission to plant,” Susan Page said.

“arborvitae trees”

What’s wrong with this picture?
Ever since a massive 2003 East Coast blackout was triggered partially by tree limbs touching power lines, the federal government has demanded greater power-grid reliability. The BPA has responded with ever-increasing vigor by tightening its vegetation management practices — canceling agreements allowing homeowners to do their own trimming near power lines, and toughening its standards for maintaining clearance below and around power lines.

Thirty days after Page became president of the First Place Neighborhood Association, BPA mowed down the previously planted arborvitaes that bordered the neighborhood’s Northeast 148th Avenue entry circle. The entry is a Vancouver landmark of sorts, and one neighbors always enjoy emphasizing via lovely landscaping and standout signage.

But after the arborvitaes went, Page said, the entry circle went from a beauty to a bummer. Original builder The Al Angelo Company didn’t want the responsibility of maintaining it, neither did the city nor the BPA had the money to do anything more than plain Jane mowing.

“The metal sign kept getting stolen and nobody wanted to replace it anymore,” she said. And the circular, 4-foot-thick laurel hedge at the entrance of the brick pedestrian was the perfect invitation for hidden mischief — Page said, loud chairs, bottles and cans, even condoms were found there.

“It was party central,” she said. “We needed to remove party central.”

Huge results

First, neighbors decided to replace the brick-mounted metal letters that kept getting stolen with nameplates that are much harder to steal: two huge boulders that bear the neighborhood name tirelessly.

What to do about the masonry pedestal at the center of the island? Some ideas were explored on cocktail napkins. Page said, but eventually she called Clark College’s agriculture-horticulture department and got connected with horticulture professor Herbert Orange. Orange’s students came out on a frizzly day in March to examine the site and volunteer “all these grandioso ideas.”

“It was a fantastic opportunity for the students,” said Orange. He said student Tim Carper did most of the hard work — illustrating three basic choices via computer software.

Those choices were voted on at a neighborhood association meeting; the winner was forwarded to the Bonneville Power Administration for approval. It involved removing about half of the laurel hedge, exposing that inner sanctum (and a hitherto hidden group of rhododendron shrubs), planting some smaller evergreen hedges and blanketimg the land with bark dust. More flowers are on the way.

The work of tearing out the hedge “was so hard and so hot,” Page said. “We did an awesome job.”

The city of Vancouver carted off three loads of debris for free. Joe Beauchin of Joe’s Place Farm brought in a backhoe to remove stumps.

Page’s favorite aspect of the project is how it brought together different interests and individuals, from college students to the county’s juvenile justice crew, and from public agencies to neighbors who’d never volunteered for anything before. She recalled a time, a few years back, when the First Place Neighborhood Association fell apart after a debate about forming a homeowners association turned ugly. This project seemed to replace some lingering resentment, she said. The whole thing was accomplished with donated money and labor — a total of just $1,200.

“The beauty of this is the neighbors who came out to help who hadn’t come out for anything in years,” she said. "I think that’s huge."

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is set for Sept. 26.

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Vancouver Sparkles, thanks to these dedicated community members

By SCOTT HEWITT
Columbian staff writer

Vancouver people sparkle in so many ways, large and small. These three letter off the streets.

Neighborhood president Ross Montgomery wrote that Richter and Hanley keep an eye out for trouble, keep a great yard and help neighbors with yard work.

Burnt Bridge Creek
Cameron Townsen. He’s only in fourth grade, but he mastered a major fundraising needed more than just two “sanctioned” city garbage cans, but nobody would empty and maintain them until Stroy stepped in. He paints over crusts volunteers with “steadfast dedication,” according to the nomination.

First Place
Susan Page. She spearheaded beautifying the neighborhood entrance and replaced its aged with new, more refined designs. This project was successful, according to the nomination.

Rose Villane

Scott Hewitt