

Revamped entry takes First Place with neighbors

Beautifying project brings together neighborhood

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

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 — cancelling agreements allowing homeowners to do their own trimming near power lines, and toughening its standards for maintaining clearance below and around power



Susan Page loves the extreme makeover neighbors, students and others provided the entry circle to the First Place neighborhood.

lines.

Thirty days after Page became president of the First Place Neighborhood Association, BPA mowed down the previously planted arborvitae 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 arborvitae went, Page said, the entry circle went from a beauty to a bummer. Original builder The Al Angelo Company didn’t want the respon-

sibility of maintaining it; neither 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 enter of the brick pedestal was the perfect invitation for hidden mischief — Page said lounge 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 timelessly.

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 drizzly day in March to examine the site and volunteer “all these grandiose ideas,” she said.

“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 blanketing 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 Beaudoin 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 resentments, 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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