

## 1981-2006: Reflection

*"In summary, I have tried to show that the successful programs of neighborhood participation in Portland have enjoyed: 1) strong local leadership; 2) a clear neighborhood self-image; 3) a relatively stable population; 4) resolute dedication and willingness to give time; 5) gaining the support of city hall, both moral and financial. Effective indigenous leadership can galvanize energy and action, coordinate meetings and make the necessary impact on government bureaucracy. A major problem for all neighborhood associations is TIME—doing the homework and attending the meetings."*

— E. K. MacColl  
Opening Remarks,  
Neighborhood Leadership  
Conference  
June 27, 1981

BY EILEEN G. FITZSIMONS  
for *The Bee*

Reviewing the back issues of *The Bee*, and 30 years of neighborhood association minutes, in preparation for this special *Bee* centennial section has been enlightening to me in many ways. Tracing the changes in a neighborhood's development is like watching a child grow up—except that it continues to change, and hopefully never dies. If a neighborhood can be considered a "living" entity, then like a human being, it is constantly trying to balance contradictions.

For instance, Sellwood's community leaders between 1882 and 1972 wanted houses, a bustling populace, schools, cultural organizations, jobs, and lots of stores. They got what they wanted. They also gradually obtained improved, and ever faster, transportation—from steamers to streetcars and an inter-urban train system, electric trolley busses, and finally individual automobiles. After WWII, when having a car became the norm, complaints increased about "traffic problems."

And the family car, which provided mobility, also provided the means to leave the cozy neighborhood and shop elsewhere. How were local merchants to survive? How could they compete with the spiffy new shopping mall with its alluring wares? This is a simplistic chain of cause and effect that puts blame on the automobile, but this is one of the contradictions: How to grow a community, but not lose the "small town feel?"



**Behold the luxurious two-goat powered *Sellwood Bee* float  
—as seen in the 1921 Rose Festival parade!**

Since the early 1970s, passage by the Oregon legislature of SB100, and the ensuing tidal wave of planning mandates, have given Oregonians the tools to evaluate their communities, define their positive and negative attributes, and try to plan for "progressive change". Of course the decisions are complicated in a city where neighborhoods butt up against each other, and the region-wide organization of services such as transportation, garbage and sewage disposal, provision of drinking water, etc. makes sense.

In a small section of the larger city, with hopefully a stable population, it may be easier to develop a sense of community. But as E. K. MacColl stated, it takes time and commitment. In the past 25 years, the originally-separate Sellwood and Westmoreland areas have become more of a coherent neighborhood, with much of the change being due to the activities of its single neighborhood association. SMILE is a grass-roots organization that predates SB100; it developed from within the neighborhood. In retrospect, the decision in 1960 by a handful of Sellwood residents to adopt "the little church" (which was actually in another town) was not a rational one, yet the successful effort strengthened leadership and provided a common cause for others to work on.

And this quixotic project wound

up having the added benefit of generating income for the neighborhood association, which in turn has provided a wide range of small-scale but beneficial community enhancements.

Although *The Bee* has served various additional neighborhoods over the years—more than six of them at present, all of which now have their own neighborhood associations—the one constant for this newspaper has been service to Sellwood and Westmoreland, now officially a single Portland neighborhood, albeit one with two very distinct districts.

For these two districts in this one neighborhood, the pages of *The Bee*, and the SMILE meeting minutes, reveal 30 years of ongoing civic improvements—among them continual support of the Loaves and Fishes meal program, concerts, annual neighborhood clean-ups, enhancement of natural areas such as Oaks Wildlife Area and Johnson Creek, grants to public and parochial school children, public park programs and beautification efforts such as organizing and subsidizing hanging flower baskets, neighborhood Christmas tree lights, Sundae In the Park, placement of trash cans, and the Sellwood Bluff benches. The funds for all these improvements are generated by SMILE-owned properties; decisions about the expenditures are made by board members who are elected by

members of the community. This is a very high level of neighborhood self determination!

After SMILE general meetings had been held on weekday mornings for several years, they were changed in the late 1970s to weekday evenings, and participation expanded. Various challenges to livability have resulted in the establishment by SMILE of committees to deal with perpetual issues such as transportation (auto, light rail, pedestrian and bicycle), crime reduction, land use planning, and event management at the Oaks Pioneer Church. In 1992 SMILE moved into its own permanent headquarters, a former fire station and later the Boys & Girls club, which the organization purchased and then extensively remodeled. It, too, was altered so that it could be used for income-producing rental fees, in order to pay off the mortgage.

Finally, citizen volunteers have served on dozens of Citizen Advisory Committees dealing with regional transportation, watershed and riparian planning and restoration, flood abatement, bridge design, park planning, crime prevention, neighborhood plans, city-wide Comprehensive Plans, etc. Of course more citizens need to become participants in community building, but *The Bee* has played a key role in alerting citizens to



**South half of Woolworth Confectionary Building on S.E. 13th Street, ca. 1950 (now America at Heart).**

issues and encouraging their participation in finding solutions.

For one hundred years, the various owners, editors, and publishers of *The Bee* have connected residents with each other and to larger issues. Like

the neighborhood, the paper has had its ups and downs, depending on the interest of its owners. Under a few owners (fortunately, short-term ownerships), it seemingly lost contact with its own readership. In the mid-1990s it almost went out of business. If it hadn't been for the editor/owner I refer to as "St. Teresa of *The Bee*" (Teresa Wood Smith, 1995-1996), this venerable newspaper would not have reached its century mark. Others who deserve mention for their hard work and commitment to the quality of the paper and informing its readers include C.M. Thompson (1907-1945); Fern and Howard Hilson (1947-1969); Marcia and Tom Pry (1974-1994); John and Carol Dillin (1996-2000), and most recently Robert M. and Marilyn Pamplin, through Pamplin Media Group and Community Newspapers, Inc. (2000-present).

In 2000 I spoke with Fern Hilson, who stated that when she and Howard purchased the paper they were "told to run it like a country paper." In another interview at about the same time, later owner John Dillin told me, "A Big newspaper always wants the Big Story, but it can't substitute for a community paper, which has close ties to its neighborhood." He also mentioned attending his first SMILE meeting to introduce himself to the neighborhood, saying he "wasn't ready for the emotional ties of the neighborhood to *The Bee*. It had then been a big part of the community for 75 years. This was a message I took to advertisers, the loyalty of readers to the paper and community." John admitted he hadn't bargained for such personal responsibility, but he didn't want to let the paper go and be connected to a failure.

Local readers no longer have to pay for a subscription to *The Bee*, which is delivered in six neighborhoods by mail, free of charge. But remember, dear readers, the paper reaches you courtesy of its advertisers! Do not take that situation for granted. The advertisers support the paper, so in our best small-town fashion, we need to continue to support them. I do hope that *The Bee* survives for many decades to come.

My personal thanks to everyone who provided information for this, *The Bee's* special 100th Anniversary commemorative section, among whom are included Clyde V. Brummell, Linda Schwartz and Ann Walker, and Leslie Goldsmith.

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