

Robin Jensen, *Conservation Champion*

by Carolyn Myers Lindberg



You're never too old to get involved in restoring natural areas in your neighborhood. Robin Jensen, longtime advocate of and tireless ivy puller at Marquam Nature Park in SW Portland learned that lesson by watching her enthusiastic 80 year old neighbor!

After Jensen moved next to the park, [Dorothy Wustrack](#) showed up at her door with a plate of cookies to welcome her to the neighborhood. The rest is history. Not only did the two women become fast friends, Wustrack spent a lot of time with Jensen's family and was like a grandmother to her children. Jensen describes her as a highly accomplished woman who enjoyed backpacking, gardening, tennis, canoeing, and hiking well into her mid-80s. She loved plants and got involved in the park in the early 1970s when some of her students' parents started raising money to protect park land. Jensen and Wustrack bonded over many things, but in particular, pulling weeds and helping restore Marquam Nature Park.

Jensen has been a board member, and served as president of [Friends of Marquam Nature Park](#) for over 24 years, building and maintaining trails with neighbors and Americorps members, and organizing regular work parties to tackle invasive weeds. She says, "What's special about Marquam Park is the plant life there and how you feel you're far away from civilization even though you're in the middle of a big city."

Jensen was also involved in forming the West Willamette Restoration Partnership (with West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District, 3 Rivers Land Conservancy/Columbia Land Trust). The Partnership was instrumental in starting the Backyard Habitat Certification program and Jensen's yard was one of the first certified by the program. Her yard now includes lots of native plants, a 45-foot long stream, 8 X 10 pond, a small rain garden and 40 sq. ft. pollinator meadow. She also raises mason bees. Her yard draws great blue heron, cooper's hawks, band-tailed pigeons, warblers, owls, and a coyote.

Jensen says, "I am not a religious person, but I find being in nature a very spiritual experience because it connects me to the greater world, makes me feel a part of things. It grounds me and just makes me feel at ease." Jensen loves living in Portland because she says folks here value the natural world much more than other parts of the country where she has lived.

One of the things Jensen is most proud of is the [Marquam Mosaic](#), a participatory public art project with the Friends of Marquam led by Portland artist Lynn Takata. The project enlisted neighbors, school children, and visitors to create ceramic art based on the flora and fauna of Marquam Nature Park. Over 400 people participated from 2012-2013.

Through the years Jensen has engaged with and recruited many neighbors to get involved with restoration activities. She says she just talks to them about what can happen if we do nothing, such as hillside erosion, the establishment of monocultures, the loss of whole forests as ivy smothers and causes trees to die. Jensen believes all this translates to human health. She says nature is healing; exercise makes us healthy and breathing clean air sustains and rejuvenates us.

Those are good things for all of us...no matter what age.