

Andrea Wall, Conservation Champion

by Carolyn Myers Lindberg



When I sat down with Andrea Wall she gave me the following quote from poet Clarissa Pinkola Estes:

“Ours is not the task for fixing the entire world all at once but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach.”

That, in a nutshell, is how Andrea Wall views her work to improve her neighborhood and surrounding community. To many, she is a relentless warrior for environmental restoration.

Andrea grew up in Connecticut and Virginia, where she was surrounded by forest and the wildness of nature. She says she didn’t have a lot of adult supervision so she escaped to the woods whenever she could.

Owning cats and dogs weren’t an option for her family due to health concerns so she adopted box turtles as her pets. She grew to love them and even as a child joined efforts to protect them from nearby development. Andrea caused quite an uproar at an early age when she became lost while “playing” in the woods with a 4 year old friend. The ensuing search (and happy ending!) didn’t dissuade her from her favorite pastime.

After college at Temple University, she graduated with an occupational therapy degree and eventually set her sights on the forests and natural areas of the Pacific Northwest. Her work would take her to the VA Medical Center, St. Vincent’s Hospital, Elderplace and many other medical facilities and institutions in the area. Not surprisingly, Andrea says she always ended up working with clients on plans to take care of their pets. In 1983, she volunteered with the Oregon Humane Society and stayed for 13 years, working on a number of improvements and initiatives including a Portland city law to make it illegal to dump or give away unwanted animals on the streets. Andrea also worked on a spay and neuter program to address the number of unwanted cats and dogs and helped start the outreach adoption and greeter programs. She also helped with the Prison Pet Partnership Program, in Gig Harbor, Washington, where women inmates worked with shelter dogs to train them for service dog positions or household pets.

Andrea lives in the Hillsdale Neighborhood of SW Portland on a road that is partially unpaved. The road is undeveloped and used by vehicles and pedestrians, leading children and adults to nearby Robert Gray Middle School, a bus stop, and the Mittleman Jewish Community Center. There are no sidewalks along the trail, and Andrea noticed that more and more people were using the trail, which sloped into a steep ravine leading to the headwaters of Fanno Creek. The trail became quite muddy and treacherous in the winter and spring and she says Portland Public Schools addressed this by busing students over a mile around the trail to school.

Andrea learned of West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District and called Urban Conservationist Mary Logalbo to create a Conservation Plan for this common space and the private properties next to it. The maintenance of “unimproved” right of ways and roadways falls on the shoulders of adjacent private landowners, so this is a common focus of the District’s urban programs as these areas often include significant natural areas and waterways with a host of conservation issues. Andrea was a bit overwhelmed by the conservation plan, calling it a “master’s thesis,” but she used it as a guide to start

raising funds and begin work in this treasured neighborhood space. She made friends with Don Baack of SW Trails who started removing blackberry and other invasive species and eventually install nearly 320 native plants. Andrea worked closely with Don and other interested neighbors to write grants, successfully securing funds from Portland's Bureau of Environmental Services, Southwest Neighborhoods, Hillsdale Community Foundation, and the Portland Garden Club. In addition to the West Multnomah SWCD Conservation Plan, Andrea received technical assistance for a district-funded engineering assessment, resulting in the creation of a bioswale that prevented flooding in downhill homes and improved water quality in the Fanno Creek Watershed.



Along the way, Andrea has become a local expert in invasive and native plants, stormwater management, volunteer organizing, contracting, grant-writing, fundraising and working through the public and non-profit bureaucracies. But Andrea says her greatest joy is seeing the wide variety of cultural communities that come together for the numerous work parties she organizes. They include fourth-graders from Portland Jewish Academy, Muslim teenagers and members of other faith communities working alongside each other.

The trail is now designated a Safe Route to School, but Andrea isn't finished. She, Don Baack and SW Trails want to install steps and a railing for safety. The team has secured \$23,000 from the city to pay for supplies for work at the north end of the trail, for which SW Trails will provide labor. Andrea is also interested in doing more, such as protecting a native red cedar tree in the area, remove more than 10,000 square feet of invasive plants, bushes and trees, plant native species, and build a bioswale and other features on the hilly unimproved road to address stormwater concerns. She hopes the trail will be an urban demonstration area for other neighborhoods that are dealing with similar issues.

Andrea calls herself a dreamer - someone who found the right people to help make things happen. We call her a leader, someone who saw a problem and had the passion and persistence to encourage many, many other people to come together to work on a common goal.

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