

made into a botanical garden within 10 years. The penalty would be that the property would be turned over to the YMCA if this did not happen. Luckily, newly appointed Parks Commissioner Charles Jordan rescued the park just in the nick of time and cut the ribbon when the park opened to the public in 1983.

Today the park is managed with the help of the nonprofit Leach Garden Friends. It has grown to over 13 acres that straddle Johnson Creek. A number of other organizations have been helping to restore habitat, connect the area to its pre-European roots and the community, and facilitate the educational work of the garden. These include the [Wisdom of the Elders, Inc.](#), [The Blueprint Foundation](#), Johnson Creek Watershed Council, David Douglas High School, and [AYCO](#) (African Youth & Community Organization).

Our tour started at the top of the Missoula Floods gravel terrace on the north side of the property. This part of the garden is far above Johnson Creek and includes the parking lot and offices of the garden. On the east side of this area is the pollinator garden. This lovely garden, filled with 48,000 pollinator plants, features a meeting pavilion and bench uniquely constructed of wooden slats. Passing through the pavilion, the group found themselves on a recently built terrace leading to a new feature of the park, the sky walk.



2. *The pollinator garden.*



3. *The Skywalk*

Along the way, Vrillakas pointed out a flowering *Ribes aureum* and told us about the construction of the skywalk. It is a sturdy metal framework floored by a steel grid with steel railings, painted a dark color to

be less intrusive. On the skywalk, Vrilakas described the 4 heritage trees that lived in the park, and pointed out a beautiful *Stewartia* which was the first of these we saw. She also brought our attention to a vine climbing another nearby tree. This climbing hydrangea had flowers similar to the lace cap hydrangeas and had a good trait of not choking its host tree.

We exited the skywalk and skirted the edge of the pollinator garden before heading down the slope towards the “Back 5” restoration project being done by the partner volunteer groups. Part way down the slope Vrilakas pointed out a small tree-shaped plant with sturdy glossy leaves. It was a *Camellia sinensis*, or tea plant.



4. The “Back 5.”

Our group were escorted to the fenced restoration project and went through the gate. There many volunteers have labored to rid the slope of blackberries down to the roots, and Vrilakas thanked the Wisdom of the Elders and David Douglas High School students for their hard work in accomplishing this. Other groups have worked on bridge construction and species transects, or linear surveys of plants in the restored areas. She said how the interest this has sparked has encouraged the groups to work on projects in collaboration with each other as well. Native plants for the project have been obtained from [Johnson Creek Watershed Council](#) and the [Sparrowhawk Native Plants Nursery](#).

From the “Back 5” area the group wandered through the gardens surrounding the Leach manor house, then headed for the 122nd Ave bridge spanning Johnson Creek. Along the way Vrilakas pointed out a large gnarled Lavalle Hawthorn in the gardens, and an enormous Atlas Cedar, both heritage trees. In the short walk along the creek

to the bridge Vrilakas spoke about the bridge being damaged in a flood in 2015. She also described some of the unique denizens of the pond below the house, where red-legged frogs have been observed, lampreys, mussels and crawfish. The shaded waters in wooded areas help provide the cool environment needed for salmon in Johnson Creek.

Across the bridge was a stone cabin built by John and Lilla Leach in 1932, and they lived in this charming structure while the manor house was under construction. John had an exquisite floor mosaic added to the floor in honor of their 50th wedding anniversary. The cabin is constructed of stone from Oregon City,

slate roof tiles from the Reed College Library, and petrified wood. There is an outdoor fireplace flanking a nearby terrace. John Leach was an accomplished metallurgist and made many decorative elements on the property, including the metalwork outlining the anniversary floor.

On the return journey back up the hill, the group was led past still more lovely plantings, including Dawn Redwood trees of remarkable height and European cork oaks. And of course, the inevitable gift shop,

where t-shirts and a smattering of garden-related purchases could be made. Leach Garden also hosts stress reduction and mindfulness seminars as well as art classes at the manor house.

It was an interesting glimpse into the history and future of this remarkable little gem of a garden.

Carol S. Hasenberg



5. *The cabin.*