

# The Sunnyland Scout

A blog covering events in the Sunnyland Neighborhood for spring quarter 2011

Tuesday, June 7, 2011

## Food to Flowers saves district money

Sunnyland Elementary now creates 80 percent less trash to meet the requirements of the Bellingham School District's "Food to Flowers" program. The school district wants to cut costs by decreasing its total trash output.

"We could get Sunnyland to produce zero waste if everyone pitched in and did it right," David Wilson, a custodian for Sunnyland Elementary said.

Four years ago, the school was emptying a 6-yard dumpster full of trash headed to the dump every week. Now they are emptying a 2-yard dumpster every other week.

Bellingham garbage costs \$65 per month per cubic yard of space according to Rodd Pemble, recycling manager for Sanitary Service Company Inc. For a school with a 6-yard dumpster emptied twice a week, as Sunnyland Elementary was in the beginning of 2008, that is \$745 per month, according to Pemble.

A 2-yard dumpster emptied every other week with the "Food to Flowers" program will save the district \$5,820 per year for Sunnyland Elementary alone.

"We just started with the recycling program where we would take out the cans and bottles and stuff like that," Wilson said. "That got us down to a 5-yard dumpster and then a 4-yard dumpster in 2009."

The next step was called "Food to Flowers" which removed food waste from the trash. Napkins, milk cartons, paper towels and leftover food are now taken to be broken down into compost. The program began with Alderwood, Lowell and Roosevelt Elementaries in a month-long test before expanding district-wide. This program reduced these school's was by 50 percent according to the Sanitary Services website.

Sunnyland Elementary now has one large recycling tote for aluminum, six Toter cans for compost and the 2-yard dumpster for trash instead of a 6-yard dumpster for it all.

The district plan is based on Sanitary Service's "FoodPlus! Recycling" program focused on recycling organic waste. This is an expansion of the service that once only accepted yard waste but now takes away all compostable items, even meat and bones.

Items that were once tossed in the trash are now being reused. The custodians said that plastic used to take up a lot of garbage space.

"We get those books and magazine wrapped up in plastic and they would just go straight to the trash," Wilson said. "Now we separate that and send it to the recycling site instead."

Plastic bottles are made from different materials than other types of plastic. The recycling plant separates plastic into three types; bottles, hard plastic (caps and containers) and film plastics (Ziploc bags and plastic wrap) which are composed of different types of materials. The three groups are baled separately and shipped to processors that will melt the material down for purchase by plastic manufacturers to be reused.

### About Me

#### Alexandra Kocik

I am a Western Washington University student. This blog was created to share articles that I write concerning Sunnyland Neighborhood in Bellingham, Wash. for a reporting class.

[View my complete profile](#)

### Blog Archive

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### Memorial Memo

On May 22 there will be a brick cleaning at Memorial Park in honor of Memorial Day. From 1 p.m. until 3 p.m. volunteers will clean the walkways and memorials located here. The park is located behind Sunnyland Elementary School on the corner of King Street and East Maryland Street. There will be signs posted around the park to lead anyone that is interested to the work area. For more information contact Christopher Brown at [c.brown@vet-corps.org](mailto:c.brown@vet-corps.org).

### Crosswalk Construction

According to an article in *The Bellingham Herald*, the Transportation Benefit District decided on upcoming projects that should be completed in 2010. One project concerns a crosswalk on James Street and East Illinois Street.

The Sunnyland Elementary custodians now fill up a 60-gallon trash bag full of film plastics every other week.

Sunnyland Elementary is the only school in the district able to reduce their dumpster size and waste output by over 80 percent, according to Wilson. The school also has 200 more students than other elementaries in the district.

“We are the biggest little school in Bellingham with the largest green program,” said Scott Sorensen, a custodian for Sunnyland Elementary.

When the program was first introduced, Wilson researched programs for schools across the country to find what would work best. He decided that the first thing to do was break down what the school could do on its own. Wilson then began to visit Sunnyland classrooms over several weeks to educate students and teachers about what the school was trying to accomplish.

The students seemed to catch on much faster than the staff according to Sorensen.

“It was pretty difficult at first to start the [recycling and compost] programs at the school,” said Mary Anne Stuckart, Sunnyland Elementary principal. “We needed to put pictures up to show what should go in each bin and I still sometimes have to ask Dave.”

A student at the elementary took what was happening at the school home with him.

“There is a kid here that told his grandma to start packing his sandwiches in wax paper instead of in Ziploc bags because we can send the paper to compost,” Sorensen said.

The “Food to Flowers” program has yet to become part of any Sunnyland teacher’s curriculum.

“With WASL tests and science fairs to worry about, I know it’s hard for the teachers,” said Sorensen. “I think it could easily be taught as science though.”

The custodians of Sunnyland Elementary have two goals for next school year.

“We hope to get our waste level down to zero percent, or close to it, by this time next school years,” Wilson said.

A zero percent waste level means no trash is picked up and taken to the dump. In order to accomplish this, items such as metallic chip bags and Capri Sun juice boxes would have to be eliminated from the school menu.

“Another goal we have is to sort the trash from parties more,” Sorensen said. “It’s difficult to think about how to get rid of the stuff while teachers have to worry about planning the party.”

The way to solve this is to ask for trash cans to be moved into the classroom for that day, according to Sorensen. Teachers are also encouraged to use biodegradable or recyclable utensils and packaging for parties.

Posted by Alexandra Kocik at 12:42 PM No comments:



Thursday, May 26, 2011

## Whatcom Middle School to reopen with new interior

On Sept. 6, the familiar chime of class bells and students heading to class will echo down the halls of

This has been labeled as a “high-crash location” by the commission. A crosswalk will help protect pedestrians.

Currently there are no crosswalk to cross James Street after the crosswalk over East Maryland Street. I decided to cross it on April 9, 2011 to see the extent of traffic at 5:30 p.m. on a Monday. This intersection is close to Sunnyland Elementary. It took me a good five minutes of standing and waiting for cars to pass before I could safely cross.

The design has cost the city \$10,000. The cost of construction has yet to be determined.

### Bocce Blog



Photo by Alexandra Kocik

Bocce is a sport that even one lacking hand-eye-coordination, such as myself, can enjoy playing. The rules are simple and I was able to learn them by watching a few rounds.

Bocce balls are not made to be heavy. They are often made from acrylic (which are pictured in photo) or plastic and around 4 inches in diameter. Two different colors are used to differentiate teams. A golf ball can be used for the pallino (the small white ball in photo). Teams can be made up of four players each. If there are four, then they are split in half with two standing on each side for the game.

The pallino is rolled out by the chosen team first over the center of the court (indicated by the black line in photo). If the pallino hits the back of the court or does not go past the center line, then the opposing team rolls it.

Points are given for each ball that ends up closer to the pallino than the opposing team’s. If it is a tie at the end of a round after all the balls have been rolled, no one gains points. The team that wins the round gets to roll the

Whatcom Middle School. Students who attended the school before the fire in 2009 will return to a renovated building with a new library, water fountains and a higher ceiling in the basement.

Ruth Chartier attended Whatcom Middle School years ago and looks forward to sending her children to the updated school.

“They are only 6 and 8 years old now so Whatcom Middle School will for sure be open when they're old enough,” she said. “I just hope they won't change too much so that I can share memories with them.”

The school's exterior was largely untouched by the flames. No big changes could be made to the damaged interior due to the school insurance policy which doesn't cover additions to the school building. This meant that modifications had to be done without any major expansions to the original building design.

The layout of the building before the interior overhaul did not meet the needs and "philosophy of a middle school," according to Jeff Coulter, principal of Whatcom Middle School and part of the construction planning committee.

“Middle school philosophy means teachers work in teams and share 100 to 120 students with a math teacher, a science teacher and several core teachers,” said Coulter. “We had teams but we weren't able to accommodate proximity.”

Students traveled multiple floors to go between classes. Now the school is broken up around six open areas. These spaces have been designated as meeting places where students and instructors can gather for group activities.

Folding partitions between several rooms allow teachers to combine classes and work together with their student groups.

The library was moved from the southern end of campus to open up space for the class team areas. It is now located in the front of the building on the top floor.

The planning committee also improved constructional aspects of the building. The ceilings of the locker rooms located in the basement, once called “the catacombs” according to Coulter because the ceiling was so low, were raised to 10 feet. There are now drinking fountains dispersed throughout the school that once only had two working areas for water.

The biggest change will be bringing back students to the middle school. For the past year, Whatcom Middle School students have been split up and sent to three different schools.

“Whatcom being closed has been tough on the community,” Mark Schlichting, a former teacher at Whatcom Middle School said. “It's going to be great for the kids to be able to come back to school in their own community.”

Sixth-graders were sent to Geneva Elementary; seventh-graders to Shuksan Middle School and eighth-graders attended Fairhaven Middle School after a time at Bellingham High School.

The other schools, however, did not have enough staff to accommodate the displaced students. Shuksan alone gained an additional 200 students. Whatcom teachers were then moved to teach at the different schools.

“They have been working and educating all kids in the district, not just from Whatcom Middle School. Contractually they have a right to a job and this allowed us to provide it,” Coulter said.

During the first year of school closure, Whatcom staff was still considered part of Whatcom Middle School faculty though they were teaching at different schools. But in the 2010-2011 school year, the teachers became part of the staff of the other schools. Many plan to return to Whatcom this fall.

“Restarting the culture the Whatcom will be an interesting process because we lost some continuity,” said Coulter. “The majority of the staff is returning, however, and they are really the keepers of the culture. This will help with the transition back.”

pallino for the new round.

## Sunnyland Pages

City of Bellingham  
The Sunnyland Neighborhood  
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The Sunnyland Neighborhood Plan  
Bellingham Police Department Statistics

Parents who do not want to move their children to the renovated school will be subject to district transfer policies. Requests are taken in March and again in August. This is granted on space availability according to Coulter. There have already been six requests from eighth-graders attending Shuksan Middle School to remain at that school.

Students entering sixth grade will not remain at Geneva Elementary. The sixth-grade program was temporary for Whatcom Middle School students. The school will no longer accept grades over fifth as of this fall.

“Whatcom has been on Halleck Street for over 100 years and is part of the community,” said Coulter. “Everyone associated with the school is excited to have it back again.”

Posted by Alexandra Kocik at 4:53 PM No comments:



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Monday, May 16, 2011

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## Sunnyland sewers part of city test

Residents of the Sunnyland neighborhood will be part of a test planned in 2009 due to Bellingham’s rising population.

“This project is to find out how effective it is to fix private sewer systems on the amount of waster treated on an hourly basis [at the sewage treatment facility],” said Chad Bedlington, Public Works superintendent of maintenance for the City of Bellingham.

There are two types of sewer systems, said Craig Mueller, inflow and infiltration project engineer and administrator. The sanitary sewer carries away all of the water from sinks and toilets. This water is then treated at a plant before being returned to Bellingham Bay. Storm drains are untreated and return to rivers which eventually carry it to the bay.

It costs a fraction of a cent per gallon to treat sewage. Currently the sewage plant treats 9 million gallons per hour, during a day without rain. When it rains, this number jumps to 45 million gallons per hour. The rain can affect this amount of water needing to be treated only if it infiltrates weaknesses in sewer pipes. The city is spending money treating water that is already clean, according to Mueller.

“As a citizen who pays taxes it makes sense to repair or replace sewer pipes so ground water goes to the bay and... we don’t have to build more expensive sewer treatment plants,” said Mary Anne Stuckart, a member of the Sunnyland Neighborhood Association.

The population is expected to continue to rise. According to the Bellingham city census, Bellingham’s population has grown 20 percent between 2000 and 2010. Mueller expects this number to keep growing, which also means that water usage will increase.

The project will cost anywhere from \$4.2 million to \$6.9 million when it is complete, according to the Sunnyland Sanitary Sewer Evaluation Survey. The money was built into the city’s budget as of 2009 as a portion devoted to city public works projects.

In 2009, a comprehensive sewer plan was created to combat the rising use of water in the area from a rising population. One item called for a new 1.7 million gallon wet weather storage facility, which is an underground tank that holds water until it can be treated at the plant. To avoid purchasing this tank, the city hopes to decrease the amount of extra water making its way into the sewage system.

The first step to solving this problem is to see how badly the pipe infrastructure was damaged. To discover weaknesses in Sunnyland pipes, smoke was poured into the system to see where it would

rise.

“Most of the heaviest areas of smoke were on people's properties,” Bedlington said. “This means that we are going to have to gain permission from homeowners before we can work on the premises.”

Mueller and others on the project must receive written consent from property owners before beginning the work.

“This will be a no-charge service. Any problems that are found with a sewage system will be replaced and the area will be left exactly as, or better than, we found it,” Mueller said.

Those affected could lose sewer service for up to eight hours. The city will provide alternatives, such as portable toilets, if a personal sewage system will be offline for longer than several hours, according to Bedlington at the Sunnyland Neighborhood Association meeting on April 19.

A new sewer line can be added to a property declaration. This can slightly increase the property value, depending on the extent of work, Mueller said.

The Sunnyland Neighborhood was selected for a number of reasons. One is Sunnyland is in the central basin of the city, meaning that more rain tends to collect in this area. Another factor is where the pipes lay. In Sunnyland, most sewage areas are in alleyways, making it easy to fix the pipes without disturbing the community.

Not all of Sunnyland is eligible for pipe upgrades. Only the area with a boundary of Kentucky Street to the south, Illinois Street to the north, Dean Avenue to the west, and Grant Street to the east will be part of the sewer replacement, according to Mueller.

The area surrounded by State Street, James Street, Illinois Street and Grant Street will be the “control area.” To show if replacing pipes in the west part of Sunnyland worked, Mueller compares the water treatment amount from this area to the eastern portion of the neighborhood. The two areas had relative amounts of smoke rising in similar areas, meaning the problems are comparable.

Posted by Alexandra Kocik at 6:18 PM No comments:



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Monday, May 9, 2011

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## Sunnyland's first community garden

An idea planted by the Sunnyland Elementary PTA grew to become Sunnyland Neighborhood's first community garden.

Members of the church wanted to find a way to “connect to the community,” according to Scott Roberts, pastor for Hope In Christ Church. He approached the Sunnyland Neighborhood Association and asked what the church could do.

“One thing was that Sunnyland Elementary wanted a garden. PTA members were complaining about not having any room for one,” Roberts said.

The congregation decided to create a community garden. Land behind the church was chosen as the initial plot. This is several blocks away from the elementary school.

Before the project could begin, the community needed to be informed about the garden, according to Roberts.

“We went door-to-door and handed out flyers and talked to people in the neighborhood,” said Rosa McAlister, a member of Hope in Christ and part of the project.

The initial meeting occurred in March with a turnout of about 20 people. This group split into three focus groups; one for finance, another for construction of the garden and the last dedicated to searching for locations.

“We had to lay out what we wanted from the garden. The easiest way to do it is just do rectangular plots in a row, which is what we did,” said Greg Waters, who once owned his own landscaping business and help with construction.

There are 33 plots in the initial garden. Twenty-seven of these plots are 10-by-10 feet and cost \$50 to rent. The remaining six are 4-by-10 feet for \$35 each.

“Anyone and everyone are welcome to register for a plot,” Roberts said.

Sunnyland students have not been able to help with the garden because it is too far to bring students, according to Mary Anne Stuckart, Sunnyland Elementary principal.

Local businesses will have the opportunity to sponsor those who can’t afford a plot. McAlister and others involved with the financial aspects of the project have been approaching businesses to contribute to this cause. There is also a large plot for co-operative planting. Anyone interested may work in this area.

Community gardeners who are unable to kneel for long periods of time are also being considered. Waters said the group is looking into making raised beds that would make it easy the soil easy to reach for the elderly, those in wheelchairs or others that need a higher plot.

The initial idea was for this area to contain vegetables. However, anything that isn’t invasive can be grown at the garden as long as no pesticides or herbicides are used, according to Roberts.

Volunteers for the garden project have also been writing grant requests to those giving money for cooperative gardens. These requests lay out the mission of the project, the level of sustainability and why the garden needs funding.

The group is looking into gaining a financial sponsor to make any donations tax deductible. Becoming a non-profit takes time and this is the best way to give back to encourage donations until then, McAlister said.

One local business provided help that was not monetary. The owner of The Garden Spot, located off of Alabama Street, donated a truckload of leftover compost from a sale by Sehome High School and the Kiwanis Club. The garden store also allowed Janaki Kilgore, a project member, to borrow a truck for transporting the dirt to the garden.

Kilgore said that the church site is only the first in what the group hopes will end up being many gardens. Several more sites are being looked into.

One potential site for a future garden includes land owned by Puget Sound Energy. The company is interested in looking at designs the garden group creates before discussing further terms, said Roberts.

Another possible plot is an overgrown piece of property close to the church. The owner also wants to see designs and is “dialoguing with us about putting a garden there,” Roberts said.

Kilgore created a website (<http://sunnylandcommunitygardens.weebly.com/>) for the project. This will allow those that weren’t initially contacted to get involved in the project, she said.

Polly Gilbert, a Sunnyland Neighborhood Association member who has attended numerous garden meetings, said that the association approves of the work so far.

“I have plenty of yard of my own but think this is a wonderful idea for those who don’t have land,” said Gilbert.

McAlister said she is confident the community garden project will be a success.

“It has been a really eye-opening process...” she said. “A small group managed to do a big thing fairly quickly, I was impressed by that.”

Posted by Alexandra Kocik at 6:01 PM No comments:



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Tuesday, April 26, 2011

## Annual bocce tournament has roots in Sunnyland

Tom McNutt of Bellingham’s Sunnyland Neighborhood never thought bocce would end up becoming his career and hobby. One evening at a party in 2001, McNutt said he learned how this ancient sport could bring people together.

“They were barbequing salmon, had good beer and a bocce court. By the end of the evening, everyone that had been strangers felt like friends,” he said. “It was one of those peak experiences in life that you can’t just ignore.”

Several days after the party, McNutt decided to build his own bocce court. His backyard, however, was dedicated to a large garden. With the city’s permission, McNutt built a public court between the sidewalk and the curb with his own money. He began experimenting with dirt for the new court. A year and a half later, he created his own blend called Boccecom Rain Country Blend made from rendered oyster shells. After hiring his friend David Donohue to create a website, McNutt was able to sell this product all over the United States, Canada and world. One court was sent to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

McNutt’s court also created a bocce team in Sunnyland Neighborhood. In front of his home on Carolina Street, across from Youngstock’s Country Farms Produce, the Bellingham Bocce Club meets every Wednesday afternoon, rain or shine.

Games often go on long after the sun sets, according to Lee Kincaid, a long-time player of bocce at McNutt’s court. Lights have been installed in McNutt’s front yard so the game can continue even when it is dark.

“Anyone, even passersby, is invited to join in,” said Kincaid. “Nobody is ever unhappy while playing bocce and that can attract people to check it out.”

Bocce is a proximity sport. Scores are based upon how close each team gets its balls to the pallino, which is a small ball rolled into the court at the beginning of each round. The game is generally played until a team reaches 13 points.

“Bocce was played by the Romans ages ago,” said Kincaid. “It’s the grandfather of games like billiards and golf.”

The growing popularity of Boccecom.com products made McNutt want to give back to the community. He began searching for a way to combine his love for bocce with charity. A tournament seemed like the perfect way to accomplish this.

“I knew I had creative energy to contribute to a cause that would help a person in the community. I didn’t have any money but I had the time and energy,” said McNutt.

Local business such as Avenue Bread, Boundary Bay Brewery and Dick’s Drive-In sponsor teams to compete in the annual tournament. This helped pay for the tournament while also raising money for a chosen non-profit organization.

The Ninth Annual Bellingham Bocce Tournament’s proceeds will go to the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center (WDRC).

All 128 players, split up into 32 teams, showed up at the tournament. This was an unprecedented turnout according to Moonwater, who goes by one name and is the executive director of the WDRC.

“It’s wonderful to see people of different ages, backgrounds, ethnicities and skill levels coming together to support this cause, even when the economy is bad,” she said.

The tournament on April 16 was the third time the WDRC has been a part of the Bellingham Bocce Tournament, said Anderson.

Marty Mitchell had been playing bocce for only six months when he was invited to participate in the event at the Sportsplex.

“I think a lot of the players here are a lot better than I am,” said Mitchell. “The idea here though is to have fun and raise money for the mediation center.”

Bocce is meant to be played in a low-walled rectangular court where players roll the bocce balls. The tournament is played on the indoor soccer field of the Bellingham Sportsplex, which is laid with synthetic grass. To avoid damaging the field, flat white ropes were laid out in a rectangular shape as individual courts and acrylic balls were used. The balls move differently on the grass, which often shortens the skill gap between bocce veterans and rookies, according to Kincaid.

The event was also streamed live on the Livestream website. The host, Peter Di Turi, runs Puget Sound Bocce, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting bocce. Di Turi films, keeps track of scores and acts as game announcer to viewers online. The videos are then edited and posted on the Puget Sound Bocce Livestream website (<http://www.livestream.com/pugetsoundbocce>).

Posted by Alexandra Kocik at 7:01 PM No comments:



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