

CATHY CLAIRE

TAPE 4, Side 1

September 3, 1996

M.O'R.: This is Michael O'Rourke for the Washington County Historical Society continuing the oral history with Cathy Claire on September 3, 1996, and today's interview is taking place at the Oregon Historical Society.

When we left off last time you had already told me a little bit about organizing the first Tualatin River Discovery Day and mentioned some of the difficulties you had in organizing that both that year and the year after with respect to people wanting to be in or out depending upon who else was in or out. One of the things that you mentioned just in passing was that Mike Houck helped you negotiate with REI to get them in one of those years. Is that right?

C.C.: Yes. What we originally ran into I think were two things: one, that people simply weren't used to working together; they were still in the mentality of "us and them," and you were either the good guy in that you were a wild environmentalist, or you were a bad guy because you were something other than a wild environmentalist. The second was that the environmentalists were divided in that you were either one of them specifically and they knew you personally and you had been involved in their very specific organizations, or else you weren't trustworthy, and there simply wasn't any help from other organizations. They were the ones that wanted control of everything. They were jealous of their territories.

So that was evident when the Sierra Club refused to participate if we invited the Unified Sewerage Agency to be involved, and yet they didn't even bother following through on the initial

obligation by helping at all or even showing up. The "them and us" mentality then went over to when REI, a corporation concerned for its image, did not want to be accused of being involved with the Unified Sewerage Agency because they were the ones that were polluting the Tualatin River. Of course it wasn't any of the bathroom facilities within the structure of REI that could be accused of having any of these problems; it was simply the Unified Sewerage Agency that was responsible.

When I talked to REI, I said, "But wait a minute. Even Mike Houck is involved in some way."

"Well, get Mike to call us."

So I called Mike.

M.O'R.: Who did you talk to at REI?

C.C.: I don't recall. I don't recall.

M.O'R.: Was it somebody here in Portland, though?

C.C.: It would have been someone here in Portland, yes, someone at their local store, and I can't remember if the Tualatin store had just opened or was about to open. They then spoke with Mike, and I think that was my first communication with Mike was getting a telephone call from me going, "Help," you know, "Talk to these guys. This doesn't make any sense."

And he gave them a phone call, and we got a call the next day, and they became involved.

The original concept of Tualatin River Discovery Day was to give the people within the Tualatin Valley some sort of ownership in the river, because unless you have ownership in something, you really never care about what condition it's in. If you never have access to the river, why are you ever going to care what's in it because you've never seen how bad a shape it can be in.

The other concept was if you're going to save a river, you have to save it by changing the ideas of all of the communities and

in effect forming a community which is centered around the river. So we didn't go at this with the idea of "please give me some money so we can put on an event." We sent out packages which involved pictures of the first canoe day and a synopsis of what it did, what it could do, and how people could become involved, and it set forth the requirement that if you want to be involved, you have to assume your own cost of being involved. So we weren't asking for cash. We didn't want cash, and in fact I turned down cash two years in a row. What we wanted was the people involved.

So the Unified Sewerage Agency was involved, the Tualatin River Discovery Day organization, because we had not yet assumed the name of Tualatin Riverkeepers, REI was involved, and we met in the back room at REI. We met about once a month beginning in February. The City of Sherwood was involved. And we asked for volunteers, and people could volunteer in any way that they could. PGE printed the flyers. USA provided shuttle service. We got the local canoe club, the Columbia River Canoe Club to volunteer its members as river guides. We got the City of Sherwood to volunteer their receptionist as the person who would take reservations.

The first three years we still tried to get people together so if they didn't have a boat we would find a vacancy in someone else's boat, so having a boat was not a requirement. We got an organization in Oregon City, Sportsraft Marina, we got them involved. They started taking - because there were so many people that wanted to go who didn't own boats that they would take reservations, and people would mail money to them and they actually delivered the boats and picked up the boats at the takeout point.

We got Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts to have food. Some communities such as Rivermede, because the first routes were from the Chamberg Bridge down to at first Cook Park and then the City of Tualatin, we would have the kids at Rivermede would sell hotdogs

from rafts out in the middle of the river. Stores would donate the food that the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts would use. Then we would have organizations setting up information booths. One of the organizations, one of the Boy Scouts had to make for one of their projects - no, it was 4-H; excuse me - for one of their projects had to set up a papier mache map of the entire area of the watershed, so they had that on display.

We have a nurse who volunteered so she would be the emergency people, and eventually we got involved with the Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue, and they have a boat, so they would come with their rescue boat, and they would send out information.

We had the Northwest Steelheaders tried to serve as a guide the first year, but they had difficulty with their put-in points because the water is so shallow in some areas. So we found that their being involved didn't really help a lot.

There's a ham radio group, before cellular phones ...

M.O'R.: Their boats, the Steelheaders' boats, just wouldn't handle the shallow water; was that it?

C.C.: They couldn't handle the shallow water. They would have motors in the back, and it would break their props.

M.O'R.: Oh, I see. Okay.

C.C.: There were too many things that might be hidden and too many dangers for them.

M.O'R.: So motorcraft in general would have that problem, probably?

C.C.: Right. So there really weren't any motorcraft involved. But we did have the Fire & Rescue. There were people that would stand by with some motorcraft. That was the Fire & Rescue, in case of an emergency they could have gone in some shallower areas.

We got SOLV involved. They supplied the bags, the garbage bags. We got any organization that we could, free musicians; we said, "Hey, would you at least play, just for half a day?" So we tried to get a carnival at the end of the event, so we would bill it as "Spend half a day floating the Tualatin," the first year. The second year we tried to get people who would float with them and give the individuals ideas of what the history was, and we would place people at certain points, just to say, "Hey, this is what happened here in such-and-such a year."

M.O'R.: So these people that were placed at these strategic points, then, would just kind of holler out to the people that were passing?

C.C.: Right, and start to chat with them and give them some history.

M.O'R.: Okay. So the boats would maybe pull up temporarily?

C.C.: Mm-hmm. So what we ended up doing is taking Clorox bottles, making them float, getting an anchor, tying a string to the Clorox bottle, a string to the anchor, and then taking some historic information, placing it in a zip-lock bag, securing it so it wouldn't get wet, and as you floated you would find this piece of information and you would be able to read what happened. So we got in a lot more history about what was going on on the river.

So we got the community involved, and from this more community people started getting involved, and all of a sudden people had heard of the Tualatin Riverkeepers, which everyone started calling us. We were called the Riverkeepers way before we ever assumed the name. That way we started to create a community, and we started giving at least one day a year people some sense of ownership.

Later we expanded this to the Tualatin Wildlife Refuge, and we started giving a tour through there. This was when the federal

government was just starting up trying to promote this creation of a wildlife refuge in the area.

M.O'R.: This would be between Tualatin and Sherwood?

C.C.: Between Scholls and Sherwood. I think that's the major area, and every September now we have taken people on a route through the wildlife refuge, or abutting at least a portion of wildlife refuge property.

M.O'R.: So there's a second trip, then?

C.C.: So a second trip. From that sprung a van trip, and there were years when we didn't have a whole lot of people participating. We would show up at a parking lot, and no one else would. And now the van trip is rather popular, and it goes on at least twice a year.

This trip takes folks to the headwaters of the Tualatin, or as close - up to sometimes Barney Reservoir, depending on who the individuals are, sometimes to the Lee Falls area, and takes them down through Lake Oswego, shows them the dam there in Lake Oswego, the dam that's on the Tualatin. Shows them the dam that's on the lake itself and explains a bit of the history and what's going on with the river.

M.O'R.: Now, the van trip, I guess, at least with respect to the headwaters is sort of a unique opportunity because the public isn't generally allowed up in that area, right?

C.C.: Correct. Correct. One year the board of directors of the Riverkeepers decided that we had not been to the headwaters of the Tualatin and it's about time we went. So we took this nice map, and it showed a six-mile hike. Well, that's not much. So we started walking from the headwaters, from the reservoir where the Trask River is, and we were going to walk down to the area where Forest Grove has its watershed and Lee Falls and Little Lee Falls are located.

And we're walking along, and it was the most miserable hike; we call it the hike from hell. It was six miles, but seven hours. There was no trail. There were trees, 100-year-old trees, 200-year-old trees that had been cut in the early 1900's, and because they had been cedar they had been left to lie. So through the years parts of the trees had been covered with dirt, and you would think that you were on the ground. And I was standing in one position and all of a sudden my right leg disappeared, and I found that my knee was on my chin and my other leg was hanging out into midair because what I had been standing on was not solid ground.

M.O'R.: It was a hollow tree trunk, eh?

C.C.: Yeah. We found a waterfall that was not on any maps and named it after Kayakut, who was one of the - I'm sorry I can't remember the tribe that was out in the Gaston area - but he was the chief that was around when the white man came and said, "Give us your land and we'll make you this kind of trade," and he said, "No, this is our land," and the white man took it anyway.

So the hike from hell took seven hours, in terrible terrain. So at least now I think that you could say that the Riverkeepers really do have a better grasp of what is involved on the Tualatin than a lot of other individuals.

M.O'R.: I take it the hike from hell hasn't been repeated?

C.C.: I heard that some of the folks were going to try and do a repeat, but I sure wasn't one of them. It wasn't my idea of fun.

M.O'R.: Now, this is land, I guess, that is occupied by a timber company that controls access to it; is that right?

C.C.: You know, part of it may be a timber company, I wouldn't doubt it, but I believe that a large portion of it's in the watershed, as well. So I'm not up on who has exact ownership and who doesn't. We had permission from everyone for the hike. We had to get keys to gates in certain locations. So we had permis-

sion to go, but that wasn't my job. On that one all I had to do was go, not make the arrangements.

M.O'R.: When you first started talking about this you mentioned that you didn't accept financial donations, and I guess in some cases people were willing to give you reasonable sums of money. I think you mentioned to me on the phone that you turned down a thousand dollar donation?

C.C.: Unified Sewerage Agency tried to donate a thousand dollars, and I said no. People wanted to give money, and we said no.

Eventually things changed. Insurance, finding insurance has just been a bear. So we ended up with an insurance through the American Canoe and Kayak Club which required a \$5 deposit each time someone went on a trip, so we started - and I think that was in the fourth year - requesting people to make a \$5 donation to help cover costs. And of course folks would toss in more money, you know.

I think the first year it didn't cost me anything because STOP paid for the flyers. Maybe it cost STOP \$50. The second year I did it on my own, and it cost me \$300. That included putting together some sort of package that we could use for marketing, to get people involved, and the flyers, of course, had to come out of my own pocket - or excuse me, not the flyers themselves, they still came from PGE, but designing the flyers and some of the other things that we needed to do.

M.O'R.: Postage and things like that?

C.C.: Yeah. So I came up short about \$300, and someone else came up short about \$100. I may have gotten a check for about \$100 that year to help absorb costs, but I don't recall. I know once there early on I did receive some, but I'm uncertain as to where it came from at this point. But USA was always more than generous in trying to help absorb costs.

It's changed now. You know, money is really a curse. The focus of the organization - it would be great if there was one individual that had enough time that they could devote their day to this as a job because it takes day-to-day work to form communities. In an attempt to get somebody to do that, you have to get grants, and then to get the grant, they want you to have an organization. So instead of paying the person to actually form the community and do community organizing, they pay the organization to hire somebody to run the organization or to create an organization to run.

So instead of going out, then, and looking for people like we did initially in the first days, where we heavily ...

[interruption]

M.O'R.: Okay. Before the interruption there, you were saying that instead of going out and, you know, working on building the community, like you did in the first days, you were ... and that's when the door opened up.

C.C.: Now they're more centered on building an organization so that funders will approve and having so much of their focus being centered on meeting whatever requirement someone who might grant them money might have, they've spent less time actually organizing the community and getting other groups involved with their issue.

The Riverkeepers today are in an unusual position in that they in some ways are almost, or could be, an umbrella organization for other smaller organizations within the watershed. Because their purpose is to look at the security, the cleanliness and the safety of the river, you can only do that by looking at the entire watershed and as that takes in every small wetlands and creek and stream, they have just by what they're trying to do the possibility of doing a lot more.

What has happened is what came out of the lawsuit that the original Tualatin Riverkeepers had was nine million nine hundred some odd or nine million whatever amount of money that was put in escrow, and it sat there I think for almost four or five years in escrow before the courts and the people involved in the original lawsuit could figure out how it should be distributed. Money was turned over to the Oregon Community Foundation, and they then, trying to uphold what the court had ordered as far as public meetings, tried to start arranging some funding of groups to match the court order.

What we, the Riverkeepers, have been able to do is to identify the areas of need for that funding. It's amazing the kind of lobbying you can do if you know everyone involved in the watershed and you've spoken to them and they give you what their ideas are, you start finding the common thread. And then you go and have an idea or think of something perhaps that can tie that common thread together, and you go into a meeting, one of the meetings that the Community Foundation puts together once a year to help identify needs, and you start talking to everybody, you try and lobby them to work together on an idea which would appeal to all of their concerns, and it's a great amount of satisfaction to then come away at the end of the meeting finding that yes, everyone ended up agreeing to work together on a specific idea. Sometimes it's been the Riverkeepers.

Right now there is a really exciting thing happening in the watershed, and that's the Watershed Council, and this is an attempt to get the very diverse organizations and groups and interests within the watershed working together. This puts someone in a position from an environmentalist organization sitting next to another person who is from one of the logging companies, and then you may have someone who's just a straight business person, a

realtor, and all of these things are starting to tie together, and the Watershed Council is going to be a great avenue.

Being with the Riverkeepers and looking at the entire watershed gets you involved with the Soil and Water Conservation District, which is the Department of Agriculture. They had a position available, and one of our members met the qualifications for that position and put in an application and ran for public office, which the board of directors for the Water and Soil Conservation District are publicly-elected positions, and won. So it gives us another connection.

So by forming communities and getting people involved in a variety of things, you start changing ideas, and you start changing the health of the river.

M.O'R.: And who was it that won the position?

C.C.: The person who has the position is Steve Huffman, and Steve is on the Soil and Water Conservation District, he's a member of the Kinton Grange. He has a long history of living on farms. He's a Boy Scout leader and is the head of the grounds for all of the city of Forest Grove, manages all of their parks and properties.

M.O'R.: Do you think that he was elected in part because of his membership in the Riverkeepers, then?

C.C.: No. I think he was elected because no one else would run. I know for a fact he was elected because no one else would run.

M.O'R.: I take it this isn't a paid position?

C.C.: You know, it may be a paid - no, it's not a paid position. It's an elected position but not a paid position. If it was paid, the pay would be so minimal as it wouldn't count. It's just one of those many positions that we really need to have people there. But there aren't - you know, with the time constraints

these days, any kind of organization, even if it's government, is having a hard time finding people to participate.

In Steve's case, being a member of the Riverkeepers did not get him elected, and I don't think it's really why he's there. He has a long history of farm involvement. But being a member of the Riverkeepers gives him some balance between the agricultural world and the environmental world, and I think it makes him an excellent person in that position.

M.O'R.: Well, we're coming up on 1:25, and I do want to ask you some more questions vis-a-vis your own participation in the Riverkeepers and what your involvement is now compared to the time you were running it almost singlehandedly, as well as some more general questions about the river, so I think we could benefit from one more session.

C.C.: Okay.

M.O'R.: Maybe we can arrange to do that whenever is convenient.

C.C.: That would be fine.

M.O'R.: And thanks again.

[End of Tape 4, Side 1]