

The Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods (KAN) nominates Karen Story for the Jefferson Public Service Award for her unparalleled commitment to her neighborhood, to the city of Kirkland, and to the sustainability of our environment. **Karen's definition of** community goes far beyond the borders of Kirkland, though, and encompasses a global perspective that may have begun with her work in the Peace Corps.

Neighborhood Leader

Karen has been a resident of Kirkland for 21 years, works for a local business, and has raised two boys. Like most parents, Karen helps out in the schools by volunteering. However, her contribution to her community goes way beyond what most parents offer. **Karen's volunteer efforts began in high school with Youth Eastside Services.** At seventeen, she spent a summer with the Youth Conservation Corps, building trails in the North Cascades. She was in the Peace Corps in Togo (West Africa) from 1985-87. Her commitment to the world around her has led her to become a neighborhood leader who has shaped the community in tangible and intangible ways. The tangible projects that she has had a hand in include the creation of a new park, the restoration of an existing park, the installation of a paved walkway to connect her neighborhood with the downtown area, landscaping the entrances to her neighborhood, and the construction of a 500 foot long raised walking trail.

The intangible ways that she has shaped her community, however, may in fact be even more valuable. **David Ramsay, Kirkland's City Manager, describes her as the "glue that holds the community together".** The *Kirkland Reporter*, for whom she has written numerous neighborhood columns, named her a **"community information guru"** (4/2/08 edition). She created a website (www.kirklandhighlands.org) and e-mail list for her neighborhood association. Karen sends out neighborhood crime alerts and organizes community events such as the annual egg hunt and picnic. Whether it is negotiating with local, regional, or private entities, she is a community organizer--willing to work slowly, methodically, and persistently to improve the quality of life for her and those around her. Nothing is too daunting or too trivial for Karen to take on, and she never does it by herself. She is passionate about community, and about what people can accomplish when they work together. It is Karen's infusion of enthusiasm that gives not only motivation but direction. She gets people the information that they need, creates a plan and a timeline. Karen sets high standards, and follows up when needed. She sustains the vision that carries everyone through.

Commitment to Sustainability

Karen has been described as a "citizen extraordinaire" by the Green Kirkland program, and her efforts over the past 10 years make this almost an understatement. She has a deep commitment to sustainability, and she makes sure that that commitment is contagious. When Karen heard that a developer was going to purchase a piece of City property, Karen and another neighbor intervened and encouraged the City to instead turn that **land into Cedar View Park.** She helped get the City Council's approval, went door to door to get the neighbors involved, organized the volunteer effort to landscape the area, and even designed the layout of the park itself. Through volunteer efforts and neighborhood grant funding, a new neighborhood park was created for a fraction of the cost.

Several years later, Karen began work to restore the four acre Cotton Hill Park to a natural forest and wetland. She completed the training required to become a Native Plant Steward, and has organized multiple volunteer events involving local youth, the cub scouts, and adults to donate over 2400 volunteer hours. They have they removed 1.6 acres of invasive plants through these efforts. Karen also spearheaded the volunteer **effort to create a 500 foot long "turnpike" trail to increase public access** through the park without disturbing the natural wetlands. Although Karen avoids the limelight, she is willing to be creative in her problem solving. For Earth Day 2008, she got permission and funding to hire sixty goats to help remove invasive plants. The unusual idea brought not only media attention but 150 volunteers out to see the spectacle, help out and cheer on the goats as they ate their way through the hillside. King 5 featured it and you can view the video here: <http://www.ilanga.com/other/King5-news-item.wmv> *Currently Kirkland, Kirkland's local news program,* featured it as well. The UW Restoration Ecology program has selected Cotton Hill Park for two years to assist with restoration efforts. That brings additional resources and volunteer efforts to Cotton Hill Park. One reason they give for their selection is the commitment of the neighborhood to the park. This commitment is fueled by Karen Story.

This same commitment to sustainability and community has also led Karen to champion efforts to build sidewalks and walkways. Karen worked with the City to find cost effective solutions to pave a walkway along

2 very busy streets. One of those walkways connected her neighborhood to the downtown area. These pedestrian safety measures allow people to get out of their cars, enjoy their neighborhood, and meet their neighbors. To spread that message, Karen organized a Celebrate Sidewalks event to show how the new walkway connected three neighborhoods.

Organizing for, not against

Anyone who has worked with a City or other government entity can attest to the fact that any effort such as putting in a park or creating a sidewalk can be very slow going. In a time when many have given up on government and there are limited funds available, Karen has the persistence to see these projects through to the end. **Karen's mantra is "what we can do, not what we can't do".** Kari Page, Neighborhood Resources Coordinator, notes that Karen would organize a project along a timeline, and have specific tasks laid out with **particular deadlines.** "Karen would always call you, to check in on how the project was going. She was always friendly, always offering to help, but you knew if you didn't live up to the commitments you'd made, the timeline that was **set, you'd have to answer to why".** **Some call her persistent; others say relentless, but everyone admires and respects her for the work that she does.**

Karen also has an ability to bring different groups together around a common cause. City Manager David Ramsay notes that it is always easier to organize against something, but Karen would always organize for something. If it was a Cub Scout group that was willing to help, Karen would work with young children. If the City Council needed to be on board, Karen would work to gain their support as well. She worked with the Department of Transportation to get permission to beautify freeway offramps, and with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to build a sidewalk.

She used this same approach to find funding for many of the projects she spearheaded. As Neighborhood Chair, she was scrupulous in her tracking of the grant funding received from the City. Each dollar was utilized to the full extent possible, and leveraged with volunteer hours and community support. **Where most neighborhoods completed two or three projects with their grant monies, Karen's neighborhood would complete six or seven.** Currently, Karen is working to restore the Summer Concert Series that fell victim to a recent budget cut. **She says she is doing it partly for selfish reasons, as her band "Back Burner" would like to play a concert.** But everyone knows that each time Karen puts her mind to something, it gets done. And each time a project of hers is completed, everyone benefits.

A fitting end to this nomination is a quote from Karen when she heard she would be nominated "I am enormously flattered and humbled. I don't want the recognition, but am willing to be one example of how individuals really can make a difference".

Summary

The Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods (KAN) nominates Karen Story for her unparalleled commitment to her neighborhood, the city of Kirkland, and the sustainability of our environment. Her tangible contributions include building new walkways that unite neighborhoods and allow people to access the downtown by foot, creating parks where none existed, restoring overgrown parks to their natural state, and uniting stakeholders in sustaining our community. Her intangible contributions bring people together by providing information (crime alerts, volunteer opportunities) and organizing community events (park clean-ups, egg hunts, summer concerts, picnics). Her mantra is "what we can do, not what we can't do".

February 2010



CityClub

Attn: Jefferson Awards Committee

1333 5th Avenue, Suite 24
Seattle, WA 98101-2600

**Subject: Nomination of Green Kirkland Steward Karen Story
2010 Jefferson Award**

Dear Jefferson Awards Committee:

When Karen Story contacted the City of Kirkland in 2007 to ask about the Green Kirkland Partnership program, she didn't ask why parks in her neighborhood were not yet undergoing restoration activities; she asked *how her community could immediately get involved and be active stewards!* Karen is a truly outstanding community leader committed to working with her neighborhood to turn their degraded Cotton Hill Park into a healthy and sustainable urban forest.

Karen is Chair of the Kirkland Highlands Neighborhood Association (HNA). Karen has served on the HNA Board for many years and she excels at community communication. She writes a Highlands Neighborhood column for the Kirkland Reporter newspaper that keeps everyone informed and let them know how they can get involved.

Her ability to mobilize her neighborhood aids her greatly in her role as a Green Kirkland Steward. As a Steward, she has the training and responsibility to manage park restoration events, and involves her neighborhood as volunteers in those events. Her neighborhood comprises approximately 950 homes, 2,500 people, and 400 acres, and is a mix of multi- and single family homes of all ages and sizes.

When Karen learned about the purpose and goals of the Green Kirkland Partnership's 20-year Forest Restoration Plan, she quickly advocated for her neighborhood to take on restoration of Cotton Hill Park as their community stewardship project. Cotton Hill Park is a 4.1 acre natural area comprised of degraded forested and wetland areas that are choked with invasive plants.

Through Karen's leadership over 1.6 acres is currently in restoration and another 0.5 acre will be added in 2010. The momentum of support that Karen garners both financially and through volunteer participation exceeds expectations. There is no doubt that it is because of her community's long-term commitment to support restoration efforts that the University of Washington Restoration Ecology Network (UW REN) program has twice selected Cotton Hill Park as an ideal location for student projects. Professors from the UW REN program regard Karen and her neighborhood as a model of citizen engagement to teach students about successful community engagement.

Karen would be the first person to tell you "it's not me; it's the community." And yes, it takes more than one person to do all the work, but it does take leadership, commitment, and passion to sustain the vision. For Cotton Hill Park restoration efforts alone, Karen has recorded approximately 150 hours from 2008 through January 2010.

In addition to her own volunteer efforts, she has spearheaded countless community volunteer efforts to restore Cotton Hill Park. Examples of these include:


- Numerous forest restoration events, including Earth Day April 2008 (150 volunteers and goat herd), Martin Luther King Days of Service January 2009 (63 volunteers) and January 2010 (69 volunteers).
- Over 2,400 of volunteer hours from her neighborhood and beyond.
- Over 700 native plants installed.
- Removing 70,000 square feet (= 1.6 acre) of invasive plants.
- Working with UW REN students 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 to restore 0.5 acre of forest.
- Constructing of a 500-foot long raised (turnpike) trail through the muddiest trail areas.
- Hiring a herd of 60 goats for three days to eat invasive blackberry plants.
- Arranging funding for: volunteer refreshments and gifts, trail supplies, hiring goats, purchase of native plants, UW student gas mileage, and educational signage. Over \$3,000 was raised by the community for the restoration work in 2008 and another \$2,000 in 2009. More funding is planned for 2010.

Beyond Cotton Hill Park, Karen has led many other community environmental stewardship projects over the years. Just a few of those include:

- Stopping a new road from being built through her neighborhood to a busy shopping area.
- Building Cedar View Park by preventing the city property from being sold for development, and providing funding for park facilities. Karen and community volunteers designed the park, cleared invasive blackberries, spread mulch and gravel, and planted drought-tolerance shrubs and trees. The neighborhood maintains the park, with the help of the local Cub Scout troop.
- Clearing right-of-ways and planted trees in several locations.
- Landscaping the entrances to the neighborhood.
- Creating pedestrian walkways.

Each successful project builds neighborhood pride, confidence, momentum, and relationships with city personnel. Karen is a citizen extraordinaire -- an inspiring example of a successful communicator, community organizer, and environmental steward.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Schroder, CPRP

Director, City of Kirkland Parks and Community Services



February 11, 2010

RE: Karen Story

Dear Colleague:

It is my pleasure to be able to recommend Karen Story for your consideration to receive the Jefferson Award. The City of Kirkland takes great pride in the valuable role that our neighborhoods play in our livability and strong sense of community. This requires very effective leadership coming from our neighborhood associations. As far as I am concerned, Karen has set the gold standard for what a neighborhood leader should be.

Karen has a unique set of organizational and inter-personal skills that result in her being a very effective community organizer. She combines a personal passion for her work with the ability to rally people to the cause. She is very creative at harnessing the energy of volunteers while leveraging the resources of the City and other organizations.

A great example of this is the Cotton Hill Park restoration project. This natural area had been overtaken with such invasive plants as blackberries and holly. She laid the foundation for this project by first working with the City, the University of Washington and the Cascade Land Conservancy to secure support and resources for the project. This has been followed by a series of volunteer work days involving a wide variety of individuals and organizations that she has recruited. As one of "Karen's volunteers," I can attest to the organization and positive energy of these work days – including my favorite part namely Karen's home baked cookies! In recognition of the quality of this effort, it was recently selected as a Martin Luther King Day project.

Karen's community organizing efforts go beyond organizing volunteer projects. They include communication coordination involving e-mail updates and a website. She is the glue that keeps the neighborhood together. She has also worked with the City on a series of neighborhood improvement projects including Cedar View Park, pedestrian walkways and sidewalks and the Forbes Creek stairs. All along the way she has established positive relationships with everyone involved.

Karen and I share something in common. We are both former Peace Corps Volunteers. I believe that through her community involvement she has continued to demonstrate her passion, commitment and desire to make a positive difference. For all of this, I am very proud to be able to recommend her for your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Ramsay", with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Ramsay
City Manager

February 11, 2010

Norm Storme
Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods

Dear Norm,

Per our conversation regarding Karen Story's many contributions to the Highlands Neighborhood, these are the ones that I feel had a significant impact:

For the past seven years Karen has served as the driving force for the HNA; first as Secretary, then Communications Director, and currently as Chair. During that time she has developed and continues to maintain the HNA email list and web site.

Two major accomplishments were the construction of a paved surface linking existing sidewalks on 112th NE with sidewalks on NE 87th, and the reclamation of Cotton Hill Park.

The sidewalk project was very complex, involving homeowners, Kirkland Public Works and the BNSF Railroad. There were numerous meetings, many frustrating negotiations with BNSF, and a requirement to stay within budget. In the end a paved walkway was completed, providing a safe walkway from downtown to Kirkland to the middle of the Highlands.

Cotton Hill Park was a disused tract of forested swamp. Students from Kirkland Junior High would sometimes use it as a shortcut from the Highlands to school. Working with Sharon Rodman from the City, Karen organized blackberry removal pulls. Using Neighborhood Connections money, she hired a goatherd and goats to clear more invasives. Hearing that someone had built a path through the wooded area at Crestwoods Park, Karen worked with him to construct a raised wooden path through the marshy area thereby opening up the park to walkers. When Karen found out that Cotton Hill Park was not officially named, she petitioned the Parks Board to officially name it.

Those were two major accomplishments. However, there have been many smaller achievements, such as numerous park clean-ups, the beautification of the Highlands neighborhood sign at NE 85th, the clean-up and planting of trees at the intersection of 87th and 116th, the construction and installation of a picnic bench, a water fountain, and a new baseball backstop at Highlands Park.

These few paragraphs merely scratch the surface. Karen Story is a model of what is needed in a neighborhood leader. Her willingness to always listen, to always contribute, to always go that extra step makes her a great neighbor. Karen's passion and deep involvement in making and keeping the neighborhood safe, attractive, and highly functional should not go unrecognized.



Walking the Cotton Hill Park Trail

By Carrie Wood
Kirkland Reporter

Students have trudged along the muddy Cotton Hill Park Trail to get to Kirkland Junior High and Peter Kirk Elementary schools. Highland residents have also used the trail for walking or jogging to the nearby Crestwoods Park.

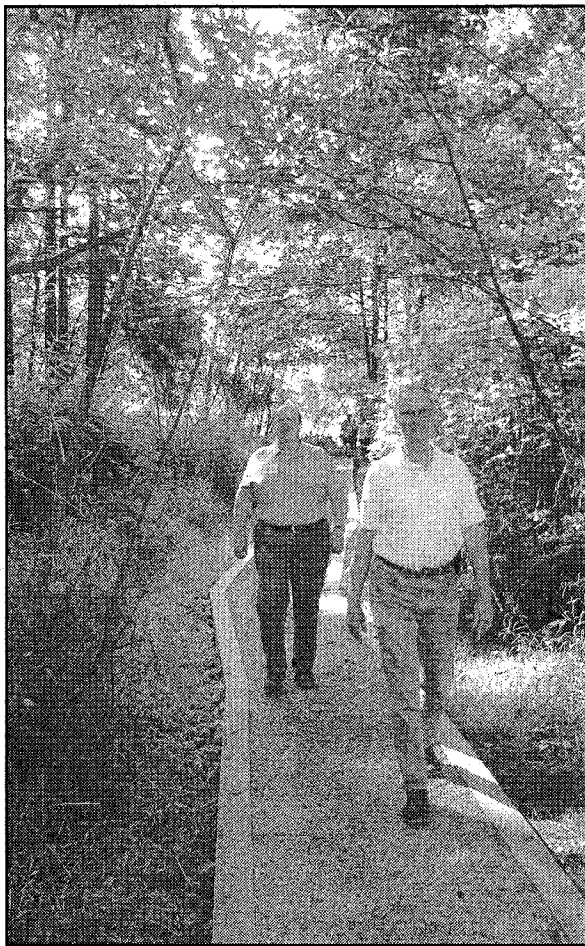
Over the years, people have laid down a hodge podge of old boards along the trail to provide a somewhat drier route through the puddles.

But tired of being stuck in the mud, Karen Story wanted a more permanent solution.

Last November, Story, communications chair for the Highlands Neighborhood Association, contacted the Kirkland Parks Department about building a raised gravel trail. Using funds from Highland's Neighborhood Connections grant and with the help of about 40 volunteers, the trail was recently completed.

Last Saturday morning, nearly 50 residents and city leaders gathered by the trail to celebrate its grand opening.

"I love to walk," said City Manager Dave Ramsay, but, "that little stretch was difficult to walk during the winter months, so what an improvement to my walk.



Carrie Wood/Kirkland Reporter
During a grand opening celebration Saturday, Kirkland Mayor James Lauinger (right) and Council Member Dave Asher walk the new Cotton Hill Park Trail that was once a muddy path. Highland residents turned the trail into a gravel walkway.

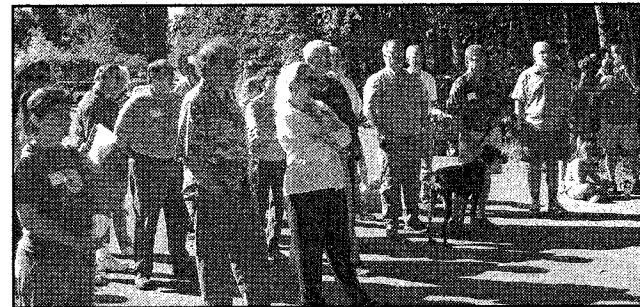
I'm really impressed."

During the grand opening event, several volunteers were recognized for their dedication, including Stu Clarke, who volunteered more than 100 hours on the project. An avid hiker, the 79-year-old South Juanita resident also volunteers for the Washington Trails Association and recently finished building trails in Crestwoods Park.

When the city approached Clarke and asked him for help on the Cotton Hill trail, he set out measuring the 500 foot, four-foot wide trail right away.

Work parties cleared brush to widen the trail and laid ruff raff. They set timbers four feet apart on top of the rocks and spiked the timbers into the ground using long pieces of rebar. Then they filled between the timbers with medium sized rocks and put gravel on top.

According to Story, the "turnpike" trail will allow water to flow underneath.



Carrie Wood/Kirkland Reporter
Nearly 50 residents gathered to celebrate the opening of the new trail.

"The gravel packs down to make a very solid, permeable trail surface that will never be slippery," she said, adding that the gravel trail should last for many years with little maintenance and it was less expensive to construct than a boardwalk.

The community had fun with the project, she said, and there were days when no one wanted to stop working.

To see photos of the project, visit <http://kirklandhighlands.org/CottonHillTrail>.

Carrie Wood can be reached at cwood@kirklandreporter.com or 425-822-9166, ext. 5050.

NEIGHBORHOOD SPOTLIGHT | KIRKLAND HIGHLANDS

Residents enjoy “100 percent residential” community

By Linda Hughes

Staff Writer

On a drive around Kirkland's Highlands neighborhood, Karen Story plays tour guide to her neighborhood. Over here is Highlands Park, where the community picnic will be held on Sunday. On the south end by the railroad tracks is the patch of land community members will landscape soon. This trail required more than 300 volunteer hours. That park is kept crisp and clean thanks to frequent community weeding parties. And over there is the house that “Extreme Makeover: Home Edition” built for Connie Chapin so she could continue her Angelish Swimming business in her backyard pool.

As communications chairperson for the Highlands Neighborhood Association, Story knows quite a bit about her neighborhood. She e-mails announcements and work-party notices to more than 400 homes in the Highlands, a tight-knit neighborhood that has about 1,000 homes on the hill above downtown Kirkland.

Story's story with the Highlands began six years ago, when a developer wanted to build on a vacant lot near her home with views of Lake Washington. Story wanted it to be a park instead. She took the matter to the city and found that Kirkland supported her



Karen Story stands at the entrance to Cedar View Park in Kirkland. Story asked the city to allow her to turn the vacant lot into a park rather than sell it to a developer.

LINDA HUGHES

vision of having more parks. “The city believes — and so do I — that there should be a park within walking distance of every home,” Story says. “There wasn’t one at our end of the neighborhood.”

That’s how Cedar View Park came into being — with some city funding and lots of volunteer sweat. “It’s just mostly a quiet place you can go and just sit and look at the view,” Story says.

The city of Kirkland is an ally for Story and her neighbors. “They do have a really progressive attitude toward citizen involvement,” she says. “They really encourage it strongly and they do a lot to facilitate it.”

Story’s activism is firmly grounded in civic pride. “I feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when I see all the projects that we’ve worked on, and I love feeling

that people can get so much done if we work together. But also I really like the sense of community,” she says.

The neighborhood recently came together to clear invasive plants from Cotton Hill Park — with a little help from goats. The association hired 60 goats from Rent-a-Ruminant to chomp through pesky vegetation in April. Then came the building of a 500-foot-long trail through the woodsy park. In October, University of Washington ecology students will help the community restore part of Cotton Hill Park, using resources from the college’s Restoration Ecology Network program.

“We chose Cotton Hill Park as a location because it provides ecological restoration challenges of the scope and complexity that

we feel will challenge our students,” says Warren Gold, co-director of the UW-REN program. “We were especially impressed with the commitment of both the surrounding community and the city of Kirkland to the restoration efforts.”

Debra Sinick, a real estate agent and resident of the Highlands since 1994, credits Story for much of the cohesiveness of the neighborhood. “Karen has changed the involvement of the people,” she says.

Sinick moved to the neighborhood because of all it offered. “I love the location. I am half a mile from Park Place, a mile from downtown. I actually walk to movies, I can walk to restaurants, I can go to parks. It’s just easy to get everywhere,” she says.

Just down the hill from

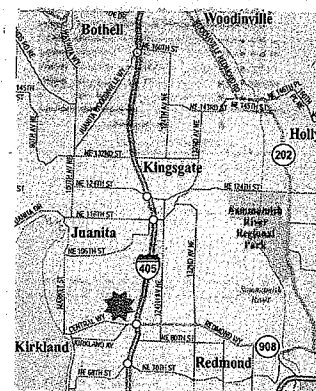
the Highlands is downtown Kirkland, brimming with eclectic boutiques and restaurants. There’s also an expansive waterfront park that is a magnet for sun worshipers, walkers and people-watchers.

But up in the Highlands, residents have a sense of being away from it all. “It’s 100 percent residential,” says Bob Kamuda, the chairperson of the Highlands Neighborhood Association. “There isn’t a 7-Eleven or a gas station within our (boundaries). We have essentially one way in and one way out. We have no connectivity with the other communities, so it makes us like a peninsula with the railroad tracks on one side, I-405 on the other side, wetlands in the north end and the entrance and exit at the south end, so we really are one of a kind when it comes to Kirkland.”

“It’s a little bit of a small-town feel in our neighborhood, so you just feel more connected,” Story adds. “It’s a very green, quiet neighborhood with lots and lots of character, and it’s close to I-405 so you can get where you’re going really quickly. You don’t have to go on surface streets for a long time to get to the freeway.”

The diversity of the houses adds to the character, says Sinick. “It’s a real eclectic neighborhood. You’ve got high-end new construction, you’ve got little Kirk-

AT A GLANCE



Back in the day

Kirkland was the first city incorporated on the East-side and was named after businessman Peter Kirk.

Check it out

The annual Highlands Picnic runs from noon to 4 p.m. Sept. 7 at Highlands Park, 11210 N.E. 102nd St. Pizza, dessert and beverages will be provided; side dish contributions encouraged. The Cotton Hill Park trail grand opening is at 10 a.m. Sept. 13 at 110th Avenue Northeast and Northeast 98th Street.

Find out more

www.kirklandhighlands.org

land bungalows, you’ve got little ramblers, you’ve got big houses. It’s just a huge variety of different things and different price ranges,” she says.

Prices range from the \$400,000s to more than \$1 million. “It isn’t inexpensive to live in Kirkland, but at the same time there is a variety (of home prices),” Sinick says.