

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 05-21-03) , ©2005

A week ago I got a sneak preview of Islandwood, one of the show gardens on the Bainbridge in Bloom Garden Tour scheduled for July 12 and 13. Subtitled “A school in the Woods,” Only twelve acres of the 255 acre site are cleared with six acres devoted to solar meadows and six acres devoted to buildings.

The mission of the center is “To inspire environmental and community stewardship by providing hands-on learning experiences that link science, technology and the arts in a natural setting.” The vision is “a future in which generation after generation shares an extraordinary bond of stewardship for each other and for the communities in which we live.”

Islandwood offers: conferences for youth and adults; environmental education experiences for youth in fourth and fifth grade; day and weekend programs for kids, families and adults. University graduate students live in student housing on site and participate in environmental learning and teaching experiences. Many of the public classes and programs include gourmet meals prepared by Chef Greg Atkinson. Several programs are planned for the weekend of June 28 and 29 and will continue throughout the summer. Call 206-855-4300 for information and registration. Islandwood’s website is www.islandwood.org.

Tours of Islandwood begin at the “Main Center” which houses the Welcome Center, Great Hall and Administration. Running the length of this building is a 92-foot, 120-year old salvaged wood beam. Bronze imprints on the floor show the five main trees found on the site: hemlock, red cedar, big leaf maple, alder and Douglas fir. Students can trace the lines of growth on the tree-imprints and also compare the differences between the species of trees. Sustainable design is used throughout all the buildings and the main building shows examples of materials created using strawboard, recycled glass, recycled-plastic wood, recycled carpet, recycled rubber flooring, strawboard and sunflower seed hull bio fiber board.

To honor the native peoples the Great Hall has a twenty-foot red cedar house post carved in the image of a woman. The image honors the Lushootseed language and native people who spoke this language throughout the Puget Sound region. Tribal Elder Vi Hilbert was honored at the dedication of this hall and the carved pole. Salish Art will adorn the hall and some already does. The website at www.islandwood.org gives a detailed account of the research and history behind the design of the hall and honors Vi Hilbert and her dedication to the fostering of passing on the language, traditions and customs of the native people.

Gardeners will be inspired by the organic culinary herb and vegetable garden. The anti-deer fencing is decorative and effective. Cottage stones form the raised beds and a greenhouse extends the growing season to all twelve months. The fans, heaters, shade cloth and other greenhouse accoutrements are monitored and run by a computerized

system. Little and Lewis created the huge cabbage rose fountain at the garden's entrance and also the Morel mushroom outdoor sink for washing hands and vegetables. A cistern is used to water most of the vegetable garden and several types of cistern systems can be found throughout the property.

Most activities onsite involve kids or families. Kids were consulted to help determine the design of the buildings and the features throughout Islandwood. Kids didn't want any buildings "named after dead people." They also wanted the art building to be anything but "square and sterile." A duckblind camouflaged with vertical twigs nearly floats over the pond and marsh where nesting boxes abound awaiting woodducks. A treehouse looks over a woody meadow and bog. A suspension bridge beckons exploration. An old millworkers house gives glimpses of days gone by. Future plans include a fire lookout tower from the Mt. Rainier area. Kids can step back in history to learn up about the past while stimulating their imaginations and creativity.

Near the end of my tour Volunteer Coordinator, Cyndie Wingren, showed me the "Living Machine." This is an on-site treatment system providing tertiary treatment of wastewater. Reclaimed water is used for low-flush toilets and potential landscape irrigation. It's all housed in a green house with a bioswale, water features and tropical plants. Cindy introduced me to the small resident tree frog. I could tell she really enjoys her job. Cyndie said, "I saw this little green frog on my own tour here and it's what made me want to come work at the center." I could certainly understand her enthusiasm for the center after my tour too. I want to quit my day job and go play in the greenhouse and kitchen garden all day.