

Salem Enlists Neighborhoods To Keep Park Budget in Line

Nineteen neighborhood groups help plant ivy in medians, pull weeds by hand, pick up litter, and plant trees.

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Dealing with cutbacks is part of life for Frank Bellinghausen. With a budget that has continually weathered cut after cut and a staff reduction of from 68 permanent employees six years ago to 45, the parks superintendent for the city

of Salem, OR, was running out of ways to keep the quality of services he provided at an acceptable level.

One of the ways he decided to stem the tide of his ebbing budget, Bellinghausen's department became involved in the city's Self Help Project. The Project lets neighborhood groups get involved

in the work of keeping their neighborhood in good shape. It saves the city time and some expense and offers the residents a quicker way of getting things done in their particular neighborhood.

This summer, Bellinghausen had three projects under way with four completed. Residents help with planting ivy in medians, hand weed pulling, planting trees and litter pick-up. Salem has 19 neighborhood associations.

"It has its problems, but it works," said Bellinghausen who endorses the project enthusiastically. "We live within the resources we have and where we can, we seek non-governmental support. We're reaching more and more to the volunteer aspect."

After a neighborhood's proposal is accepted by city council, the city provides the funds and the neighborhood provides the labor.

Working with and within a combined city and county \$1,900,000 parks' budget consumes much of Bellinghausen's time. (Another \$100,000 to \$200,000 is budgeted for construction.) He admits budget bureaucracy can be time consuming and tiresome. All budgeting is done through the city's budget



Frank Bellinghausen, parks superintendent for the City of Salem.



Tree trimming and shredding in one of Salem's many city parks.

committee, composed of 9 city council members and an equal number of citizens.

"There's a lot of red tape," Bellinghausen said. "I have to go through three budget committee hearings a year."

The department's greatest task is maintaining the turf and trees. In 1979, the department cared for 976 acres. This year that acreage has climbed to 1,644.

"We know how to do the work, but the budget curtails us," Bellinghausen said. "We have had no uniform application of herbicides for the past five years and have no budget for fertilizing in 1983. While the cutbacks continue, the demand and use of the turf in all areas is up. We can't reduce mowing any further without disturbing play."

The city has multi-use fields for baseball, softball and soccer and has a four-field softball complex in the middle of the fairgrounds. "When it gets to be state fair time, I have to schedule crews to go in and take down the backstops," Bellinghausen said.

Even with the cutbacks, Salem has had its share of recognition and awards, including being named Tree City, U.S.A. for the past seven years by the Arbor Foundation (The city of Salem alone has more than 60,000 street trees) and being named an All-American city for municipalities of its size for 1961 and 1983. "The city has done well to promote its parks with the resources it has," he said.

To make his division more efficient, Bellinghausen contracts out some of the maintenance on the older city parks so that his crew can handle the newer areas. He has developed a "program budgeting system" where the work areas in the city are divided up and cataloged so that an orderly and efficient maintenance schedule can be followed.

The city of Salem has neighborhood "mini-parks" which are usually small plots with play equipment on them. The larger community parks have regulation



A city worker does edging around the Salem Civic Center.

ball fields and in some cases, tennis courts. Large urban parks such as the Minto-Brown Island Park & Wildlife Refuge, only five minutes from the heart of downtown Salem, has jogging and bike trails and observation areas.

Bellinghausen has a serious erosion problem to deal with along the Willamette River in the refuge and will work with the Army Corps of Engineers to correct it.

"We are reaching more and more for volunteer help."

The equipment for the parks and recreation department is rented from a city equipment pool. In some cases, Bellinghausen has found it more cost and time efficient, rather than tying up his rented equipment, to contract out certain work such as mowing and tree trimming.

Manhattan ryegrass is predominant in the city's older parks. Now, Bellinghausen said, he uses a Derby/Manhattan mix. More than 400 acres are irrigated automatically.

He is also having a reoccurrence of Oak pit scale."Up until two years ago, we had it under control, then the budget was cut and we couldn't afford preventive maintenance anymore."

Bellinghausen has a parks supervisor who is responsible for the maintenance section and who oversees four foremen; and a Foreman II who heads the repair and construction section and also cares for three pools owned by the school district. Nine craftsmen work for him.

"A lot of my job is to pave the way for other people to get their jobs done," said Bellinghausen, referring to the governmental channels he must go through. But, he says, he is used to it and his past work experience shows it.

Prior to coming to Salem, Bellinghausen worked for 16 years for the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation. He was a park ranger and became the Statewide Ranger Training Coordinator at Asilamar, assisting in training all new park rangers in the state.

Besides working for the Forest Service, he was a State Parks Supervisor and an Area Manager. He has worked in Squaw Valley, Marin County, Samuel Taylor State Park, Point Reyes and was involved in the early stages of the Old Town San Diego State Historical Park renovation. In those 16 years, he made 13 household moves.

"It was just getting to be too much," he said, "and I wanted to get out of the law enforcement end of it."

When he came to Salem in 1972, he restructured the Parks Division. One month after he started his new job, he became involved in the Pacific Northwest Park and Recreation Management school. "My department has managed to meet the day-to-day challenges and avoid suffering too much," Bellinghausen explained. "We haven't had to run around and put out 'brush fires' because of the support of the community and elected officials." **WTT**