

NANCY LEVINE: ESTABLISHING ROOTS IN HER NEIGHBORHOOD

Heritage and Evergreen Circle Member Dr. Nancy Levine had an incredible impact on her entire neighborhood's tree canopy, an effort that began with a single tree in her front yard.

A large red maple needed to be removed from the sidewalk of her Highland Park home in 2007. Disappointed to see the old tree come down, she asked the city forestry department if they were going to replace it. They told her that they only had staff and resources to cut down trees interfering with powerlines and sidewalks. In fact, they hadn't planted a tree in over 20 years! Determined to replace it herself, she quickly learned that it was quite a process to purchase a tree and get approval from the city to plant it near the street. After researching other options, she discovered a much easier solution and applied for a street tree through Pittsburgh's TreeVitalize program. TreeVitalize Pittsburgh, launched in 2008, is a partnership among WPC, Tree Pittsburgh, Allegheny County Parks, the City of Pittsburgh and the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The program conducts free widescale tree plantings with community involvement in neighborhoods throughout Allegheny and neighboring counties. Special attention is given to planting the right type of tree in locations to avoid outgrowing the space or growing into power lines, among other considerations.

Nancy had already been very familiar with the Conservancy through the community gardens program. After working as a family doctor in New York, she moved to Pittsburgh in 1992 to take on the role of Director of Family Practice Residencies at West Penn Hospital. She volunteered with a group of colleagues who planted the Highland Park Bridge flower garden each year for more than a decade. She also became a member of the Conservancy during this time.

After working through the initial TreeVitalize application process to get trees planted on her street, Nancy took it a step further and decided to help reforest Highland Park. For the next seven years, not only did she complete and submit all of the applications for street trees in Highland Park, but she also mobilized large teams of volunteers for all of the plantings and even created the schedule for tree care and pruning. She became a volunteer Tree Tender, and recruited many others to do the same. Tree tenders participate in a workshop to learn how to plant, monitor and care for the street trees to ensure their survival. All in all, due to her applications, more than 500 trees were planted in Highland Park! Even more impressive is that during all of that time, only two trees did not survive.

To illustrate her dedication, Nancy shared a story about finishing a tree application on her way to catch a flight to Mexico, working furiously to meet the deadline while stuck in standstill traffic on the 31st Street Bridge. Luckily, she submitted the application in the nick of time and still caught her flight. And her application was approved.




Nancy Levine at a Conservancy event at Fallingwater

She credits her passion for conservation to her love of nature, which she traces back to a child growing up in Europe, primarily England and Spain. She has always been fascinated with exploring the natural world, and cites Rachel Carson as her childhood heroine. It's an interesting twist that she found herself moving to Carson's hometown as an adult.

Now retired from the hospital, she has more time to enjoy biking, kayaking and swimming. She is very active with Bike Pittsburgh and also sits on the board of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. Nancy decided to include the Conservancy in her estate plans because she feels very strongly about all of the work the Conservancy does, but of course, trees are her true passion.

"I feel climate change is the biggest existential crisis facing us today. Aside from all of us making big changes and sweeping legislation, I believe the best way to combat climate change is by planting more trees."

Ultimately, she hopes her current gifts and future planned gift enable the Conservancy to "keep doing what we're doing, and more of it: planting trees, cleaning up water and educating the next generations on the importance of this work." 



A Reimagined Space for Everyone

A garden is a different place from season to season and year to year. Sometimes gardens take an entirely different direction than intended, and sometimes they get tired and need to be rejuvenated.

A group of residents from the Pittsburgh neighborhood of Manchester recognized that their local community garden, the Page Street Vegetable Garden, had become overgrown and difficult to tend. WPC had helped establish the garden in the 1980s on three vacant city lots. For the next four decades, residents shared the space, growing vegetables and enjoying a bit of quiet in nature in the middle of the city. Yet eventually the edges blurred with vines, the pathways were choked with weeds that grew into the beds, and two trees of heaven, an invasive species, grew large enough to cast the garden into shade. It simply needed to be refurbished.

The garden has interesting multigenerational connections: the founder of the garden, Michelle Jones, reached out to WPC for help. Her daughter Tyi-Sanna belongs to the sorority that cares for WPC's Frankstown Avenue and Bennett Street community garden in Homewood. Another founding gardener, 95-year-old Manchester resident Lois McCullough, was also involved in the garden's renewal. They hoped to reimagine this space to benefit the broader community, especially the students of Conroy Early Childhood Center, a Pittsburgh Public School (PPS) located across the street where Ms. McCullough's granddaughter, Candace Hall, works as a classroom assistant.



Students from Conroy Early Childhood Center planting the first raised beds.

Conroy serves nearly 200 students from the ages of five through 21 who require life skills support, autistic support and disability support. Conroy teaches independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning, recreation and money management, which are not only skill-building, but help them to move confidently in the world. For most of these children, the terrain of a typical garden makes it an impossible space to navigate, let alone participating in planting and tending the space.

With these students in mind and with generous foundation support from Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust and Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, WPC worked with J. Frank Studios to redesign the Page Street garden with accessibility and visual



Before: The Page Street Vegetable Garden in 2021, though still being tended, was in need of a refresh.



After: The rejuvenated garden on its grand opening day in October 2023.

interest as the primary goals. Some of the specially designed features include a wide, meandering 2,080-square-foot ADA-accessible pathway of recycled rubber to allow wheelchairs to access the garden beds. There are eight planter gardens raised three feet above the ground to accommodate wheelchairs and an additional seven garden beds. Other elements include a weather station with a thermometer, barometer and rain gauge. There are 30 feet of curved benches, native trees and more than 400 native shrubs and perennials. Pittsburgh Water and Sewage Authority also provided a new water access.

Giant Eagle is sponsoring the garden and it will be managed by community members, who will choose what they want to plant. Other local partners, Bidwell Training Center, Manchester Academic Charter School and City Connections CCAC Campus (a PPS community-based program for young adults with disabilities), also helped refurbish the garden and will use it for their programs.

The garden, completed this fall, is a bright, open and optimistic space surrounded by a rainbow picket fence. WPC and PPS held a grand opening in late October and children from Conroy spread throughout the garden and were encouraged to explore, dig into the dirt and plant. Community members, including several people who tended the garden in the 1980s, also attended the grand opening. The garden was filled with smiles, hugs, and the buzz of conversation and laughter. It was a truly happy revitalization for a neighborhood tradition, a garden given new purpose and life. 🌿



Students from City Connections helped to enliven the fence along the perimeter of the garden.

With Gratitude for Our Heritage Circle Members

Thank you to our Heritage Circle members, who have included the Conservancy in their estate plans. For many decades, legacy gifts from Heritage Circle members have significantly advanced the Conservancy's mission of protecting forests and waterways, planting trees and gardens and caring for Fallingwater.

We're grateful to all of the Heritage Circle Members listed below, and a special welcome to our newest members (indicated by an asterisk).

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If you are interested in including the Conservancy in your estate plans or have already done so, contact Julie Holmes, senior director of development, at **412-586-2312** or **jholmes@paconserve.org** for more information.



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Join us for WPC's
Members' Day and
Annual Meeting at Bear
Run Nature Reserve!

Saturday, May 4

8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

*Look for your invitation
in the mail this spring.*



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Contact Julie Holmes at 412-586-2312 or jholmes@paconserve.org
for more details and a personalized illustration.



Wolf Creek