

# An innovative approach to trees, landscaping, homebuilding

**Cynthia Orlando, ODF Agency Affairs Specialist and certified arborist**

A newer community located off of Madrona and Fairview in South Salem is garnering praise for its use of green building standards.

The National Association of Home Builders singled out Pringle Creek Community in 2006 for its Land Development of the Year award; Salem's mayor, Janet Taylor, has said that she sees the project as "an opportunity to do something innovative that will put us on the map nationally."

Among the site's many earth-friendly attributes:

- eighty percent of the site's existing trees were preserved during development
- 35 percent of the land is set aside as open space, parks, plazas and gardens
- the new development also boasts the largest residential use of pervious asphalt in the country.

The pervious asphalt is an important feature – it allows 90 percent of all rainwater to infiltrate on-site to the aquifer, thereby protecting local rivers and streams. Pervious asphalt notwithstanding, "our trees are our most effective stormwater management tool," says James Santana, Director of Community Development at Pringle Creek.

## Trees preserved during development

The site's commitment to mature tree retention – an astounding 80 percent of the site's trees were preserved during development – is another important feature. "Retaining existing trees on a development site is often more valuable than planting new trees," says ODF's Urban and Community Program Director, Paul Ries. "Mature trees deliver an instant sense of place – as well as a variety of environmental, economic, and social benefits that small trees take many years to provide," he adds.

The Pringle Creek community also made use of state-of-the-art solar panels, well-suited for cloudy conditions. Logs were milled on-site from older trees that couldn't be preserved, and used to build gazebos, play structures, and even the bar of a local restaurant. Bioswales – shallow depressions landscaped with plants selected for their ability to filter contaminants from runoff – are present

Photo by Cynthia Orlando, ODF



**This young Ubileen Pear tree, left, is one of 200 diverse fruit trees planted for future residents.**



**This 2-bedroom “LEED-Platinum” home – the first of its kind in Oregon – makes use of green building materials, passive solar and a shared garage.**

*Photo courtesy, Pringle Creek Community*



**This stretch of Pringle Creek, above, has already received restoration efforts by neighbors, local students, and the local watershed council, while recently restored greenhouses, below, now house native plant seedlings.**

*Photo by Cynthia Orlando, ODF*



throughout the grounds, as are rain gardens, and no herbicides or pesticides are used on-site. Adopting an all-organic land care practice helped Pringle Creek earn “Salmon Safe<sup>®</sup>” certification this past month.

Formerly the site of the 275-acre Fairview Training Center for the developmentally disabled, the land was purchased from the state of Oregon in 2002. Pringle Creek is part of a larger project spanning the entire property, which will also be developed under similar guiding principles of sustainability. Twelve of its 32 acres are set-aside as open space for small parks and community gardens.

### **Just what does building “green” mean?**

“Green” homes generally use building techniques that decrease the environmental impact of constructing a new home, and use less energy, water, and natural resources, thereby reducing the homeowner’s carbon footprint. Materials used in home

construction include 100 percent Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) – certified framing lumber, 100 percent wool carpets, and natural quartz counters.

Among seven diverse model homes, Pringle Creek’s 2 bedroom / 2 bath “cottage” home makes use of passive solar, natural ventilation, green building materials and a detached garage. Certified as “Leed (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-H Platinum,” it’s the first LEED-Platinum home in Oregon and only the fifth in the United States. The designation is the U.S. Green Building Council’s highest level of rating possible.

Will the trend for smaller homes continue to rise over time? “As energy prices rise, conventional suburban developments with large, inefficient houses, isolated miles from services, will become a thing of the past,” says Santana. “Smart, compact homes in mixed-use communities filled with trees and nature will be more and more desirable over time,” he adds. 🌿