

SUNNYSIDE

Neighborhood News

September 2025

SUNNYSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

SunnysidePortland.org

board@sunnysideportland.org

News from the Vice President

*By Hannah Wallace,
SNA Vice President*

Happy fall! As I write this in late August, the weather has already changed—we've had some overcast days and the cooler weather is definitely welcome. I hope you all had relaxing summers and are ready to get back to school and busy schedules!

We had a fabulous turn-out for the repainting of the Sunnyside Piazza in August. Thanks to all of you who came out for the fun day of painting and getting to know your neighbors—and catching up with neighbors who you haven't seen in a long time. I was pleased to run into several familiar faces—including our city council representative Tiffany Koyama Lane.

Thanks to all the businesses who donated food to keep us going—from Grand Central Bakery (delicious fresh pastries!) and Old Friends (strong coffee!) to Straight from New York Pizza and Nate's Oatmeal Cookies. Also thanks to Laughing Planet for refreshing lemonade and iced tea and to Will Grimm at First Forty Feet, who donated snacks. City Repair did an awesome job of keeping us organized and adhering to the paint-by-number pattern so we knew which colors to paint which petals.

Special thanks to SNA Board Member Tim Quayle, who was the project manager of this fantastic community event. He kept us focused, applied for the funding for the paint and other supplies, and solicited donations from local restaurants and cafes. We couldn't have made this happen without his leadership!

The Sunnyside Piazza was one of City Repair's first "place-making" projects—it was first painted by local residents in 2000,

without the city's permission! Since then many other neighborhoods across Portland and across the country have replicated this idea. There's even an academic paper written about our piazza—Google it.

Our first General Meeting of the fall is on Sept. 10th at 7 p.m. We'll be hearing from Molly Wallace, restorative justice facilitator at Lutheran Community Services Northwest who will be presenting on the free restorative justice services that LCSNW offers to neighborhoods. We may also have one of our City Council members at the meeting; stay tuned to our social media channels to find out who it will be.

We hope to see you there!

Getting to Know Your Neighbors

*By Hannah Wallace,
SNA Vice President*

Q&A with Jeremy Thomas, Sunnyside Environmental School 4th grade teacher

Jeremy Thomas has been a teacher at Sunnyside Environmental School (SES) for 17 years. Currently, he teaches fourth grade, which he loves. Though he doesn't live in Sunnyside, he and his wife, Amy, and daughter, Angela live just a few miles away in Rose City Park (His other daughter, Olivia, will be a sophomore at Willamette University this fall.) We talked about the history of SES, what he loves about being a teacher, and why Sunnyside is such a special neighborhood to work in.

How has Sunnyside Environmental School changed over time?

Jeremy: When I started, there were more kids who were from outside the neighborhood who had been lotteried in. Over the years it became more

Upcoming Meetings

Location details and agendas are on Sunnysideportland.org.

September

Sept. 10th:

SNA General Meeting 7:00-8:00 p.m.

SNA Board Meeting, 8:00-9:00 p.m.

Sept 15th:

Land Use and Transportation

Committee (via Zoom) 7:00-8:00 p.m.

October

Oct. 8th:

SNA Board Meeting, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

LUTC: TBD

neighborhood kids. Now it's back to a lot of kids who lottery in.

For a while there was a bit of a baby boom in the neighborhood. All of a sudden, in the 2010s there weren't very many lottery slots. It's an interesting school, in that it is a neighborhood school and it's a "focus option" school. So for some kids, it's like, "This is just my school because I live right down the street." And then there's other kids who sought out this school specifically.

Remind me of the history of SES?

Jeremy: It started out as the environmental middle school in 1995 and it was located in the Abernathy neighborhood. They eventually outgrew that space around 2004 and "Environmental Middle School" (as it was then called) was so small that the district was actually considering closing it. PPS said, "You can move into Sunnyside, but you have to be able to serve the



Jeremy Thomas, Sunnyside Environmental School 4th grade teacher

neighborhood and whatever extra slots you have, you can lottery those.” And when it became a K-8.

Which grade do you prefer teaching?

Jeremy: I taught third grade first—for 10 years, and then I’ve done seven years of fourth.

I think third, fourth and fifth—that’s my area. I like those middle ages. I think I like fourth grade more. At first I just loved third grade. I was like, “I never want to leave third grade.” And then one of the fourth grade teachers was leaving, and my principal at the time said, “You could just take your class into fourth grade.” And now I love fourth grade. I love the curriculum. They’re just a little older, so they have a little bit more of the basic skills down.

What’s your favorite part about being a teacher?

Jeremy: Gosh – so many things. I think my favorite part of teaching is the community-building that happens. It’s hard work, it’s messy work, building a community and facilitating the growth of a community. But it’s those relationships and the community-building that I find the most rewarding as a teacher.

I also really love the cyclical nature of it. Before I was a teacher I worked for the Social Security Administration and I was basically doing the same things in December that I was doing in July; the same

thing in October that I was doing in March. I love that in school, there’s a different feel. When the school year starts in September, there’s a certain energy, and then there’s a curricular flow that I take throughout the year. Winter has its feel, and spring has its feel, and then you get to summer; there’s not working over the summer, and then it starts over again. And I like that, not doing the same thing.

Speaking of seasons, remind me what events happen in the fall?

Jeremy: Every October we have a big Harvest Fair. It’s both a curricular showcase for the younger grades and a celebration of community. I don’t know if you’ve attended one before but it’s a little carnival – all kinds of little events, where the kids buy tickets and use the tickets to do different activities. There’s even a cake walk!

And there’s a dunk tank?

Which I’ve been in many times!

What about winter events?

Jeremy: In the winter there is an event called the Riparian Festival. It used to be every December, but we’ve now moved it to January. That one is more curriculum-focused. It’s for the 3rd-8th grade, where you go from room to room in the school and see all the stuff that kids have been learning over the course of the year. In the spring we do something called “student-led conferences,” where the students lead their parents on a conference of what they’ve been learning and how they’ve grown over the year.

I’ve heard that you also mentor other teachers. Is that something that you’ve always done?

Jeremy: My first student teacher is now the other fourth grade teacher, Asa Gervich. It was funny, because when I first started teaching at SES, I was only in my fourth year of teaching so I was still kind of new. Sarah Taylor—she was the founder of the school—she was a big advocate of teachers having student teachers, and having lots of trainees and interns in the school building. Not only did that provide more people to do a lot, but it also got new people who were here who have been trained at SES specifically. That has been helpful as other teachers have retired.

So my first year there, she asked, “Do you want a student teacher?” And I was like, “I’m still new. I’ve never taught third grade before. No, I cannot take on a student

teacher.” She said okay. And then, in the middle of the year, she cornered me in the office with this man that she was with and she said, “This is Asa and he’s looking for a classroom to observe and I thought yours would be perfect.” And, I couldn’t say no.

He came in to observe and he loved it. He was thinking of becoming a teacher. So when he decided to become a teacher, he worked in my room. And now we teach the same grade, which is kind of the full circle.

I’ve probably had about eight student teachers over my time at SES. I enjoy working with younger, newer teachers, because I believe it’s a really important profession and job, and I want to encourage people in learning how to do this job.

SES is a really great place to learn how to be a teacher. There are so many schools where the curriculum is very canned. We create so much of our own curriculum here, which is what I was taught when I was in college—and what many are taught in grad school. At Sunnyside, you get an opportunity to do that. And that’s not the case at every school.

What’s your favorite thing about Sunnyside as a neighborhood?

Jeremy: I just love how vibrant Sunnyside is. There’s so much life! And you’ve got so many small businesses. Throughout my years of teaching at SES, I’ve been able to develop relationships with some of the businesses. When I taught third grade, we did a whole neighborhood storyline and we went into different businesses and interviewed people.

It’s also a bike-friendly neighborhood. I like the fact that we are on Salmon Street, and we do a whole unit on salmon, you know? And I just love that it’s an old neighborhood, so there’s so much history there.

There are certain neighborhoods in Portland and definitely in the U.S., where you walk around and can’t get a sense of the place. There’s a sameness to them. Sunnyside is so unique—it definitely has its own feel.

Finally, it’s a very engaged neighborhood. When I first started teaching at Sunnyside, my wife got a horrible case of pneumonia, and ended up being hospitalized for nine days. And this was within three weeks of me starting at Sunnyside in 2008. At the time, Olivia was two and our younger daughter was six months old. So here I have a six month old and a two year old, my wife’s in the hospital, and I’m starting this new job at

Sunnyside. The way the community rallied was really amazing. Without my asking, people started delivering food, saying they could watch the kids. There was a parent who was a naturopath, and when my wife got out of the hospital, she came by with all these herbs. That happens throughout my time at Sunnyside. It's not just Sunnyside Environmental School—it's the neighborhood as well. I've seen just such a community feel in that neighborhood. Probably one of the best examples of that is the Sunnyside Piazza, which has always been such an important landmark in the neighborhood that represents people coming together.

Anything about SES that you wish you could change?

Jeremy: Sometimes I wish we had more space. We're bounded in that city block. Sometimes we have very ambitious goals when it comes to gardening and what we would like to do with the space.

News From Sunnyside Environmental School (SES)

By Sarah Centerwall

member-at-large and SES parent

PPS students are back in school and this means that SES is once again buzzing with energy. There are many fun end of summer/fall activities happening at this time: the Run, Walk, Move fundraiser, SES field studies, and the Community Social.

Run, Walk, Move

What is your favorite way to move - walk, run, or dance? Students at Sunnyside get to choose for this yearly fall fundraiser. The fundraiser, which this year will be on October 8th, is a celebration of movement. Kids can walk or run laps around the school. If that doesn't strike their fancy, they can hang out on the black top and dance the morning away. All the while, they are raising money for the school's gardening program and field study program. Do you know any Sunnyside students? Anyone can sponsor their move points. You can pay by the lap, minutes danced/moved, or offer a fixed sum. SES provides students with opportunities that many other PPS schools don't offer such as the gardening program, field studies and many other community-based initiatives. Those programs need funding to survive and this is one of the many ways that students get out there to help support the school. Anyone can donate, so please consider helping our school.

Field Studies

You may find yourself sitting on a Trimet bus and see a large group of middle school students waiting at a bus stop on Belmont or Hawthorne. Your first thought might be, "Oh no!" but you will find yourself pleasantly surprised by these responsible and respectful students. They use public transportation for many of their weekly field studies. Not only is public transportation better for the environment, but it teaches our students how to explore the city and represent their community in a positive way.

The field studies provide students with place-based learning that coincides with their environmental studies and it is a keystone of their learning. They take the responsibility of treating the other travelers and bus drivers with respect. I don't think anyone will find themselves on a quieter bus than one filled with 50 middle school students from Sunnyside Environmental School. It is truly magical. They are often on their way to study our local rivers, geological landscapes, forests, and waterways. So, next time you see them coming don't frown your brow, give them a smile.

Community Social

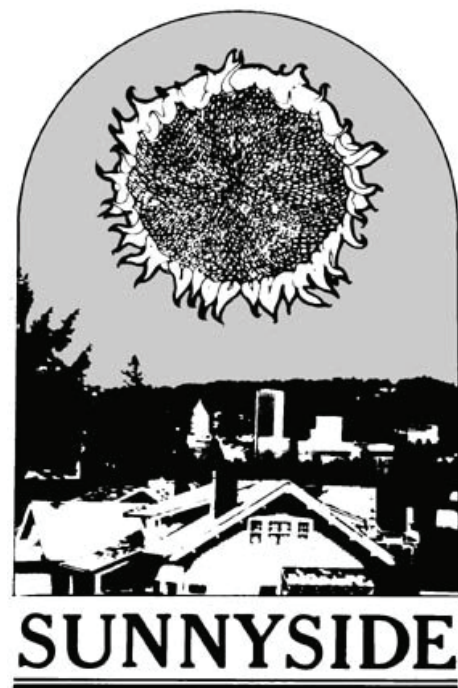
One of the amazing things about SES is the focus on community-building. We see this within the school, among the students, and between the families. It takes a lot of volunteering to make everything happen at SES and this creates a close knit group of like-minded people. In that vein, the school is holding a Community Social for Sunnyside students and families on September 5th. There will be staff and students there to share information about various school events, after school programs, fundraisers, and different ways parents can get involved throughout the year. There will be SES merch there as well! This is another great opportunity for families to get together at the beginning of the school year.

SES's Garden and Park

Please remember the grounds will no longer be open to the public during school hours starting August 26, 2025, but feel free to come by and use our outdoor spaces before 8:30 a.m. and after 3:30 p.m. Part of the gardening experience is learning how to harvest and use what was planted in the spring, so while the public is free to continue admiring the garden, we ask that you leave the tasting and harvesting to the students once they are

back in school. All dogs must be on leash in the park and please remember to clean up after your canine companions.

Have questions about SES? Email sunnysideenvironmentalnews@gmail.com and maybe I'll answer them in a future column!



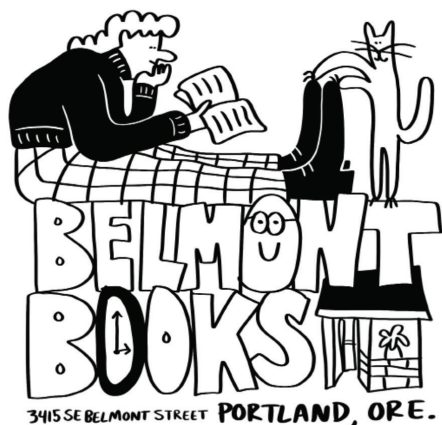
The Sunnyside Neighborhood News is published monthly by the Sunnyside Neighborhood Association.

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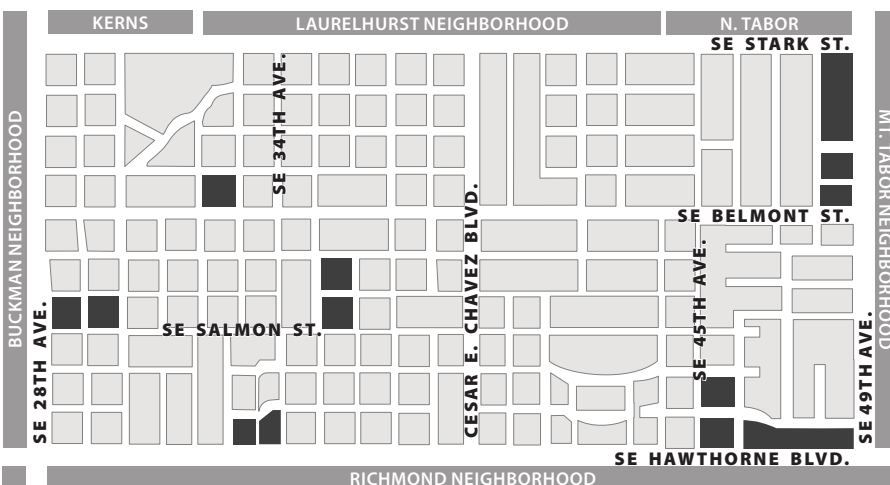
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Sunnyside Neighborhood 'Gap Map'

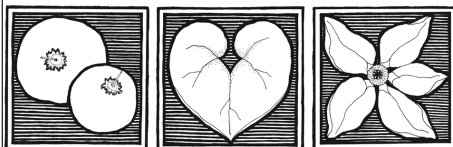
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