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# Can we paint the fire hydrants in our neighborhood? Why not, city says

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By Shannon L. Cheesman, KATU.com Producer/Reporter June 30, 2011

PORTLAND, Ore. - A North Portland neighborhood has a little more color and looks a little nicer thanks to a group of volunteers who gave up a Saturday to paint over 100 fire hydrants.

The project was the brainchild of Vicki Ezell, Chair of the [Portsmouth Neighborhood Association](#), who came up with the idea several months ago.

"I thought - what can we do that would actually spiff up the neighborhood? And painting hydrants was one thing," Ezell said.

So she sent an email to [City Commissioner Randy Leonard](#) asking how she and volunteers might be able to help. That email made the rounds and the city got in contact with Ezell to talk.

"And then I met with four people from the [Water Bureau](#) and they said 'what a great idea!' " she said.

Ezell's initial plan didn't quite fly, though.

"They had hoped that they could paint the hydrants in kind of a decorative fashion," said Sarah Bott, the Portland Water Bureau's Senior Community Outreach Representative. "But we really need to make sure that there's a very strict code about the color of the hydrants. They need to be orange so the firefighters can identify them."



Ezell didn't argue about the color. After all, it makes perfect sense that firefighters need to be able to find a hydrant quickly in an emergency. And so the plan moved forward.

Now we've all heard that you never know if something is possible until you ask and this project is a fine example of that adage. In fact, no one had ever approached the city before with an idea to paint fire hydrants.

"It's the very first time in the Water Bureau's history that anyone's asked us," said Bott. "So if any other neighborhoods want to do it - I mean, we do it anyway, but if people notice graffiti tags or something like that and they want to do something quicker about it, contact us."

Yes, an idea you bring to the city really *can* turn into something. Fast forward a few months to Saturday, June 25 and Ezell's idea had become a reality. Volunteers gathered at her home that day to meet with workers from the Portland Water Bureau who were there to give them instructions, do some of the prep work and provide supplies. And while the ultimate goal was to get the painting done, the project provided something much more valuable for the community - the chance to bond.

"Mostly I wanted to do it so I could meet my neighbors," said volunteer Oceana Seer.

"It's more about building our community than anything," said Ezell, pictured below with her granddaughter.



"You can see how much fun everybody is having just being together," she said the day of the project. "And all these people - probably as many didn't know each other, as knew each other. It's a great way to get a community together."

The picture below shows all the volunteers who showed up ready to paint. You can see there were all ages helping out for the community effort.



Some of the volunteers came from nearby [Bridge Meadows](#), a fairly new program that matches at-risk children - specifically foster kids - with elders who can help guide them and provide a sense of stability in their turbulent lives.

We spoke with James Cunningham, one of the elders at Bridge Meadows, about the program. He used to work with adults in drug and alcohol counseling and now enjoys working with kids in his retirement years.

"It's just really a good thing for me," he said. "The place is nice, the people are nice and it's like a good retirement thing for me. It gives me something to do and plus, because I'm trying to write my memoirs, this gives me a chance to be able to do that too."

In addition to helping out kids, the folks at Bridge Meadows want to stay active in their community and they were more than happy to help paint fire hydrants for a day.

"I'll volunteer for whatever I can do," Cunningham said. "And it's good."

*Bridge Meadows was recently featured in [The Oregonian](#) if you would like to learn more about what they do -- [Leveraging Grandma's moxie for the benefit of foster kids](#).*