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“Make tribute to your mom last forever”

Before a brain tumor stole her away, Maxine E. McCloskey wanted to find a way to honor her girlfriend and kindred spirit, the late Maurine Neuberger.

Both were pioneering Oregon women who wouldn't allow their gender to negate the promise of their destinies. Neuberger served three terms in the Oregon House in the '50s. During her years in the U.S. Senate in the '60s, she wrote the feds' first cigarette warning label and supported legalizing abortion.

McCloskey was an internationally known environmental activist who had a passion for protecting whales. During the '60s and '70s, she helped energize the movement to protect habitats on the high seas.

McCloskey, who at one time worked for Neuberger, kept pictures of her in an apron, with spoon and bowl, demonstrating to fellow legislators how hard housewives had to work to add color to white butter substitutes. Thanks in part to Neuberger, yellow color is now added to margarine.

So when McCloskey heard about Portland State University's Walk of the Heroines, she took the lead to raise money for a garden and bench in Neuberger's honor. But she soon discovered that the folks most familiar with Neuberger's legacy were dead.

"It's sort of a generational thing," says McCloskey's daughter, Laura King. "Many of her friends and supporters have already passed away."

Still, McCloskey dedicated her days to writing letters, licking envelopes and calling potential donors.

"She was the power behind that campaign," says Holly Huillet Locke, coordinator of PSU's heroines project.

"She worked tirelessly for her friend."

Yet life got in the way. McCloskey was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She died April 14, two weeks before her 79th birthday. But she met her goal of raising the required \$27,000.

"We were able to celebrate that before she died," says Huillet Locke.

So Neuberger will get her garden and bench. And McCloskey will get a large magnolia tree planted in her name. It will greet visitors at the entrance to the Walk of the Heroines, where the South Park Blocks meets the downtown campus.

"We feel that was a very fitting way to honor my mother," King says. "She has a lot of firsts, and she's done a lot of terrific things."

King didn't stop there. She also raised \$15,000 to build a garden along the walk to honor not only her mother but also women of all religions whose lives affirm the value of their faith.

When complete, the \$5 million project will offer art, gardens, naming walls, water features and stone benches engraved with literary quotes. And you can immortalize women, living or dead, Oregon resident or not.

Rather than renaming a street or a bridge, this might even be the best place to park city Commissioner Dan Saltzman's idea of paying tribute to civil-rights activist Rosa Parks.

Honorees, so far, include Matsu Ito, a mail-order bride; Emma Fofanah, a Sierra Leone immigrant; and Kathryn Harrison, chair of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde in Oregon.

The list also reflects well-known names, such as former Gov. Barbara Roberts, former Portland Mayor Vera Katz and socialite Elizabeth Hirsch, who is credited with the idea of putting the red nose on the then-White Stag reindeer sign in Old Town.

"It can really be anybody that has been meaningful in your life," says Huillet Locke. "That was the whole idea to weave these stories together and show how they interlink."

For a donation of \$200 and up, the women honored will have their photos and biographies included in an interactive kiosk and on the heroines' Web site. (For info, call 503-725-8188 or check out www.woh.pdx.edu.)

"It's more than just a database of life stories," King says. "It's a researchable historical archive. It's really going to be a significant piece of Oregon history."

It's also a memorable tribute to a mother, sister, volunteer or friend -- any woman you happen to love.

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