

19th Ave NW at 89th St

Plumis family leaves community legacy of open space

By Catherine Justis

NEWS-TRIBUNE

Stroll along 19th Avenue Northwest to where the street descends into a hillside and just stand there and listen for a moment. You might be overwhelmed by the noise—not of traffic or construction, but of the loud twittering of dozens of birds.

What at first glance might look like a vacant lot full of overgrown blackberry bushes is a little bit of heaven for birds, wildlife and the proud neighbors who want to keep it that way.

And a sign that declares the land an official open-space acquisition means, in all likelihood, they'll be able to.

It's officially called the Crown Hill natural area, but to folks who live nearby it's known as Plumis' Garden or Plumis Park, after George Plumis who, with his wife, Thodora, bought the property and the adjoining house as well as a lot to the south in 1940. They left it all to their children when they passed on.

Plumis planted cherry and apple trees and blackberries here. He also planted a victory garden during World War II and raised chickens, goats and sheep.

"It was his hobby," says George's son, Paul Plumis. "He ran a tavern, so he worked nights and had his days for the garden."

Paul looks around the place where he built forts and played games as a boy, pointing out the site of the old chickenhouse and the spot where the vegetables grew. He is accompanied by his young son, who is named for his grandfather.

The property slopes down steeply from Northwest 89th Street, the hillside covered with trees. Blackberry bushes full of birds line the 19th Avenue side, and a path leads down to an open, grassy glade.

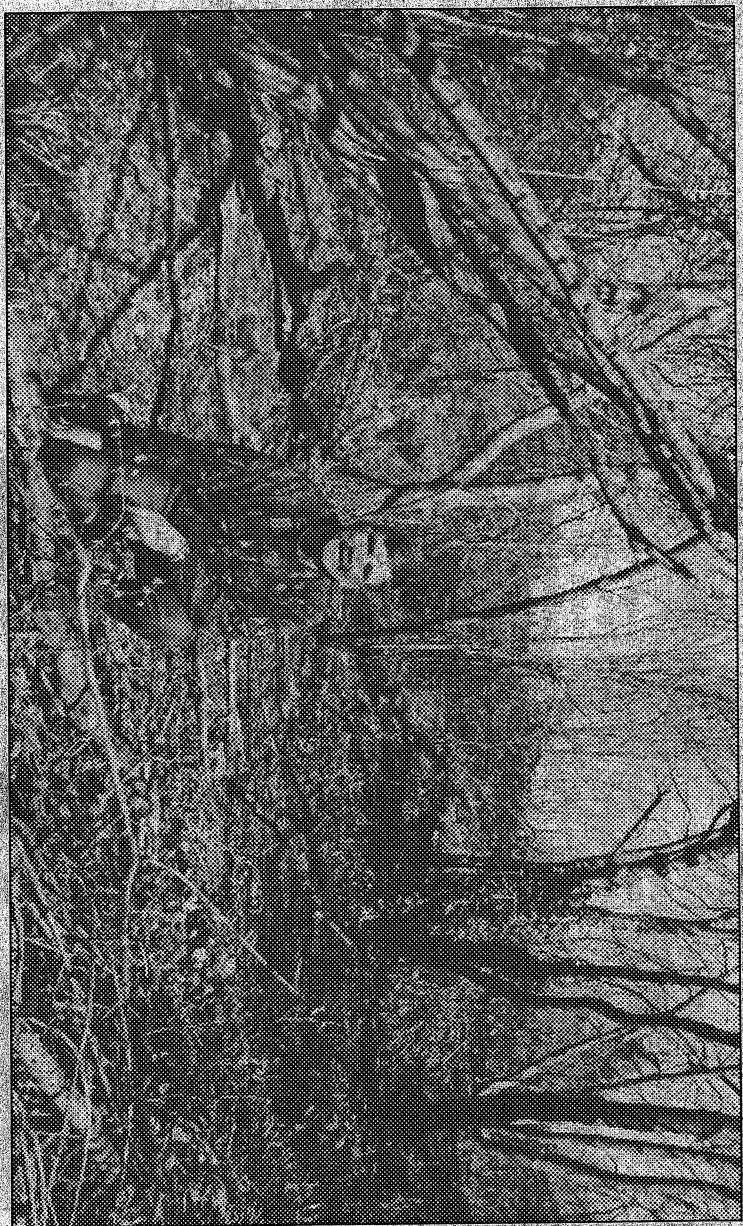
"A man on Mary Avenue used to come down with a team of horses to plow," Paul says.

When the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation asked the neighborhood for suggested sites for possible inclusion in its Open Space Program, the old Plumis property was a natural choice, according to Nancy Gruber, who helped push for its acquisition.

In May 1997, the city purchased four continuous lots from the Plumis estate, totaling .37 acres, for \$237,000.

"We probably could have gotten more for the property from developers but when the city said they were interested, I was delighted," Plumis says. "It's view property."

he adds, "You can see the water and the mountains from here," referring to a slice of Puget Sound in the distance.



Paul Plumis kneels on land where his father, George, once planted trees and tilled a victory garden.

Bruce Savadow/staff

Plumis thinks the open-space acquisition is great.

"It's a nice way to preserve some of the green space in Ballard," he says. "There's not much of it."

King County Councilman Larry Phillips agrees. "There's a tremendous shortage of open space in Ballard due to old-fashioned develop-

ment in the past," he says. "School yards doubled as parks back then."

According to Phillips, the process of acquiring open space in a neighborhood begins with the community making a list of available lots. The funds to buy the properties come from two sources: the 1989 bond measure for open space, which has

been mostly spent, and the King County Conservation Futures Tax, which generates about \$8 million annually.

"That sounds like a lot of money," says Phillips, "until you consider the price of real estate in King County."

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OVER

Open Space: Plumis Park

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A group of neighbors who live near "Plumis Park" meet regularly now to discuss its future.

"It's an exciting opportunity for the neighborhood to manage a resource like this," Gruber says.

"The city wants us to manage it."

Tentative plans include a small nature trail, some benches and perhaps even a couple of outdoor chess tables. There is also a lot of trash that has accumulated over the years that needs to be picked up.

The primary concern however, is that the bird and wildlife habitat remain unharmed. Some birds are able to use the park as a resting spot on flights between Golden Gardens and Woodland Park. Others nest there. Raccoons and opossums have also been seen there.

"I'm amazed at how the neighborhood has pulled together around the park," Gruber says. "We had approximately 50 people at the last meeting."

She adds that this is especially impressive considering the neighborhood is now home to a diverse population that includes singles, families with young children and older people. "You wouldn't think that people would care so much about such a little park, but they do," she says.

For more information: 783-8784

← Nancy Gruber

8548 20th Ave