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January 20, 2012

The landscape architect behind one of Boise's most beautiful parks

- Idaho Statesman

If you moved to Boise after October 1989, you may not know about the near-magical transformation of a horse pasture into our most beautiful park.

This lovely park, complete with mature shrubs, large trees and a wetland nature preserve, didn't happen overnight, but it seemed like it did. It was started in 1988 and opened in 1989, a peaceful sanctuary for humans and wildlife.

That is Kathryn Albertson park, the 41-acre evergreen-jeweled haven in the chain of parks along the Boise River, a four-season resort of quiet beauty. Donated land, a remarkable man and a caring community created this peaceful nature preserve near the city's center.

J.A. and Kathryn Albertson had deeded the land to the city of Boise in 1979, provided it would be developed into a park within 10 years. Their home on the bench overlooked the property on Americana that had been a gravel pit prior to being the dumpsite of tons of "clean fill" (including concrete debris) and then leveled into a horse pasture.

It remained undeveloped until 1988, so Albertson hired his friend Hansgeorg Borbonus, a landscape architect educated in Germany and owner of Cloverdale Nursery, to develop the park. By then Borbonus had lived in Boise for more than 20 years, so he knew the soil, climate and growing conditions here.

He conferred with the Boise parks director who said the city didn't need another park like Municipal, Julia Davis or Ann Morrison, so he designed the new park to be a refuge for walkers and wildlife. No cars allowed.

His preliminary design included placement of trees and shrubs but not the types of trees or shrubs. Albertson loved the design.

Borbonus publicly requested donations of shrubs and trees, and received thousands of offers from Boiseans. Some trees were too large, and the offer not taken. Borbonus and his crew could judge by the caliper (trunk diameter) of trees the size of the vital root spread. If the species and size were acceptable, folks were asked to take photos and send them in. Borbonus then relied on his education, experience and artistic taste to choose shrubs and trees for placement in the best locations and combinations.

He sent out crews to dig holes in the prospective park (using earth-moving equipment to cope with the concrete fill), and a giant clamshell digger borrowed from a friend in Portland (operated by the Portland fellow who was expert at operating it) to dig out and haul trees.

Donors received receipts so they could deduct donations on their tax returns. After the park was completed, they found they could "visit" their donated tree, perhaps planted when a child was born but not planted in an appropriate location for mature growth.

Borbonus' crew also rescued and transplanted many shrubs — Persian lilacs and evergreens — that would have been sacrificed for widening the Connector, placing them in select locations in the developing park.

Mrs. Lloyd Klingensmith wanted to contribute something, and asked what Borbonus could do with \$50,000. He said they didn't have a fountain; she said she loved fountains, so that was her contribution.

Borbonus' crews built two gazebos, popular for resting places and for small weddings, and almost two miles of walking paths. Wetland and nesting areas for waterfowl were left undisturbed. Dogs are prohibited in this park between March 1 and June 30 to prevent their harassing nesting birds.

Attesting to the park's beauty are the artists who carry paints and easels into the park, settling in to paint different tree groups, shrubs and vistas. Many also push elderly friends, relatives or patients through the park in wheelchairs, giving them a pleasant outing. Workers often take a refreshing stroll in the park during their lunch breaks. Borbonus' plant selections ensured year-round beauty in the park, not an easy task in our climate.

Boiseans immediately loved their new park. Professionals loved the finished product, too, for Borbonus won the 1992 American Society of Landscape Architects' Grand award for Kathryn Albertson Park, a national honor.

This evidence of Borbonus' work is one that most Boiseans see at least a part of almost every day as they drive along Americana to or from the city's center. Citizens were so enthusiastic about donating landscape items, he thinks it would work for future parks as well.

Borbonus came to Boise in 1958, sponsored by Fentress Kuhn, former manager of the Bogus Basin ski area. A native of Dortmund, Germany, Borbonus had been educated in horticulture in Germany. There he was known by his full first name, Hansgeorg, but Americans have trouble pronouncing it correctly, so he goes by Hans.

In Boise, he started a career from scratch, hauling composted manure in a trailer to dress lawns in the North End. In 1965, he bought an 80-acre farm on Cloverdale Road and established Cloverdale Nursery, even though Boise friends advised him it was "too far out of town" for a business.

He traded 40 acres of the property for land on South Cloverdale Road he could use for a sod farm. That trade and subsequent purchases boosted his South Cloverdale acreage to over 1,400 acres.

Over the years he's designed and built many large and small jobs, winning another national award for landscaping around the Intermountain Gas Co. headquarters. Near the turn of this century he took on another huge job: designing and landscaping a championship golf course, Falcon Crest, on some of his land off Cloverdale Road. He thought teenagers too young to drive (cars and golf carts) would like to play golf, so he designed a nine-hole course for beginning golfers, Robin Hood course near Falcon Crest. It also serves as an executive par 3 and par 4 course.

Tragically, his and his wife Maggie's only child, Pfc. John G. Borbonus, was killed in Iraq April 12, 2007, at the age of 19, protecting fellow soldiers from an approaching explosives-laden truck. His valor was recognized by posthumous awarding of the Bronze Star, the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.

He had wanted to serve his country before attending college, so joined the Army Rangers after graduation from Boise High School in 2005.

After his son's death the elder Borbonus built another nine-hole course near Falcon Crest, naming it the Freedom course, in honor of his son. He also donated riverfront property to the Kelly water park near his second home in Donnelly, and commissioned a bronze statue of his son, now placed in that location.

Gerhard Borbonus, brother of Hansgeorg, has his own landscaping business in Boise and owns the right to mine ornamental stone from Table Rock.

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