

# How the North Slope Historic District Park Began

Julie Turner, March, 2011

By 2000, the old power sub-station at the corner of North 8<sup>th</sup> and K Streets had been mothballed for years, waiting for the contaminants from transformers to dissipate. Kelly Halligan, a K St, resident, suggested the idea for a park in that space. It was better than another apartment house, the NSHD Steering Committee agreed, but how to pay for it?

Fortunately, the City was floating a bond issue to encourage development of the Foss Waterway, and as a sweetener gave each Neighborhood Council \$750,000 to spend. Our representatives on the Council, Bill Johnston and Dan Klein, held forth at North End Council meetings until \$100,000 was designated to build a park at North 8<sup>th</sup> and K.

In 2001, the property was transferred to the City from the Utility, and Metro Parks became the developing and managing partner. The Parks Department included planning sessions with NSHD neighbors and a design was chosen. In the meantime, the Steering Committee began to think about names for the park.

## Naming the Park

Valerie Sivinski had been the “guiding force” for the formation of the Historic District when she was Tacoma’s Historic Preservation Officer during the 1990s. In 1993, she had met with a J St. group wanting to form a district, and thus set a group of residents working over the next 6 years to accomplish the goal of saving houses from demolition. Valerie’s guidance and inspiration were instrumental in helping residents persevere. She died tragically in October of 2000.

During those 6 years, Valerie was to remark, time and again, that one of the most important reasons to form an historic district in the North Slope was to “preserve the homes of many of the real people who built Tacoma” before the 1950s. She said it is great to preserve large buildings, but we get a better view of life in early Tacoma from the homes of those early residents.

The Steering Committee members wanted to name the park “Val’s Park” to honor Valerie for her invaluable help, but were precluded from doing so because of the short time since her death. When her husband, Tim McDonald, was asked to suggest a name, he came up with “North Slope Historic District Park”; it would be dedicated to Valerie and would honor one of her achievements as Preservation Officer.

Tim designed and donated a memorial marker, built of local Tenino and Wilkeson sandstone. The marker showed carved books from Valerie’s personal library. The stone was from the Marenakos Rock Center and carved by Keith Phillips of Tenino.

The park was to be named by the North End Neighborhood Council, the sponsoring agency. To ensure that Tim McDonald's choice for a name was honored, the Steering Committee gathered up about 30 North Slope residents and went to the meeting to vote. We emerged with the park named: North Slope Historic District Park!

## Dedicating the Park

On June 8, 2002, about 125 neighbors, relatives and friends of Valerie Sivinski, including city officials, attended the dedication of the new park. The sun came out just in time for the 1:30 p.m. event. Councilman Bill Evans read the city's proclamation of "Valerie Sivinski Day." Park Director Jerry Thorpe expressed Metro Park's good wishes. Tim McDonald spoke about his wife's interest in historic preservation in Tacoma. Former Historic Preservation Officers Elizabeth Anderson and Michael Sullivan related stories about Valerie and her work.

As the dedication ended, Tim unveiled the memorial and explained the various titles of the books carved there, books that represented important aspects of Valerie's life. At the base was the park name: North Slope Historic District Park.

As the crowd drifted toward the Immanuel Presbyterian Church to partake of refreshments, the little children in the group made a dash for the play equipment in the woodchip area, long occupied by an electrical sub-station, but now successfully converted to playtime and conversation for neighborhood residents and passersby.

*For additional information about the park property, see our website:  
[www.tacomanothslope.org](http://www.tacomanothslope.org)*