

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Date:** Saturday, June 20

**Time:** 1:00 PM Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

2:00 PM Community Parade to Cathedral Park Beach for a celebratory swim

**Place:** Intersection of North Willamette and North Burlington

**What:** Street closure block party with food trucks, DJ and parade

## **Willie the River Dragon to Make Permanent Debut Near Cathedral Park**

**Community-led public art installation honors Portland's river culture, creativity, and civic spirit.**

PORTLAND, OR — A bold new permanent public art installation will make its official debut in the Cathedral Park Neighborhood on June 20, as community members gather to celebrate the arrival of the River Dragon, a large-scale metal sculpture poised to become a beloved neighborhood landmark.

The citizen-led initiative was spearheaded by Jennifer Vitello, who commissioned the River Dragon to bring the legend of the Willamette River Creature to life, and whose grassroots vision evolved into the formation of the nonprofit The River Dragon Club, created to bring the striking installation to life in the heart of the Neighborhood.

Affectionately dubbed "Willie," the River Dragon honors Human Access Project Founder / Ringleader Willie Levenson, whose work over the past sixteen years has helped transform Portland's relationship with the Willamette River by advancing public access, recreation, and a broader cultural reconnection with the city's waterfront. The Human Access Project fundraised over \$1.2 million to replace the Cathedral Park swimming dock, boom line, and to remove 250 tons of concrete and 300 derelict piles from Cathedral Park Beach.

The sculpture is the creation of acclaimed metal artist Ivan McLean, a Linnton resident whose workshop at nearby Green Anchors creates large-scale sculptural works that have found homes around the world.

With the iconic St. Johns Bridge rising in the background, the River Dragon's sweeping form intentionally mirrors the bridge's graceful arch, creating a visual dialogue between Portland's industrial history, working waterfront, and the city's evolving river recreation culture.

Part maritime myth, part neighborhood mascot, the River Dragon is playful, bold, and

unmistakably Portland.

“This is the kind of project that epitomizes the independent and creative culture of the North Portland Peninsula,” said Jennifer Vitello, founder of The River Dragon Club. “It celebrates creativity, community initiative, and our deep connection to the river that defines this place.”

Beyond its artistic presence, the installation also represents thoughtful community placemaking, transforming this neighborhood greenway that has historically been a high-speed, crash-prone corridor into a more welcoming civic space while naturally encouraging traffic calming.

Following the 1:00 PM ribbon cutting and block party, attendees are invited to join a festive community parade to Cathedral Park Beach for a celebratory swim at 2:00 PM, honoring the community’s deep connection to the Willamette River and celebrating Human Access Project’s recently installed boom line protecting the Cathedral Park Swimming Dock from large floating river debris.

The public is warmly invited to attend.

To donate to The River Dragon club to help with maintenance and upkeep costs, please visit:

<https://givebutter.com/raise-the-dragon-u1dryo>

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