



Passionate Advocates for the Environment

Kay Balmer / photos by Beth Nakamura



These four activists -- an environmental science teacher, a wildlife specialist, an urban farmer and a toxic reduction specialist -- fashioned careers that allow them to share their enthusiasm with others.

Article Contents [[Show/Hide](#)]

- [Jill Kuehler](#)
- [Carl Grimm](#)
- [Karen Munday](#)
- [Rod Shroufe](#)

JILL KUEHLER

- **Age:** 30
- **Profession:** Director of Zenger Farm, a nonprofit urban farm in Portland
- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in community health, Texas A&M; master's degree in education policy with a focus on sustainable food systems, Portland State University
- **Family:** Husband Garrett Brennan, musician and senior associate at Metropolitan Group
- **Learn more about her work:** zengerfarm.org

It was just this 'aha' moment. This is what I want to do. This makes sense to me, she says. It made sense to combine my love of gardening and education.

Jill Kuehler's mother views her daughter's work at one of the nation's only urban farms as the ultimate act of rebellion. Her parents, Kuehler explains, worked hard to escape the rural life they'd known on cotton farms in Texas. But for this former Peace Corps volunteer, a career path emerged when she was teaching health at a school in Guatemala. People at one of her assigned schools wanted help planting a garden, and Kuehler jumped at the chance to relive happy memories of helping her grandmother in the garden. Then, on her last day at the school, the community prepared a meal from the food she'd helped them raise. Today, city-owned Zenger Farm makes that same kind of sense to her with its focus on educating children about organic farming and its work with low-income residents in the Lents neighborhood. The 16-acre farm reaches 3,000 children a year through its summer camp and in-school programs. Fifty families work at the farm to raise chickens for eggs, keep bees for honey and use worms to make compost. There's also the Lents International Farmers Market and an immigrant farmer training program. "We're here because the city had such a great vision," she says. "I feel like it's my job, and the job of staff, to take the vision that they had and educate people about preserving those resources and the environment."

CARL GRIMM

- **Job:** Natural gardening and toxic reduction specialist for Metro
- **Age:** 45
- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in conservation and resource studies, University of California, Berkeley; graduate work in education, Northwestern University
- **Family:** Partner Benedicte Ricordel teaches first grade in a French immersion school in Portland.
- **Learn more about his work:** www.oregonmetro.gov/garden

The garden is where it begins and ends, Grimm says. It is our connection to the Earth: The ripple effect of what we do on our little plot really does extend out to the entire ecosystem. We can mess it up, or we can do it in a way that supports life.

Some may say that Carl Grimm was genetically predisposed to environmentalism. After all, his mother, Jere Grimm, was among a group of activists who pushed for Oregon's labeling of organic food. Back in the '70s, she passed out cups made by her ceramist husband, Ray, to persuade state legislators to stop drinking out of disposable cups and start recycling.



Carl Grimm got the point. As a student at Catlin Gabel School in the '80s, his contribution to a school time capsule was a biodegradable quilt made of canvas and cellophane. Inside each of 12 quilt blocks were seeds for an edible garden. He enclosed a note, instructing those who would find the capsule to grow some of their own food. Today, his work centers on reducing the toxic chemicals in home gardens. Using what he calls "community-based social marketing," his job is to get people to employ natural gardening techniques whether they grow only a lawn or all of their food. He organizes Metro's annual tour of Earth-friendly gardens, helps establish demonstration gardens at places such as Blue Lake Park and the Oregon Zoo, develops year-round seminars and publishes brochures and online content. But it's also not just about the negatives of using synthetic chemicals. Grimm sees a multitude of benefits coming from natural gardening:

connecting with neighbors, eating lower on the food chain and, ultimately, contributing to a healthy, stable ecosystem.



KAREN MUNDAY

- **Age:** 33
- **Profession:** Urban wildlife specialist for the Audubon Society of Portland
- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in biology, University of California, Santa Cruz; master's degree in teaching science, Portland State University
- **Family:** Husband Shannon Axtell, a watershed planner for Portland

Global warming is so big an issue, but it trickles down into every area. Focusing on our backyards gives us something we can do now.

Karen Munday's brand of environmentalism begins close to home.

"It's what you do in your daily life; it's the community you live in; it's protecting the wildlife you see every day. I like that focus. It's very tangible to people."

It's a fitting philosophy for the Portland Audubon Society's urban wildlife specialist -- a job Munday landed only after working for two years in the group's membership development office and volunteering on weekends at the bird rehabilitation center on Cornell Road.

Part of a generation that learned in grade school about the need to recycle and conserve water, Munday became smitten with science and fascinated by the workings of nature. But rather than feeling overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable problems, she took what she calls a "wandering path" to become an environmental evangelist of sorts.

Audubon gave her the pulpit and birds are its focus, but Munday is quick to note that everything in the environment is interrelated. The invasive plants in your yard, for example, choke out native plants that do so much for the backyard birds that are in decline. "These same birds that you're protecting in your backyard are the same birds that fly the Pacific Flyway."

A new backyard certification program will bring all that together. In a partnership that Munday is eager to promote, Audubon and Three Rivers Land Conservancy will visit Portland homeowners and connect them with local resources for invasive plant removal, landscaping with native plants, creating wildlife habitat and managing storm water.

"Global warming is so big an issue, but it trickles down into every area," Munday says. "Focusing on our backyards gives us something we can do now."

ROD SHROUFE

- **Age:** 41
- **Profession:** Teaches environmental science and sustainable systems at Clackamas High School
- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in fish and wildlife biology, Northern Arizona University; master's degree in science education, Oregon State University
- **Family:** Wife, Angie, a science teacher at Clackamas High; daughters Brynne, 7, and Jane, 5

Rod Shroufe doesn't dwell on environmental catastrophes in his classes at Clackamas High School. Rather, he focuses on what students can do to reduce their impact and be good stewards of the Earth.



"I teach solutions, and the solutions are right out there on the bike rack," he says in a simplistic summary of class projects that have included working on watershed restoration, building a school recycling program, and planting an orchard and a sustainable garden that will produce food for needy families. In an upcoming unit on transportation, he hopes students will be able to earn bike mechanic certificates. Shroufe aspires to create an "urban example of sustainability" at the school that will include a greenhouse, a fleet of bikes and more. "When it all comes together, we're going to have an outstanding example for these kids of a great, comfortable way to live that is not only sustainable but a lot more self-fulfilling than going home to an air-conditioned house to play Wii." Lest anyone think that this is an environmental club, Shroufe stresses that science is at the core and always explicit in his classes. But he cites brain and education research as well as his own anecdotal evidence to argue that hands-on learning works. "I've seen it," he says, citing the tree-planting his students did a few years ago. "The kids come back and say: 'Wow. Those are the trees I planted. This area looks completely different; there's no more blackberries.' And they're proud of that."

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