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Ron Garst, Raindrops to Refuge board president

Passions | Lisa Jo Frech

Environmental expertise perfect match for goals

The new director of Raindrops to Refuge "can't wait to get out in the field"

BY IAN RUDER
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

Lisa Jo Frech's office is cramped. Her computer is broken. Her business cards are someone else's old business cards and don't have her name on them.

She's spent the first five weeks as program manager for Raindrops to Refuge, the Sherwood-based environmental nonprofit, holed up in her tiny office instead of out in the field.

And she couldn't be happier.

"You've gotta do what you've gotta do," she says. "But I can't wait to get out in the field."

Frech's enthusiasm and dedication have served her well in a long environmental career. They're a big part of the reason she was selected to take over and energize five-year-old Raindrops to Refuge as it begins a new phase.

"She really had that idea of shared responsibility, and she had a history of having done (environmental) work," says Ron Garst, the

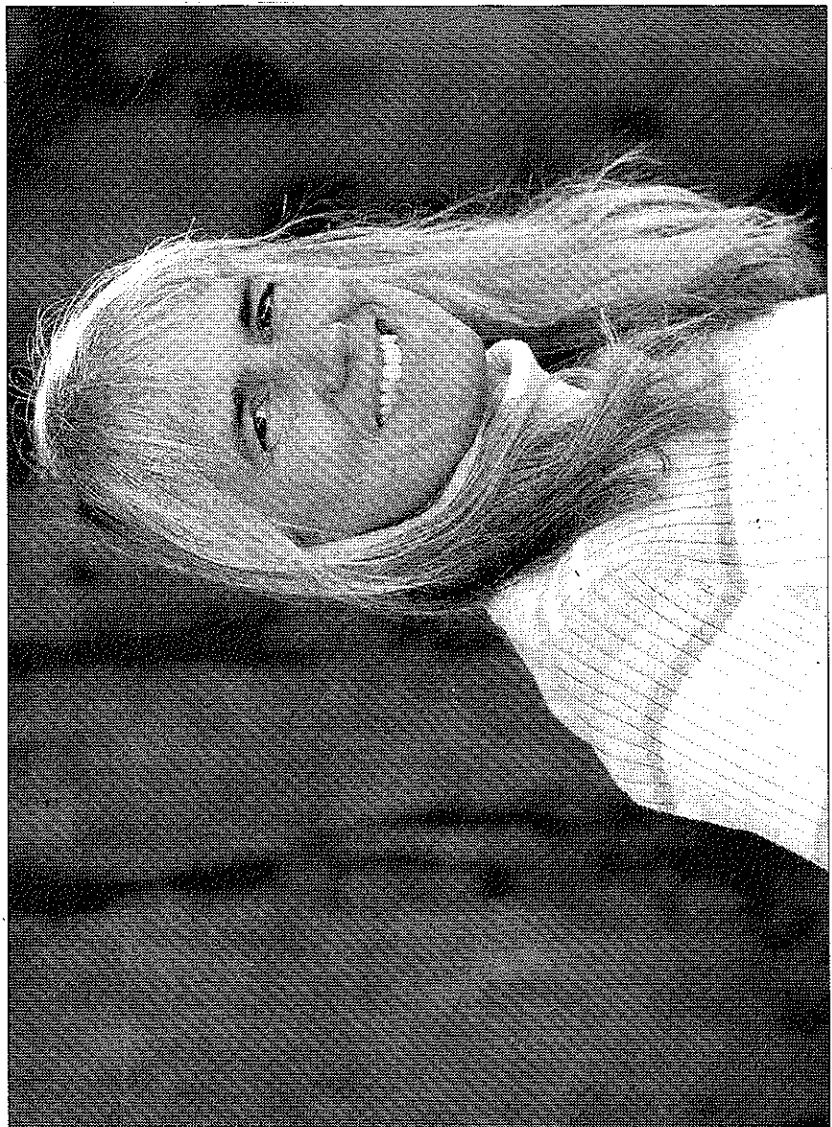
board president. "She really had a lot of strength and background experience on things we wanted to do and thought were important to focus on."

Frech, 49, discovered her passion for natural resource management while working toward her master's degree in park and recreation administration at Temple University in Philadelphia.

She became a recreation planner in Virginia and Delaware and as a contractor for the National Park Service. She also helped found and oversee the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, a consortium working to protect the Nanticoke River watershed in southern Delaware and eastern Maryland.

After 12 years with the alliance, Frech moved west to Oregon in 2001 to be closer to family. Again contracting for the National Park Service, Frech traveled around the Northwest doing community and trail planning. She also began teaching part time at Marylhurst College and became certified as an environmental mediator.

About the time Frech moved to Oregon, residents wanting to protect Sherwood's natural resources started Raindrops to Refuge. They relied on grants to hire a program



BRENT WOJAHN/THE OREGONIAN

Lisa Jo Frech hopes to help energize the nonprofit conservation group Raindrops to Refuge as its new program manager.

What's your passion?
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Creek. Until 2004, Sherwood helped support and house Raindrops, but tight city budgets forced cutbacks, and the organization had to reorganize into a nonprofit or die.

A new program manager, Carl Axelsen came on to oversee the transition, leaving in July after completing that process. Axelsen, who had been with the program since the beginning, says it was time for a change.

"It was in good shape in some ways but had some pretty serious needs," he says, such as energizing volunteers and gaining more physical and financial support from the community. "It was a good time to bring in a person with a little bit of

a different set of skills." Frech is confident that her background and her experience with the Nanticoke make her that person. Although the position is part time, she's excited about devoting herself to helping Raindrops work toward its four goals.

"When a community takes pride in itself, has some vision and follows through with the commitment to take care of the community, everybody's happier for it, everybody's healthier for it, property values go up, and people spread that word so other people know about that town," she says. "Sherwood is one of those towns."

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