

# We're Covered!

by Mary Dickson

“Vision, research, locating, buying, cleaning, volunteer involvement, and installing,” are all the steps Jim Card, Garden Director, uses for the many projects of renovation and renewal at the Gresham Japanese Garden. Jim used these steps when he wanted to enhance the new roof to look more like a roof you would see in Japan.

Jim was inspired by buildings he saw in Kyoto, Japan, where the entire roof was made from dark charcoal-colored ceramic tiles and adorned at the ends with onigawaras. The Kyoudou Center, a converted double-wide trailer, could not support an entire roof assembled with these 10-pound tiles. Bev Carlon, a longtime volunteer, had similar inspirations as Jim, wanting the Japanese influence roof line for the Kyoudou Center. After researching, they determined that adding tiles to the roof line and all four corners only would give the look they were aiming for.

Once the initial homework was complete, Jim's research took him on a circuitous route to Gaston, Oregon, where a company that used to make tiles (but no longer does) had some old, moss-covered ones for \$5 each. Jim sorted through different colors, and returned with dirty but serviceable tiles. Volunteers cleaned the tiles, and next Jim had to figure out what sort of paint would adhere to ceramic and weather well. He wanted the color to be a glossy, rich black. Ultimately, each tile was first painted with white marine epoxy that will protect them from the rain, and then painted with black boat paint. Seventy-five 10-pound tiles later laid waiting for the next step.

Thank goodness for the missionary Elders that help us on Garden Saturdays. They formed a line from the tiles on the ground up to the roof and placed them exactly where volunteer Chuck Page



*The onigawara on the roof of the Kyoudou Center.*

wanted them placed. Last, it took about a week for Chuck to meticulously place and install each tile.

You have to look at the roof from a distance to see the impact of the distinctive outline. Jim is thrilled, saying, "The results are exactly what my vision projected! And I'm so happy Bev pushed me to find a solution. And, she generously offered to fund the tiles, which made me even more accountable."

## ONIGAWARA TILES

Again inspired by the roofs of Japan, the roof needed a finishing touch. There are special ornamental tiles used on Japanese buildings called onigawara tiles, and tradition says that they protect the building from devils and demons. There are many styles, but Jim thought that having a tsuru (crane) would be appropriate. He contacted

Blane Bellerud, a Gresham ceramic artist, and husband to our ikebana instructor, discussed designing and creating onigawara for the Kyoudou Center roof. Blane

provided three sketches, and two made the cut for the GJG volunteers to vote.

Blane worked for months on the design and sculpting in to clay.

Ultimately, two large onigawara tiles with



the same design, and four smaller pendant disks or *gatou* were created with a similar design as the large ones, but less ornate. Jerry Sunday

provided funding for all the tiles.

First, a plaster mold was made for each size of tile, and then Blane pressed ceramic clay directly into the molds. They were made extra thick to help resist the effects of weather. Last Blane finished the intricate work by hand. The tedious, but necessary ceramic cycle of drying, which was quite a bit longer because the tiles were extra thick, (bisque) firing, glazing, and then a final firing followed.

And, the ending challenge, Jim and Chuck came up with an ingenious method for mounting.

Next time you approach the Kyoudou Center, stop and enjoy the roof, knowing that, once again, members of the volunteer community came together to envision and create something of beauty in the Gresham Japanese Garden.

