

‘We Choose Love,’ Ashland group declares

By Julie Akins For the Tidings

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At shortly before 9:30 in the morning Friday, a group gathered at the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) office on Lithia Way made history.

In front of an international audience watching via a live internet stream, ACPC announced Ashland as the newest city in the world to become an International City of Peace.

“It’s not just imagining. We’re doing it,” said ACPC Executive Director David Wick as the last notes of John Lennon’s “Imagine” played out from artist Kathy Kali’s guitar at the ceremony. “It is our interconnection with those cities around the world. We’re the 164th city now.”

The designation means that Ashland joins in a common mission, according to its proclamation approved by the Ashland City Council: “The core and strength of our community is based on relationships of mutual respect, integrity, and recognition of the inherent value of each person in the diversity of our community.”

The group tied together a huge red ribbon — instead of the traditional “ribbon cutting” — as a ceremonial gesture of unity with other Peace Cities.

“This is truly a groundswell movement,” said Councilor Stefani Seffinger, acknowledging the council’s proclamation but, more than that, the work of the commission. “It’s not just talk, it’s action oriented. It is making a difference. It’s about environment, about housing, about making things sustainable for every living thing.”

Asha Deliverance, the mother of Taliesin Myddrin Namkai-Meche, the 23-year-old Ashland native killed in an attempt to stop racial violence on a Portland Max train on May 26 of this year, also spoke at the ceremony. Deliverance

remembered her son to the audience. “The whole world is made of love,” she said, quoting him. “Our unity will be obvious. It will become a celebration of love.”

Namkai-Meche died, as did 53-year-old Ricky John Best of Happy Valley, as they tried to prevent an assailant from reaching two teen African-American girls, one of whom was wearing a Muslim head scarf, huddled at the back of the train. Witnesses say Jeremy Joseph Christian was yelling racial slurs and moving toward the girls when Namkai-Meche and two other men attempted to block him. Namkai-Meche is said to have asked the man to “please get off the train” and eventually the situation escalated into Christian stabbing the men, according to police. Two died and one survived the attack. Christian is charged with the attacks.

Deliverance kicked off her campaign in her son’s honor at the event. It is called “We choose love.” She gifted the city with a banner which hangs on East Main Street. The campaign is being supported by the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission as part of its action in guiding and supporting peacemaking as an International City of Peace.

Oregon Shakespeare Festival Community Producer Claudia Alick led the group in reading the “We Choose Love” mantra, urging justice for all people. She ended it by giving its website for those who want to be part of the movement:

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“We’re reflecting peace right now,” said Wick as celebrants waved signs in support behind him. Many broke off to hug Deliverance after she spoke.

“Think about taking the next step in creating peace,” Wick shouted out to the crowd as they dispersed.

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