



Andy Atkinson / Daily Tidings Savitri MacCuish and Linda Schott light The World Peace Flame at the Thalden Pavilion Friday afternoon.

# Ashland second in U.S. to have this

BY **JOHN DARLING / FOR THE TIDINGS** September 21, 2018

<http://mailtribune.com/news/top-stories/world-peace-flame-lit-in-ashland>

In a moving ceremony attended by hundreds, Ashland's World Peace Flame was lit Friday, with the pledge that Ashland Middle School kids will keep its biofuel oil burning in perpetuity — a symbol of the hope their generation be handed a peaceful world by their elders.

The much-awaited ceremony, three years in coming, makes Ashland only the second city in the United States to have such a monument — and the only university in the world to maintain one, said Southern Oregon University President Linda Schott, who lit the flame.

It burns in a waist-high glass chamber at the bottom of a pair of towering obelisks carved by local sculptor Russell Beebe situated at the recently dedicated Thalden Pavilion at SOU's Sustainability Center on Walker Street.

Many speakers struggled to define what "peace" means in today's conflicted and environmentally-troubled world, with Schott noting it's not just the absence of nuclear weapons, as men struggled with in the Cold War, but rather transformation of the world by women's peace movements which strove "to nurture justice in a world where everyone is free."

Values of peace activists have expanded now, she said, to include equity, access, sustainability and diversity.

[World Peace Flame Foundation](#) Executive Director Savitri MacCuish flew in from the Netherlands, site of the foundation office, to preside, noting that "everyone has a dream and if there's pain out there (from war and its miseries), then it's my pain."

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Some may ask what difference a little flame makes but, MacCuish said, "the flame cannot do all the work for us, just as the Creator can't do all our work for us, but gave us arms, legs and a brain and the courage to use them."

McCuish told a hushed crowd some moving stories of truth and reconciliation gatherings in the ruins of Croatia after the war there and how bitter combatants who had lost children finally were able to embrace, weep their tears, speak their sorrow and see into the heart and soul of former foes.

"Make your voice heard. You must be prepared to act from the point of love, not thinking something must be fixed," she said. "This world doesn't need more monuments. It needs people to stand up."

MacCuish encouraged everyone listening to do something before the sunset to facilitate peace in the world.

“Nothing we do changes the past,” she said, “but everything we do changes the future.”

The flame was a project spearheaded by Irene Kai and David Wick of the [Ashland Culture of Peace Commission](#) (ACPC), emerging from Kai’s chance visit to such a monument in Wales. “It was a pure journey of grace and magic,” she said. “It lit the sacred flame in my heart to lead our children to a better and sustainable world. It’s quite difficult in our political climate, but when darkness grows, we must rise and be the flame and light all the dark corners.”

The ceremony took place on the International Day of Peace, as declared in 1981 by the United Nations and, said Wick, the theme this year is that “everyone has a right to peace.”

Speakers honored the first people of the land upon which the flame sits, with Dan Wahpepah of Red Earth Descendants noting that racism is self-hate — and peace can only happen when we make peace with ourselves.

Such flames are usually run on natural gas but, since it’s a fossil fuel and not friendly to Mother Earth, organizers searched for a sustainable alternative, finally choosing biofuel oil.

“We have evolved thousands of years to be where we are now,” said ACPC member Elizabeth Austin, so “let us be worthy of all who have come before us and care for this network of harmony, which is inclusive a new culture, a new tapestry of emotion in a new world.”

State Rep. Pam Marsh, an early participant with the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, delivered a somber note, that “we live in a world with the government in disarray and where the environmental situation poses a threat to life on this planet.”

However, Marsh noted, peace is achieved by many people doing many little and sometimes big things over many days — and not giving up when it’s hard.

“I wish there were some way to measure all you do for peace, the years of marches, silent protests, letter-writing, campaigns, the checks you wrote, the cookies you baked, the hungry people you fed,” said Marsh. “That stream of energy would reach to the moon and back.”

Many an eye was dabbed and many a friend was hugged as speakers put a fine point on what peace is and what it’s like to live a life in which peace is a main energy.

As the Ashland Peace Choir ended by singing John Lennon’s “Imagine,” all stood spontaneously and joined hands, then it was over and people went to take selfies and group shots around the peace flame.

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