



Kindling the peace flame

BY [JOHN DARLING / FOR THE TIDINGS](#) September 07, 2018

The lighting of the World Peace Flame in Ashland will be the culmination of “Eleven Days of Peace,” featuring dancing, rituals, “sound healing,” blessings of the land, sermons and invocations starting Tuesday, Sept. 11, leading up to the Sept. 21 lighting ceremony at the newly dedicated Thalden Pavilion.

The unique event, attended by dignitaries from the World Peace Flame Foundation in the Netherlands, will mark Ashland as one of the few places in the world — and only second in the U.S. — with a Peace Flame, which burns as a “symbol of peace, unity, freedom and celebration to inspire people everywhere that the individual plays a crucial role in creating peace at every level.”

The Peace Flame and events around it are supported by the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, whose members David Wick and Irene Kai were instrumental in bringing it here and erecting a home for it, nestled in the obelisk at the Thalden Pavilion at the Southern Oregon University Sustainability Center on Walker Avenue.

The 11 days kick off at 6 p.m. Tuesday with a “blessing of the ground” and the sacred dances of Paola Blanton Sophia of Ashland, who is “renowned for artfully merging myth, movement and sacred theater, bringing to life Isadora Duncan’s vision of Dance as a Prayer.” She will “ground the elements, spirits and directions” and invoke spirits and open portals” with her dance troupe, says Kai.

Performances continue every other day at 6 at the pavilion. On Thursday, Sept. 13, it's "Soulful Wisdom and Music" with the Rev. Norma Burton and Adey Bell. Burton was pastor of Unity here for many years. Bell, a vocalist in the spirit of Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush, has been described as bringing a "soaring, soulful, rhythmically astute voice, perfect for the seemingly effortless harmonies and dynamics of her songs."

On Saturday, Sept. 15, a group gets together for Sound Healing with crystal bowls and various instruments, bringing forth "healing energies," says Kai. On Monday, Sept. 17, it's Wild Honey singing world music of Peia Luzzi and Megan Danforth, and Cyrise Schachter singing about life, love, grief, celebration and feasting.

On Wednesday, Sept. 19, it's local singer-songwriter David Kai, whose Facebook recounts his lyrics: "Be easy on yourself. You're a child of the Moon and Stars. Through your patience you've already come this far. Time is an open door and there's a white wind blowing through the halls on you way into forever more. It's everything that makes you feel free."

On dedication day, the United Nations International Day of Peace, the flame will be lit at noon. The program is set to begin at 11:50 a.m. with remarks from Wick, followed by a moment of silence. The program includes remarks by Kai, U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (read by a staffer), World Peace Flame Foundation Executive Director Savitri MacCuish, Southern Oregon University President Linda Schott and state Rep. Pam Marsh. The Rogue Valley Peace Choir will sing, as will Dan Wahpepah. The program is scheduled to wrap up at 1 p.m.

The next day, MacCuish will conduct a workshop entitled "Creating Balance in a Changing World — The Transforming Power of the Heart," a benefit for the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. She teaches "how to gain a greater sense of inner peace and unity as you give yourself the real gift of time," says Wick. It's set for 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 22, in Wesley hall at the United Methodist Church, Main at Laurel street. Admission is \$35 advance or \$40 at door; go to ashlandcpc.org for tickets.

The monument and pavilion at 11 Walker Ave. sit amid many educational institutions: the ScienceWorks Hands-On Museum, Ashland Middle School, Walker Elementary, Ashland High School and SOU, on whose campus it sits. Several are already setting up classes and workshops there.

Funding to create the flame monument and support dedication activities come from \$15,000 to \$17,000 of fundraising in the community, said Kai. The site will serve in perpetuity as a place of pilgrimage and sanctuary through the years in the cause of community and peace, she said. Donations can be made the Culture of Peace website (ashlandcpc.org).

John Darling is an Ashland freelance writer. Reach him at jdarling@jeffnet.org.