

Culture of Peace: The World Peace Flame in Ashland to be fueled by justice, inclusion

By Dr. Linda Schott / President, Southern Oregon University

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Peace and justice have been recurring themes throughout my career in higher education, so I was pleased when I had the opportunity to help Southern Oregon University become home to a global tribute that honors those concepts.

The World Peace Flame will be lit in September at SOU's Thalden Pavilion, and will burn perpetually in a durable lantern that will be installed at the base of two 28-foot tall cedar "teaching poles" carved by Native American sculptor Russell Beebe.

The monument — one of 13 worldwide and just two in the U.S. — will serve as a daily reminder that world peace begins with our local commitments to fairness and ethical behavior. It will symbolize our steadfast commitment to sustainability, diversity, equity and inclusion.

My own interest in the U.S. peace movement — and particularly the history of women's involvement in that cause — arose while I was a graduate student at Stanford University in the early 1980s. As I was searching for a dissertation topic in the field of U.S. women's history, women around the world were rallying in favor of nuclear disarmament. Wanting to better understand why women were leading this movement separately from men, I began the research that eventually led to my dissertation, "Women Against War: Pacifism, Feminism, and Social Justice in the United States, 1915-1941." This work later evolved into a book, "Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom before World War II" (1997).

Jane Addams, a renowned social reformer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was among the women whose work I studied and admired. She co-founded Chicago's Hull House to bring social and educational opportunities to poor, working class immigrants, and was among the activists who established the

American Civil Liberties Union and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Her place as a leader in the women's suffrage and world peace movements was acknowledged when she became the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

Addams had a holistic view of peace, which I share and try to model as a fundamental precept at SOU.

"True peace is not merely the absence of war," Addams said. "It is the presence of justice."

The World Peace Flame embodies not only that obligation to rightness and reason, but also a basis in inclusion. It was lit 19 years ago in Bangor, North Wales, from seven separate flames that had been brought to the site from India, the U.S., Bahrain, Kenya, Australia and Canada. Seven World Peace Flame monuments have since been added – in the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and the U.S. (Memphis, Tennessee).

The monument at SOU's Thalden Pavilion will be the work of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, formed in 2012 as a local, ongoing expression of the United Nations' 1981 International Day of Peace Resolution. That declaration designates Sept. 21 of each year as a day to commemorate and strengthen the ideals of peace.

The World Peace Flame in Ashland will be fueled by renewable oils, as appropriate to its location on The Farm at SOU, A Center for Sustainability. It will remind all who congregate there that true peace — resulting from firm commitments to diversity, inclusion, equity, justice and the sustainability of our planet — requires continual nurturing and the sustained efforts of us all. — Southern Oregon University President Linda Schott taught at three Texas universities and held administrative positions in Michigan and Colorado before accepting her first presidential post in 2012 at University of Maine at Presque Isle. Now completing her second year as SOU's president, she has positioned the institution as "Oregon's university for the future," with a focus on preparing students for the opportunities and uncertainties that lie ahead. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter.