



Peace flame lit at pavilion — and in hearts here and globally

BY **DAVID WICK ASHLAND / CULTURE OF PEACE COMMISSION** September 23, 2018

There is a shift taking place in Ashland, which is being felt far beyond Southern Oregon and North America. One woman's "accidental" discoveries, and three years of dedicated hard work, have brought the World Peace Flame to the United States and its permanent and perpetual home in the Thalden Pavilion (dedicated to outrageous innovation in sustainability and the arts) on Walker Street at The Farm at Southern Oregon University.

The historic, international lighting ceremony of the World Peace Flame took place on Friday, Sept. 21, the United Nations International Day of Peace. The inspired, full-of-grace journey of the World Peace Flame is a powerful story of a girl from Hong Kong, Irene Kai, persevering against all odds and igniting our community with a powerful opportunity for unity and healing.

The World Peace Flame was lit by Savitri MacCuish, executive director of the World Peace Flame Foundation, and Linda Schott, president of Southern Oregon University. Savitri and a delegation flew in from The Hague, Netherlands, Switzerland, and Australia to light the flame. Letters of support from Oregon Governor Kate Brown and U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley were read at the ceremony, and in attendance were Grandma Agnes Pilgrim, Chairwoman of the International Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers; Dan Wahpepah, founder of Red Earth Descendants; Oregon State Rep. Pam Marsh, mayors of the cities of Ashland and Eugene, Oregon; and Kelly Raymond, Ashland School District superintendent. The video of the World Peace Flame Lighting Ceremony can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH1atcjrneg.

For this historic occasion, Sen. Merkley and Gov. Kate Brown had the following to say:

Letter from Sen. Merkley

“Thank you all for coming out today for the lighting of the World Peace Flame. It is my pleasure to join this community in celebrating and recognizing the United Nations International Day of Peace. Now, more than ever, we need to remember the values of unity, hope and peace embodied in this event and in the World Peace Flame.

“It is truly an honor for Oregon to receive this World Peace Flame. Thank you to Irene Kai and David Wick for bringing this beautiful idea to realization. This flame, which will be located here in Ashland, is the second World Peace Flame in the United States, just one other is located in Tennessee at the Civil Rights Museum. They exemplify the motto, ‘One Flame, uniting people, worldwide.’ This flame will preserve the message of the need for unity in this community, and across the globe.

“Today we also gather to honor the Native Americans who lived on this land for thousands of years prior to settlers coming west. We also honor the Chinese laborers who worked in gold mines here in Oregon 200 years ago. We cannot ignore the hardships they faced, and we will use this flame to acknowledge those challenges, and appreciate the people who stood on this ground before us.

“As an international representative of hope and the right to peace and unity, this flame serves as a symbol to remind us of the importance to come together as a worldwide community.”

Letter from Gov. Brown

“As governor of Oregon, I send my special thanks to the many people who worked to bring the World Peace Flame to Oregon.

“Today, the International Day of Peace, Oregon takes her place alongside the world, including the Netherlands, North Wales, Australia, and Belgium, to welcome the World Peace Flame as a sign of our shared commitment to peace and the conditions peace requires — human rights for all.

“Oregon is a state committed to peace and justice for her people, and I am particularly glad to welcome the peace flame to Southern Oregon University. Curiosity, critical thinking, and collaboration are nurtured in every learner at SOU, to build both prosperity and peace in a rapidly changing world. Our public universities are beacons of hope for a better life.

“This flame reminds us all of our hope for a better future and our responsibility to build that future together. Thank you for your commitment to not only imagine a better world, but to do the hard work to create it.”

We are grateful to Savitri MacCuish, Erik Van Velzen, Silke Zanker, and Angela Baker for flying to Southern Oregon to guide this international ceremony.

Of particular significance is the passing of the Peace Flame to the next generation. Kristina Healy’s Roots and Shoots class in the Ashland Middle School has accepted the honor of being the Flame Keepers who will care for the World Peace Flame and keep it lit for the school year. Thus a new tradition is born.

David Wick is executive director of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC’s Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.