

'11 Days of Peace' fosters compassion

By John Darling / For the Tidings

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Encouraging area residents to think and act locally, the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission is staging "11 Days of Peace" starting Sept. 10 and culminating on the U.N. International Day of Peace, Sept. 21, featuring daily vigils and talking circles offering opportunities to examine how every individual can bring peace to the world with forgiveness, compassion, love, respect and gratitude.

The ACPC celebrates its first birthday during the events, which include hour-long vigils most days at 5:30 p.m. in the Plaza, and talking circles on most days at 11 a.m. at the ACPC office on Lithia Way at Second Street. The theme of the vigils is "Shining the Light of Peace on Our Shadows," the shadows being issues hindering the community from achieving a culture of peace, according to the commission.

Festival events open at 1 p.m. Saturday with an all-afternoon artists' reception at the library, followed at 6 p.m. with a peace ceremony at the entrance to Lithia Park with artist Marcine Quenzer.

The 11 days officially get underway at noon Sunday, Sept. 11, at the Southern Oregon Regional Peace Pole in U.S. Cellular Community Park with the lighting of the Peace Flame. Quenzer will lead storytelling at 1 p.m. Sunday at Ashland library.

At 2 p.m. Sunday, a labyrinth walk and free concert will be held at the First United Methodist Church, 175 N Main St., Ashland. The concert features Pauline Sullivan, soprano; Jim Malachi, guitar and vocals; and Jennifer Schloming, pianist. The labyrinth walk begins at 3 p.m. in Wesley Hall.

The talking circles will explore a range of peace issues, including: forgiveness, inclusivity, accountability, compassion, respect and change, while asking questions such as, "Do I bring my heart into daily life and be willing to embrace

emotional pain? Do I appreciate all that I have and why is this important to peace? Do I appreciate the ways in which my thoughts and actions perpetuate violence?”

Vigil themes include sexual abuse, addiction, environmental degradation, homelessness, private prisons, racism, patriarchy and the mother wound, historical trauma (by the Red Earth Descendants), and food injustice.

“We mark each day by making the conversation around peace and how to build peace with a culture of peace,” says ACPC Executive Director David Wick. “The theme of the International Day of Peace is the sustainability of the building blocks of peace by helping local communities become more aware of how peace is built, so they develop a closer relationship with each other.”

Anya Kumara will light the peace flame, “invoking the light from around the world. We will carry the flame to Methodist church in Ashland for a peace concert with Pauline Sullivan and others, followed by the labyrinth and more music ... offer your part in anchoring this light of peace in Ashland and in our world ... We’re pretty fortunate in Ashland, that as we move through the challenges of life, we have lots of pretty aware people who work with each other.”

Wick says ACPC actively focuses locally on issues of poverty, homelessness and racial differences, “developing more awareness and compassion for each other.”

In support of the Days of Peace, Wick says elementary schools created poster art, middle school students wrote poetry and high schoolers did essays.

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



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