

Culture of Peace: Celebrating 11 Days for Peace in Ashland

By Mayana Kingery / Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

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The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) is celebrating one year of exploring a new culture that could bring more peace into our community and the world. Individuals come together to take on hard questions and reveal solutions. Our focus is on how we can change from a culture that promotes separation, fear and violence into one of compassion and peace.

Immediately after the attack on Sept. 11, 2001, Trish McCarty, founder of StarShine Academy (K-12 charter school in Phoenix, Arizona, www.StarShineAcademy.org) called upon students and staff to commemorate 11 Days of Peace. That began an annual memorial celebration from 9/11 up to the International Day of Peace, Sept. 21. Starshine, a mini-United Nations campus with students from all over the world, paved the way for other groups to expand the 11 Days of Peace.

ACPC presents the 11 Days for Peace in Ashland and suggests a heart/mind focus for each of the 11 days, including Forgiveness, Inclusivity, Accountability, Compassion, Respect, Gratitude, Embracing Change, Love, Empathy, and Peace. Ashlanders will have the opportunity to explore what “peace” means personally and collectively.

The 11 Days for Peace event is an opportunity for ACPC to share its vision for a community that works for everyone. When one can see what isn’t working without judgment, there is an eye toward solutions. Every individual, business, organization and agency is invited to be a pathway to peace.

The question, “How do we shift from the culture we are in to one of peace?” has led through awareness of what is not peace to imaginings of how a peaceful society might look, all with the realization that we may not know what true peace is and that we are discovering together.

An answer on how to achieve peace comes from our indigenous roots. Marcine Quenzer, author of “Spirit Winds of Peace: The Epoch of the Peace Maker” (www.MarcineQuenzer.com), brings to life the story of the founding of the **Iroquois Confederacy’s Great Law of Peace**, which **formed the basis for our Constitution**. Five warring nations came together in peace that reigned for a thousand years in North America, bringing us a model for peacemaking to use today.

The 11 Days for Peace launched over the weekend with ceremonies in Lithia Park led by Marcine Quenzer, at the Regional Peace Pole in Medford’s Cellular Park, and with lighting the Peace Flame. Activities continued with a concert and labyrinth experience at United Methodist Church.

A daily vigil is being held from 5:30 to 6:30 pm on the Plaza throughout the 11 Days for Peace where challenges to peace are examined. With the theme “Making peace inclusive for all,” ACPC and guest speakers will address specific social issues. ACPC is also hosting a daily talking circle from 11 a.m. to noon at its office exploring the quality recognized each day that allows peaceful solutions to emerge.

What we create now is what our grandchildren and the generations that follow will be living with. Listening to youth and hearing their concerns about the future led to further inquiry about “How can we provide an opportunity for our youth to express their visions, ideas and dreams?”

The ACPC Education team responded with an invitation for high school students to write an essay, middle school students to submit poetry, and elementary students to create a poster. Specific prompts and details for each category are found on our website. All youth living in or being educated in Ashland are welcome to participate with submissions, which are due by Friday, Sept. 16. A book will be published with the entries so Ashland can hear the voices of the future.

On Sept. 21, we celebrate International Day of Peace and our one-year anniversary in Ashland. Events will be held in Wesley Hall at the United Methodist Church and include field trips for elementary students from 10 a.m. to

2 p.m. and an evening celebration from 5 to 8 p.m. featuring **Matthew Fox** (**Creation Spirituality**, www.MatthewFox.org) and **Cecilia St. King** (**Inner Peace Troubadour**, www.CeciliaStKing.com).

We invite you to explore, experience, share and participate in creating a Culture of Peace within — and in our beloved city.

For the full schedule of activities for the 11 Days of Peace and International Day of Peace, go to **www.ashlandcpc.org**.

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