



## Making space – a time for cultural literacy and respect

By Ashland Chamber of Commerce, July 12, 2021

The Ashland Chamber of Commerce and Travel Ashland appreciate the many efforts of Irene Kai and David Wick in developing the Culture of Peace through the years and their recent efforts around cultural literacy.

From the designation of becoming a City of Peace to being home to one of the few sacred Peace Flames in the world, their work has built an impactful foundation to grow upon.

We have been pleased to be engaged with them over the years and a partner in international conferences and education, having served as a conference panelist as well as promoter of their events and vision. As they are promoting the work of cultural literacy, we want to underscore the merits as well as the need.

Given the current social climate in Ashland and around our nation, cultural literacy begins with making space for each other to listen, respectfully to hear where someone is coming from. That takes time and dedication to being open and kind as well as respecting differences of opinion. We are listening and we acknowledge the work we have to do to move forward to further understand each other. Expanding that openness beyond the individual, the Ashland Chamber and Travel Ashland have been focusing on what work we can do to help support cultural literacy.

Travel Ashland is regionally connected in partnership with Travel Southern Oregon, which created the Tourism Inclusion Council of Southern Oregon in 2018, composed of a diversity of stakeholders from the business and tourism communities of Southern Oregon. TSO is committed to establishing a regional tourism economy that promotes equitable, safe and welcoming experiences and opportunities for visitors and our regional workforce of diverse backgrounds.

The TICSO mission is to advise Travel Southern Oregon on strategies to nurture and develop a welcoming, inclusive and safe cultural climate for tourists visiting our

region and citizens living in our region. TICSO will also be working with TSO to create training and educational programs and events that promote our understanding of diversity, inclusion and equity, and to expand our capability to welcome people from all cultures, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and races.

Given our role as an educationally based, membership organization, a tourism destination marketing organization and Ashland economic development entity, our work in cultural literacy continues to expand. It is important to reflect on the collaborative sister-city relationship with Guanajuato, Mexico.

With partners such as SOU, city of Ashland, the Amigo Club and Ashland residents, significant efforts have gone into fostering the respectful bond that Ashland and Guanajuato have grown over the years, culminating in the 50th anniversary celebration in 2019. The Ashland Chamber's past global conferences on doing business with China, Japan and Mexico highlighted navigating international business relationships with a cultural lens.

Currently, through the economic development work of the Ashland Chamber, we have learned statewide and nationally people of color have had much more difficulty in access to capital, revealing a significant gap in the ability to grow businesses. As we are launching a new program to support small businesses in Ashland and our region, we have developed an outreach strategy to help provide access to these resources to businesses owned by people of color.

The Language of Business, a financial literacy initiative of the Ashland Chamber, will run throughout the summer with five consecutive educational videos with links and partner resources to help guide existing businesses as well as promote new business development.

We continue to listen, learn and support Ashland's cultural literacy efforts, acknowledging the work that needs to be done in our community, to take steps forward together toward a greater awareness to be welcoming and kind to each other.