

## **Culture of Peace: The World Peace Flame is coming to Ashland**

**By Irene Kai / Ashland Culture of Peace Commission**

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This is a journey of pure magic and grace. I went with my daughter to the U.K. for an art exhibit in early September 2015, and on a whim we decided to tour the Snowdonia National Park in Wales. We drove deep into the mountains on a narrow two-lane road with hair pin turns on the “wrong” side of the road. As dusk fell, we decided to go back to town. The nearest turning outlet was behind the mountain, so I drove into a hidden nearby space to turn. As I turned, I suddenly saw a two story tall glass tower with a flame inside near the top of it. An inscription on the glass said: “The World Peace Flame.” I was awed. Deep in the mountains in the middle of nowhere, I was greeted by a living flame representing World Peace. At that instant, I felt as if the flame ignited the sacred flame in my heart. I realized World Peace begins with me.

I went into the building behind the monument where a woman told me the history of the World Peace Flame. In 1999, the princess of the Netherlands went to five continents to collect seven sacred flames, flew them via military and commercial jets and united them in Wales. The Asian flame was from the eternal flame that burns at Gandhi’s memorial. The monument in Wales is the original World Peace Flame Monument. I was invited to light a candle from the flame and I brought it back to Ashland.

I came to Ashland 20 years ago via Hong Kong, New York, London and Los Angeles, not knowing anything about Oregon. Over a decade ago, I was attracted to the local Native American culture, and became very involved with the Ashland Native American group and befriended Roy Hayes, Chief Joseph’s great-great grandson.

I learned deeply about the culture of the Native American’s history in the Rogue Valley.

Jacksonville was once a thriving Chinatown 200 years ago. Hundreds of Chinese migrants came to southern Oregon as laborers for the gold miners. The ditches they dug are still visible today. When the gold dried up, they were chased out

and some were killed. They vanished without a trace. This group of migrants were from Toisan, southern China, the village of my family. They were my ancestral relatives.

On Sept. 21, 2015, the International Day of Peace, my partner David Wick and I launched the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC). During the launch, I lit the candle I brought back from Wales. During the ceremony, I was inspired to bring the World Peace Flame monument to Ashland, to honor our ancestors and to heal their sufferings. By bringing healing and peace to our ancestors, we, the descendants will be able to release the burden of the sufferings of our lineage and learn to practice living in peace for ourselves, our children and their children.

The physical official live eternal World Peace Flame on our city ground will become a beacon of light that represents hope, healing, forgiveness, unity and humility for all who see it. The only other World Peace Flame in the United States is in the Civil Rights Museum in the Lorraine Motel, Memphis, Tennessee, the assassination site of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

For almost three years, I told anyone who had influence in the city of Ashland that I would like to install a World Peace Flame Monument in Ashland.

Everyone thought it was a great idea, smiled and said: "Good Luck." One day, David Wick and I wandered into the Southern Oregon University Sustainability Center. We walked into the old farm house and saw the architectural drawing of the "Thalden Pavilion — The Center of Outrageous Innovation" on the wall. I saw a tower next to the main structure and said to David, "That is the perfect place for the World Peace Flame!"

Barry and Kathryn Thalden, strong supporters of ACPC, agreed to have the World Peace Flame installed at the base of the obelisk and informed us that it will be flanked by two 28 ft. cedar teaching poles, carved by Russell Beebe, a local Native American sculptor. How perfect!

ACPC is responsible for our part of the construction for the housing of the World Peace Flame. I invite you to join me on this magical journey of grace to bring the World Peace Flame to Ashland. With your generous donations, it will become a reality. Please visit our website at [www.ashlandcpc.org](http://www.ashlandcpc.org).

—Irene Kai is a co-founder of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to [ashlandcpc@gmail.com](mailto:ashlandcpc@gmail.com). The ACPC website is [www.ashlandcpc.org](http://www.ashlandcpc.org); like the commission on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission](https://www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission); follow

[twitter.com/AshlandPeace](https://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.