



# Culture of Peace: Ashland - a thriving City of Peace

BY [WILL WILKINSON AND CHRISTOPHER HARDING](#) January 27, 2019

Imagine Ashland as a thriving city of peace. What would that look like? How would it feel?

Can we envision a thriving economy year-round, with enough traffic even in the winter months to pay the bills? How about picturing important local issues like homelessness peacefully resolved. Imagine the wealth of knowledge accumulated by the city's more experienced residents being exchanged generously with younger people who, in turn, share the increasingly valuable wisdom that digital natives can provide.

Ashland, a thriving city of peace. It's quite a vision. So, how do we get there?

The journey is already underway with the City Council and mayor having voted to officially acknowledge Ashland as an International City of Peace and the [Ashland Culture of Peace Commission](#) having partnered with numerous organizations to provide services for the homeless community and local educators while bringing the International Peace Flame to the city's Thalden Pavilion.

An obvious next step is leveraging this foundational work to develop a truly thriving local economy, one that can withstand the increasing challenges of annual wildfire smoke that keeps visitors away and causes financial suffering for local businesses that rely on summer traffic to survive through the winter months.

One solution? Bring more visitors here during the off-season. So, why would they come?

A number of us have recently begun discussions with local businesses and community leaders to brainstorm such possible solutions. This is an important start because it's going to take a broad range of inventiveness to come up a clear direction.

One idea that's already surfaced is to establish Ashland as a center for conscious leadership development — providing the type of leadership training, forums and conferences that equip current and future leaders with the skills to truly thrive in a world of rapid change and potential chaos. This might take shape in terms of a "Leadership Festival" or a series of events during the winter months.

Ashland already has the hotels, the restaurants and support services needed for such an endeavor. As important, our hills are alive with talent, scores of highly-skilled consultants and trainers, some with clients from around the world. We are home to Southern Oregon University, a deep resource in terms of educational knowledge and connections. And, of course, there's the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, a wonderfully well-connected organization with remarkable talent and the ability to attract participants from far and wide.

Ashland is situated midway between Los Angeles and Seattle, just one short flight away, making us highly accessible to many thousands of entrepreneurs, business and community leaders living and working along the Pacific Coast.

What's more, with the Festival, the Ashland Independent Film Festival, Britt, our local wineries, the Rogue River — this is a visitor's paradise! What if we extended a welcome to leadership events AND a full-immersion journey into Ashland culture?

Other small towns have already succeeded. Telluride developed the Telluride Music Festival; Aspen developed the Aspen Institute as an economic engine to provide for its year-round economy. Oxford, Mississippi, population 23,000, developed a two-day art fest with live music, art vendors, great food and a score of community events. They also created an ongoing Arts Incubator program with workshops for artists and entrepreneurs.

It's not beyond reason to believe that, with the right marketing, people would want to experience what's special about this place in the winter months. How would we describe our uniqueness? It's not easy to capture in just a few words, but most residents and visitors would agree that there is something fundamentally uplifting about Ashland. Some say it's the water! Who knows, but native people traveled here for generations to conduct their healing rituals for good reason.

Ashland seems to promote community building. Why not invite others here to experience this, so they could return to their own home towns and spread the word by transplanting the goodness they picked up while here?

We look forward to helping Ashland become a truly thriving city of peace. If you are interested in advancing this conversation, please contact us at [www.thrivinginbusinessandlife.com](http://www.thrivinginbusinessandlife.com) or email [info@ashlandcpc.org](mailto:info@ashlandcpc.org).

*Will Wilkinson is a senior consultant with [www.LuminaryCommunications.org](http://www.LuminaryCommunications.org) and co-founder of the Thriving Leadership Academy, based in Ashland. He has authored eight books and offered personal development programs in seven countries. He lives in Ashland and offers mentoring from his downtown office. Christopher Harding is the founder and a senior consultant with [www.LuminaryCommunications.org](http://www.LuminaryCommunications.org) and co-founder of the Thriving Leadership Academy, based in Ashland. For the last 20 years, he has worked with Fortune 100 companies, government agencies and local businesses assisting them in creating thriving cultures. Previously Chris led an international film/TV/Music company in Los Angeles. 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](http://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 at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.*