

Bridge: Project was completed 'on schedule and within budget'

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"The city is very excited to have completed this project on schedule and within budget," said Jeff Harrington, the city engineer. "It is a very critical bridge to our city infrastructure and city road system."

"And having it open means that we will hopefully see reduced traffic on Marine Drive."

The \$5.8 million project was mostly financed by the federal government. The new span features decorative concrete railings, sidewalks and retaining walls designed to make the bridge sturdier.

Crews gave the stretch of Irving at the bridge a fresh coat of asphalt Thursday before opening the span to traffic, beating a Saturday deadline to complete the work.

The city is a bit apprehensive about how drivers will react, since Irving has had a reputation for speed.

"It's not a NASCAR track," warned Lance Clark, a project inspector for David Evans and Associates, a Portland contractor that worked with the city on the bridge.

But the city expects traffic flow to improve.

"It saves a lot of time and that street really absorbs a lot of traffic," said Astoria City Councilor Russ Warr, who represents the city's east side. "I felt that a lot of our overwhelming traffic this summer was because we had no alternative route of any kind, and so lots of those people that would traditionally be using Irving had to come clear to the other end of town and then cut back."

Residents on Irving, who have suffered through the detours and bustle of construction, will also get some relief. Some neighbors, though, quietly enjoyed the respite from traffic.

There is concern that pent-up driver demand for the alternative route will turn their neighborhood back into a speedway.

"We're dreading it," said Martha White, a retired computer analyst who lives on Irving near 20th Street.



The Irving Avenue Bridge is now open after being closed since August 2014.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Park: Dan and Sue Stein have strong ties to the community

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The gravel trail that connects Skyline and West Grand kitty-corner-style follows what may otherwise have become a "pathway of desire" — a shortcut that walkers naturally take instead of the path already laid down.

"We just want to make it more convenient for them, is really what we're trying to do: Give them a convenient walkway," Dan said.

Yard work

After the Steins bought the property last year, they hired Leslie Thies, a landscape designer from Portland, to blueprint the yard. "She saw what it was and

what it could be," Dan said.

Alex Raichl, general manager of Trails End Recovery, then carried out the excavation work and Dennis' 7 Dees Seaside crew did the landscaping.

"We were looking for something that was peaceful, but not just a standard 'building a yard' that's all green grasses, a patio and picnic tables. There's plenty of those around town," Raichl said. "We wanted to have something that had a little more character to it."

Trails End demolished a defunct house near the intersection and let local carpenters and handymen harvest the wood and other materials. Then the digging began.

"I wanted to do a lot of the work myself, just to really capture what was going on and to be a part of something that turned out great," Raichl added.

The result — which combines new and existing components — is a terraced, open park space that includes camellias, maple and evergreen trees, arborvitae and other drought-tolerant plantings; a rock garden, stone steps and two rock swales (now featuring "Finding Nemo" toys); and a rock wall and berm that separate the private and public areas while preventing erosion.

"We try to create a reason that someone wants to be in that space, in the garden, and

can even compete with those beautiful views all around without blocking them or distracting from them," Thies said.

Golden Rule

Originally from Wisconsin, the Steins moved to Astoria after a 15-year spell in Portland.

Dan, who's in the commercial real estate business, and Sue, the associate dean for the College of Health Professions at Pacific University, had long visited Astoria for anniversaries and special weekends.

"The more we got to know the city and the people, the more we really liked it. Downtown has a real strong

arts-cultural-business vibe to it," said Dan, who sits on the Liberty Theater and Astoria Armory boards. "It's a vibrant city that happens to be located in a very picturesque place."

It will take a few years for the Steins' plants to mature and fill in their park, which may remain a work in progress, said Sue, a member of the Astoria Public Library Board.

"We'll have to see what makes it through the first year," she said. "It's a battle with the deer right now."

Dan said they hope that visitors (who are welcome to add to the small toy collec-

tion, by the way) remember to observe the Golden Rule when passing through.

"In perfect world," Sue said, "people would freely come and go down here but be really respectful of it."

Last week, while Dan was walking their dogs, Herb and Olive Oil, a troop of Girl Scouts earning their exercise merit badges walked up the hill and took a breather on their property.

"They all stopped, had some water, sat down on the rocks, had a nice little chat and went on their way, which was perfect," Dan said. "I mean, it was exactly what we were looking to do."



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