

# Sisters contingent investigates public art in Redmond

By Helen Schmidling  
Correspondent

Last week, more than a dozen Sisters residents met in the courtyard of Redmond City Hall. Traveling in carpools, the group tracked down most of the public art on city streets before having lunch and talking with the Redmond Committee for Art in Public Places.

The Sisters contingent included members of the board of Sisters Arts Association (SAA), business owners, representatives of city government, and the Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce.

Last year, SAA worked closely with the City, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and U.S. Forest Service when screening and accepting art for the Sisters roundabout. And, in 2016, SAA was instrumental in having the City designate an arts district on and around Hood Avenue. One of SAA's next goals involves planning for and installing more public art throughout Sisters.

"The city of Redmond has a passion for sharing art with the public," said Bob Burgess, president of SAA. "My vision is to have Sisters known across the country as a place to go for art in Oregon, but it takes the entire city, working together with a common goal, to achieve what they have accomplished."

Kathy Deggendorfer, executive director of The Roundhouse Foundation and one of Sisters' most passionate advocates for the arts, praised the passion and long-term commitment of Linda Hill, the volunteer in charge of Redmond Committee for Art in Public Places (RCAPP), the Redmond city staff, and Chamber of Commerce.

"Redmond faces the challenge of being a community divided by the highway and the one-way street systems. It's built along a horizontal grid with little development of cross-traffic. You naturally view the city from north to south. They are working hard to create a center and a feeling of community in a place that has been designed to run you through."

Sisters, she added, faces some of the same issues.

"We have a freight corridor running through the center of town. We can't focus too much on decorating the east-west corridor on Hood and Cascade. We need to develop the north-south areas like we have started at Fir Street and Barclay parks."

Paul Alan Bennett has created public art in Sisters,

including the backdrop on the stage in Fir Street Park, and a mural outside The Belfry.

"Having art in public places says the arts play an important role in our community and we are proud of our art," Bennett said. "Although public art is often sculpture or painting, it is also a reminder that in our day-to-day lives, we are always making aesthetic decisions, whether it's the color of car we drive, the clothes we choose to wear each day, or how we arrange food on our plate. These are all aesthetic decisions."

LaRita Chapman owns Raven Makes Gallery right in the middle of Hood Avenue.

"My vision is to see Sisters embrace its natural beauty and collaborate to encourage cultural tourism. Sisters is known for its musical art (Folk Festival), its crafting and traditional art (Quilt Show), and its beautiful flower baskets. Now it's gaining some recognition as a place that can support and attract art galleries and artists, as well as other shopping and boutiques options," she said. "Quality art events and inspiring public art in such a unique setting seems to me to be a natural fit for Sisters as it grows and develops."

Businesswoman Ashley Okura has many reasons to advocate for all sorts of improvements in Sisters. She grew up here, she owns the Sisters Saloon and the Best Western Ponderosa Lodge, and she and husband Aaron are raising their son (who was along on the tour) right here in Sisters.

"I found Art in Public Places to be very enjoyable, especially when the artist is local," she said. "I think (public art) adds depth to the community. I would like to see art on every block. Showcasing art on top of pedestals, tall enough for people to see as they drive through town, may entice them to stop and spend some time enjoying our

town."

Enthusiasm is great, but creating and placing public art that will both identify and enhance Sisters takes work and coordination.

"Loans of art from the artists, two-year installations, city-installed pedestals, would all work in Sisters," Deggendorfer said. "The great part about SAA working with the city is that it represents more than just the business community. Individuals can participate and that will enhance the opportunities."

"Public art needs to be as inclusive as it can so that everyone feels a sense of ownership and pride in the art chosen to go on display," Bennett said, citing the public comments that contributed to the selection of the final decision on art in the Sisters roundabout.

Mayor Chuck Ryan was impressed with what Redmond has accomplished, as it seems to be a very innovative and effective program.

"I would think Sisters could benefit greatly from Redmond's progress, and personally, I would love to see such a program in Sisters. Clearly, the City of Redmond has supported the program fully, and I would think the City of Sisters would be able to do the same."

BreAnne McConkie, principal planner for the City of Sisters, was impressed with Redmond's efforts.

"What a wonderful program! Art is an opportunity for us as a community to create and enhance our collective identity. It adds to our already iconic Western character by creating an authentic and unique sense of place," she said. "It's so great to see the collaboration and such a creative way to maximize the amount of art. Greater collaboration between the City and art community will ensure ongoing public art in public places."

"The Sisters Area



PHOTO BY HELEN SCHMIDLING

Sisters arts advocates, officials, and interested citizens visited Redmond last week to learn how that city has developed its public art program.

Chamber of Commerce is in lockstep with building economic development through the arts, and partners with the Arts Association to make that happen," said Judy Trego, executive director of the Chamber.

Sisters artist Kit Stafford mentioned the importance of children's and youth art in the overall success of Redmond's program.

"The community participation with students designing, citizens voting, and the planning expands of city land to benefit all demonstrate Redmond's wider vision," she said.

Stafford emphasized collaboration. "Clearly, the Chamber of Commerce, public works and city administration play large roles in moving the vision, know-how and dollars forward. It is admirable how they navigate big issues and incorporate everyday experiences for citizens and visitors."

Mayor Ryan pointed to an effort already underway in Sisters.

"We are currently going through a visioning process, and the focus on Sisters as an arts community is clearly a priority, so the public support seems to be there," he said.

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