

# Changes afoot for Sisters Community Labyrinth

By T. Lee Brown  
Correspondent

Sisters Community Labyrinth came into being thanks to a leadership project funded by the Ford Foundation. The labyrinth sits on land whose fate is uncertain. The group running the labyrinth also reorganized recently, under new requirements from its fiscal sponsor.

Jan McGowan and Sharlene Weed were both part of the original cohort that built the labyrinth within the U.S. Forest Service's East Portal site, at the confluence of Highway 20 and Highway 242.

East Portal's distinctive triangle of ponderosa pines and native shrubs suggests an ambiance of nature and the Old West. Visitors arriving from the Valley drive past the commercial activity and asphalt parking lots of Ray's, fast food restaurants, and Bi-Mart. Before hitting the downtown area, they round a pleasant curve surrounded by trees. East Portal provides the landscape folks see out their passenger windows, roughly south and west. In addition to trees and the subtle presence of the labyrinth, East Portal offers a McKenzie Pass interpretive center, restrooms, and small parking area.

Weed and McGowan now sit on the committee that

manages the labyrinth under the auspices of SPRD, the Sisters Parks & Recreation District (disclosure: this writer is also a committee member).

East Portal is on the USFS acreage within Sisters that has been put up for sale. Recent reports indicate that the City of Sisters expressed interest in purchasing the parcel.

"I am glad to hear that the City may soon own the East Portal site. This will give our town the opportunity to have year-round access to the labyrinth," said Weed.

"It's unfortunate that for the past two seasons, parking at the site has been blocked from public use most of the year," she said.

People using the labyrinth often park their cars along the highway or walk over from nearby businesses.

Weed added, "It's now June and still the gate is up."

The East Portal parking lot is expected to be open for the Summer Solstice Gathering at the labyrinth on Friday, June 21 (see related story).

McGowan, who is a nonprofit consultant, praised recent efforts at SPRD to organize its fiscal sponsorship programs.

"Sisters is fortunate to have SPRD serving as the fiscal sponsor for programs that benefit the community," she said.

Without fiscal

sponsorship, small programs and projects would lose out," McGowan explained. Becoming a nonprofit entity such as a 501(c)(3) can take more time and money than a small, new, or struggling community group can come up with on its own.

McGowan listed various benefits associated with being a nonprofit. These include tax exemption, so that donors know their donations are paying for services and activities; the potential for donors to receive tax deductions on their own tax returns; and being eligible to receive grants from foundations.

Fiscal sponsors typically charge a percentage of all incoming revenue to the sponsored group, to offset administrative fees. Many charge in the 10- to 15-percent range. In the past, SPRD handled local groups without any charge. Under SPRD's new approach to fiscal sponsorship, existing groups are charged a five percent administrative fee.

SPRD recently set out new guidelines for each group, including formation of official committees with certain requirements for meetings and reporting. In addition to the labyrinth, SPRD acts as fiscal sponsor to the Astronomy Club, Outlaw Lacrosse, Outlaw Volleyball, and Sisters Farmers Market, among others.

# Solstice gathering set for Friday at labyrinth

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Summer solstice is celebrated around the globe and throughout the ages. It takes place Friday, June 21, this year. Sisters Community Labyrinth will celebrate with a short gathering that includes a labyrinth walk and drumming.

Solstice is associated with bonfires, feasts, and fairy mischief. Marking the longest day of the year, it's also called Midsummer's Day, as in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

"When I honor the passing of the seasons through ancient rituals I feel a deep connection, both to our ancestors and to the natural rhythms of our Earth home," explained Susan Prince.

Prince leads brief, nonreligious rituals that help visitors engage with the labyrinth, the earth, and each other.

Often, labyrinth walking is a quiet and contemplative affair.

"For those of us involved in creating it, the labyrinth was envisioned as a place for the community to gather and find harmony," said Jan McGowan.

For summer solstice, though, people are invited to make a little celebratory noise. Drums and other instruments are welcome.

Observing the cycle of the seasons is common in many

cultures, ancient and modern. Folk traditions call for honoring each turn of the "Wheel of the Year" as the seasons change. Summer solstice is a favorite among Druids, for example, who meet at Stonehenge in England.

"Each season has a particular flavor and, when we tap into that flow, we see that our own human being rhythms are their mirror," Prince continued. "I love sharing the labyrinth experience with my community in a celebratory way. It brings people together, creating a beautiful timeless synergy."

Popular celebrations are held on winter and summer solstices, and the equinoxes in fall and spring. Sisters Community Labyrinth typically hosts gatherings on those days.

All are invited to join in the Summer Solstice Gathering this Friday. The group asks that participants wear white, if convenient, and bring drums or other instruments to play. The gathering starts with a brief circle at 7 p.m., followed by a labyrinth walk. Sisters Community Labyrinth gatherings are usually 30- to 60-minutes long.

The labyrinth is located in East Portal on West Hood Avenue. East Portal is the U.S. Forest Service site where Highway 20 and Highway 242 meet, roughly between Bi-Mart and Les Schwab.



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Last year's Summer Solstice gathering at the labyrinth brought out bright colors and hand drums. This year, participants are asked to wear white or pale clothing — and still bring out those drums.

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