

ROUNABOUT: Another roundabout depends on funding sources

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Approaching Sisters from the west, the traveler sees pumice rocks, dry-land plants, and three antelope sculptures depicting the area to which they are traveling on the east side of the state. Those headed to the Willamette Valley view the solitary elk and basalt pillars representing the west side of the state.

Bennett-Miller said the entire project “came naturally to me because I love Sisters. It is the perfect spot to feel the contrast.” She described a very long process in creating the sculptures, with thousands of hours spent alone in the studio.

She described what a wonderful feeling she had watching the statues being brought in and set in place by a boom truck.

Bennett-Miller’s 90-year-old mother was in attendance and was credited by the artist for always supporting her efforts.

“Never be afraid of doing something you love,” her mother often told her.

Most of the officials who spoke at the ceremony came to their positions long after the decisions were made to construct Oregon’s first roundabout on a Federal and State highway freight route.

City Manager Cory Misley, who has been in Sisters for six months, welcomed everyone on behalf of the City of Sisters and thanked all the people who have been involved in the roundabout project over the past decade.

“The roundabout is a terrific amenity for Sisters and Central Oregon,” Misley remarked. He mentioned the team effort of the City, County, State, and Federal governments, and the local citizens.

He thanked the diverse group of people who all came together in a community effort to make the roundabout a reality. He mentioned ODOT, the City Public Works Department and Manager Paul Bertagna, Kittleson Traffic Engineers, Knife River, Parametrix, Cameron McCarthy landscape design, Mountain Sky Landscaping, the U.S. Forest Service, Western Federal Lands, the local art committee that organized the process for securing the artwork, the City of Sisters, and, of course, Bennett-Miller for bringing the concept to life.

ODOT District 4 Manager Gary Farnsworth assumed his duties about a year ago. He described the multitude of discussions with all the

stakeholders, with lots of people initially saying the roundabout couldn’t be done and wouldn’t work. Some thought there was no way to do center island art.

“But we figured it all out and it took well over 10 years,” said Farnsworth, who appeared truly delighted with the end result.

“We are super excited to have it in the book and successful,” Farnsworth said.

He thanked the adjacent businesses Ponderosa Best Western and Washington Federal for their cooperation during construction. He also named a large team of ODOT employees who brought the project online.

Sisters District Ranger Ian Reid, who arrived about a year-and-a-half ago, said this year marks the 20th anniversary of the 82-mile stretch of Highway 242’s designation as a scenic byway. He concurred that the roundabout art tells the story of transition between the wet side of the state and the dry side.

Reid noted the economic vitality of Sisters as a coveted recreation area. He made particular mention of the art committee’s contribution to

the final successful outcome of the project. He especially appreciated their arranging for the citizen voting on the art project. He took his two daughters to City Hall to see the models and cast their votes. He said they felt empowered that they got to vote, especially when their choice was selected.

“Western Federal Lands went over the top with their funding of the art installation. They went out on a limb for this first public art project. They have seen it and are super-excited. They want to do more in other locations,” Reid told the audience.

At a reception at City Hall following the formal dedication, Farnsworth elaborated for *The Nugget* on the overall safety afforded by the roundabout.

“Roundabouts are the safest intersection you can get,” he said. “They are way safer than signals. Signals don’t solve safety problems. A roundabout reduces things you have to look for as you drive through.

“There are more points of continuity,” Farnsworth explained. “It is an all-around good investment.”



PHOTO BY JERRY BALDOCK

Bob Burgess, Kathy Deggendorfer, Paul Alan Bennett, Dennis Schmidling and Danae Bennett-Miller celebrated the roundabout dedication.

Eight or nine funding sources made it possible to build the roundabout. As changes were made or components added, more sources were identified and funds secured.

Farnsworth said progress on a planned Locust/Highway 20 intersection comes down to a matter of available resources; in other words, finding the funding.

He believes the City, County, and ODOT can work together on an operations approach, which will require dedicated staffing and a draw on resources.

He pointed out that the proposed Highway 97 improvements in Terrebonne came with funds earmarked by the legislature for improvements. That is how that project is able to proceed.

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