

Alternatives to memorial designed

■ **AWARD:** A contest focused on possible replacements for the cross on Skinner Butte

By Keijo Hunter
Freelance Reporter

The Skinner Butte war memorial cross has been the center of controversy in Eugene for years, and this year the cross was the center of a local design contest.

Local architects and students participated in a contest to design a hypothetical replacement for the cross. Winners of the First Annual Jack Stafford Memorial Student-Practitioner Design Charette were announced at a public gathering in Lawrence Hall on Wednesday.

The contest was sponsored by the Southwestern Oregon Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

"Our intention was for participants to grapple with all those issues [surrounding the cross] and then present those issues to the public for their analysis," said Tobias Barwood, design charette committee member.

One of two meritorious awards went to local architect Eric Hall.

His design featured a crater that would be formed out of the natural base of the butte. A path would allow observers to walk along the crater while viewing writings along the wall. The exit of this underground voyage would lead to Willamette Street.

Other design solutions ranged from a structure featuring a helium balloon and a lit block figure that resembled a cross to everything in between.

Meritorious award winners received \$125 for their entries. Winners included Hall and architecture student Christopher Kummerer. Honorable mention award winners received \$50. These included graduate architecture students Francis Cooke and Aso Jaff as well as graduate land architecture students Matthew Heidloff and David Whittaker. All of the entries will be on display until Nov. 27 in Lawrence Hall.

The charette, an architecture term that is synonymous with competition, comes at the climax of discussion surrounding what may be Eugene's most controversial land fixture: The Skinner

Butte Cross.

The cross, which first was erected in December 1936, has long been the subject of recurring judicial and civic controversy.

"Since the mid-60s, it's been litigated upon twice by the Oregon Supreme Court and twice by the 9th Circuit Court in San Francisco," Barwood said. "The Court ruled that the cross violates the establishment clause of the constitution."

But in 1971, Eugene voters took action that affected the Court's earlier decision.

"The people of Eugene passed an ordinance changing the cross from a cross to part of the War Memorial, so the court reversed itself and said because it is a war memorial it could stay," Barwood explained.

In August 1996 the cross was declared a violation of the separation of church and state by a three-judge panel.

The city council voted in September to find a new location for the cross. A date for the removal has not been set and litigation regarding the cross is expected to continue.

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