

New Sellwood Bridge span opens, yet nine months of work remains

By Erik Vidstrand
The Southwest Portland Post

The new Sellwood Bridge opens to traffic on March 1. While it marks a major milestone, more construction work will continue which cannot be performed until the new bridge opens. This will allow contractors to begin removing the old bridge and complete other projects.

The current bridge opened in 1925 replacing the Spokane Street Ferry. The \$442,000 cost was reputed to be "the most extensive bridge programme (sic) of any city in America" (The Oregonian, Jan. 1, 1924). It took 250 working days to construct.

It would be Portland's first Willamette River bridge without a movable span and the first Portland bridge to be designed without trolley tracks.

The problems with the 90-year old Sellwood Bridge were well known: foundation problems, general deterioration, and a narrow, lightweight design that poorly served all traffic modes.

Multnomah County, who owns the property, maintained a rigorous safety program that included visual inspections every three months to ensure that the bridge continued to be safe to use but was decided it needed replacing.

The project began back in 1999 with the South Willamette River Crossing Study looking at a variety of options for a new bridge. Community input was provided and local school children developed their own models. Work began in summer 2012.

"One of the most important messages we want to convey to the public about the bridge opening on March 1," stated bridge spokesman Mike Pullen, "is that we still have nine months of construction to complete.

"I think your westside readers would be especially interested to know what work will be completed after the bridge opens and why."

The westside trail from the bridge to Willamette Park is expected to open in April. The wide trail will follow the trolley corridor and Southwest Miles Place. It will be a major improvement compared to the old trail along the east side of busy Macadam Avenue (Highway 43).

The Macadam Bay/Freeman Motors

driveway work has resumed after a 30-day delay due to an archaeological find of a century-old brick house foundation and expected to be completed by April.

The old concrete truss spans (deck, sidewalks and railings) will be removed in March and April. The steel truss will be disassembled and removed in May and June.

Northbound Highway 43 which goes under the bridge is expected to open in May. The left turn from the Sellwood Bridge to Highway 43 south is expected to open in late August. It will eliminate the need for drivers to travel north and turn around at Taylors Ferry.

Final paving on Highway 43 will take place in August. Bioswales will be installed on the both sides of the river from August to November.

The new bridge features a steel deck arch design, with three arches supporting the deck of the main river spans. It

measures 1,976 feet in length, including the main river spans and the east and west approaches.

This design picked by a community advisory committee allows for a 64-foot width at its narrowest point. Two 12-foot travel lanes, two 12-foot shared use sidewalks, and two 6.5-foot bike lanes/emergency shoulders make up the bridge.

"While no plans are underway for a streetcar at this time, the deck is ready when the need and budget present itself," Pullen commented. "A MAX line was never in the design and will never



Aerial view of the new Sellwood Bridge as it appeared in January. (Photo courtesy of Multnomah County)

go over the span."

A farewell candlelight walk was held at the end of February. Participants strolled across the 90-year old bridge one last time to say goodbye. At press time, a community celebration was scheduled to be held Feb. 27 to dedicate the new bridge. Dignitaries, workers, media, and the community were scheduled to be on hand.

Harry Austin Blythe, Jr. 1927-2015

OBITUARY

Harry Austin Blythe, Jr. passed away on Dec. 19, 2015. Harry died at home of cancer with the care and support of hospice, his family and a dear close friend.



Born Aug. 25, 1927 in Chicago, Harry attended Hyde Park High School, graduating in 1945. He enlisted in the U.S. Navy and was stationed in Corpus Christi, Texas and served as a medical corpsman.

After his discharge from the Navy, Harry returned to Illinois to attend Bradley University, where he met Barbara Joanne Stone. Harry and Barbara were married in 1950 and settled in Peoria, Ill. where Harry got a job selling ads for the local newspaper and Barbara became a schoolteacher.

In 1953, the family moved to Burbank, Calif., so Harry could accept a job selling ads for the *Los Angeles Times*. Their son John was born in 1954, daughter Merry in 1955 and daughter Leslie in 1956.

Soon after this Harry began working for Ohio Medical and the Blythe family grew by one more with the birth of daughter Stephanie in 1962.

In 1968, Harry's company transferred him to the San Francisco area, so the family moved to Piedmont, Calif. In the mid-1970s, Harry and Barbara purchased a home on four acres on the Mendocino, Calif. coast and spent most of their weekends there.

Harry soon bought the *Coast Peddler*, a small newspaper which evolved into the *Mendocino Commentary* under his ownership. The Blythes sold their home in Piedmont and bought a new home in San Francisco. Throughout the 1980s, Harry split his time between Mendocino and San Francisco, selling surgical equipment for Medical Technologies and continuing to publish his newspaper.

In 1991, Barbara retired from her teaching career so the Blythes sold their home in Mendocino along with the newspaper and moved to Portland. In 1997, Harry began selling ads for the *Southwest Portland Post* and he and Barbara (who were married for 55 years) did some traveling. Barbara died in 2005.

For the next 10 years, Harry continued to sell ads for *The Post* while making new friends and enjoying time with his family.

Harry primarily covered Hillsdale (where he lived) and Multnomah Village.

Harry was a lifelong fan of the Chicago Cubs, as well as an all-around fan of football, basketball, baseball, and track & field.

He loved listening to music and public radio, going to see movies on Sunday afternoons, and having breakfast at his neighborhood bakery. He loved to read, and especially enjoyed poetry, periodicals, and the *New York Times*.

Harry is survived by his sister, Bette Blythe of Las Vegas; children John Blythe (Denise) of San Anselmo, Calif., Merry Pettis (Bill) of Portland, Leslie Pressman (Stuart) of Carmel Valley, Calif., and Stephanie Evjen (Eddy) of Portland. He is also survived by seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Harry will be missed by his friends and family and will be remembered for his quick wit, corny jokes, snappy one-liners and his overall kind and caring nature.

The Southwest Portland Post is researching funding a journalism scholarship at Wilson High School in the name of Harry Austin Blythe, Jr. Contributions to this fund can be made care of this newspaper.

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