

# Buddhist meditation center offers tranquility

By  
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Associated Press

BEND, Ore. (AP) — On a rural property west of Redmond, Buddhist monks walk along dirt paths, tend to gardens and meditate under maple trees or inside a house next to a gold statue of Buddha.

The International Insight Meditation Center of Oregon is a quiet, peaceful retreat center located on 12.5 acres off state Highway 126. The center is open for daytime use and hosted its first formal retreat Oct. 13 and 14.

Ben Heffer, who's a student of one of the monks and visits from Colorado, hosted the first retreat, which attracted four people — one from Bend, two from Redmond and one visiting from Vancouver, Washington.

Heffer, an English-speaking instructor, said he plans to organize more retreats next spring and summer. While the center celebrates Buddhist culture, Heffer said, it is open to all religions and experience levels.

"The practice is the practice," Heffer said. "It doesn't matter what your language is."

Heffer helped the property's owners, Preecha Tingakrau and Yee Thanittithanand, open the center last year. A Deschutes County hearings officer approved a land use application in December 2016 to allow the center to open in a house and detached building on the property.

A condition of the county's approval is that guests are not allowed to stay overnight. However, up to five monks can live on the property at one time.

Meditation sessions guided by monks can be held 10 to 12 times per year, consisting of between 10 to 15 people. Five of those sessions can include up to 30 people.

Tingakrau, 47, and Thanittithanand, 48, who own Oishi Japanese restaurant in Redmond, moved to the area four years ago in hopes of one day opening a meditation center.

"We feel grateful that once in our lives we can do this," Thanittithanand said.

The owners have plans to add landscaping to the property and give the monks more places to meditate. The property already has a greenhouse and garden area, where the monks planted 300 trees. Herbs and spices are growing in the gardens.

Eventually, Tingakrau and Thanittithanand will consider reapplying with the county to have overnight stays. Thanittithanand said it is important for people to be immersed in the tranquil environment, and going home at night can break that focus.

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## Ben Heffer, retreat host

"We want to do everything little by little," Thanittithanand said.

Each day, Tingakrau and Thanittithanand prepare Thai food and offer it to the monks, who only eat in the mornings. The monks, who are from Thailand, Nepal and India, usually stay for a short time and then travel around the country or back to their home countries to continue their practice.

Ajahn Chalee, 83, a senior monk from Thailand, is a regular on the property. He previously practiced in Denver, Salt Lake City and Las Vegas before moving to Oregon. He has been gone this month visiting other Buddhist

temples.

One of his students — Singto Korsungnoen — has been the lone monk on the property.

Korsungnoen, 40, of Thailand, said through translation he finds the property very peaceful, and the temperature in Redmond much cooler than in Thailand. He has no plans of leaving any time soon.

"In Thailand, it's hot all the time," he said. "It's so much cooler here."

Redmond resident Toni Rich, who became friends with Tingakrau and Thanittithanand after dining at their restaurant, comes by the center Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to teach the monks English.

Rich, who has four children, 10 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren, often brings some of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren to the classes.

"It's a lot of fun," Rich said. "We use flash cards. We have a good time."

When Tingakrau and Thanittithanand moved to central Oregon with the vision of starting a meditation center, they contacted members of the Wat Buddha Oregon congregation in Turner, south of Salem. The congregation offered support and supplies for the new center.

It has taken long days of work and planning, but Tingakrau and Thanittithanand are honored to bring a meditation center to the region. On breaks from running their restaurant, they find time to enjoy the property and meditate.

Thanittithanand still remembers words of encouragement from her friend and business partner, Tingakrau, when they first started planning the center.

"He said our dream is going to come true," Thanittithanand said.

Information from: *The Bulletin*, <http://www.bendbulletin.com>



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And Downing encouraged the importance of looking at issues individually instead of just voting party lines.

The last question by Eby was, "What are some solutions to fixing the system so it can be more responsive to average citizens?"

Dwyer reminded the audience that it was important to pressure the government to change and cited the Tea Party as an effective force in getting their representatives to flip votes. "Government will respond to pressure."

In addition, Lathen replied that there is "always a bias in what you hear, if you read it on the internet, don't believe it and be more skeptical with the media."

After the panel and refreshments, the audiences tuned-in to a video showing a speaker Timothy Snyder, Professor of History at Yale University, author of "On Tyranny" explain how tyranny can happen.

The event concluded with audience members convening into four groups to discuss 1) First Amendment freedoms, 2) the election system, 3) political polarization and 4) solutions.

During the group discussions some of the topics included: How do we engage our youth in the political process, mainstream media versus internet and twitter, states' rights and the evolution of democracy, electoral college effectiveness, voter fraud, "Slow Money Movement" and the investment of farmers, re-drawing district lines, personal sovereign rights and using local media to educate residents.

Carol Valentine from Illinois Valley Indivisible said that one of the main reasons for having this conversation was that their group "had the sense that people in the community were concerned about the state of government and didn't know where to turn."

Valentine hoped that everyone leaving the meeting felt hopeful and empowered.



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