



DENNIS WIANCKO

A Decade of Peace and Community

Chela Mela, Altared Space and Library celebrate the big 1-0

by Suzi Steffen

Eleven years ago, the Oregon Country Fair basically had two options for fairgoers: Either you're on the path with the booths (and parades and fairies and ...), or you're watching a performance. "We didn't have that feeling of all hanging out in the park together," says Hilary Anthony, who now coordinates the large open space known as Chela Mela.

This year, Chela Mela Meadow is one of several areas celebrating a decade of providing a variety of different spaces to fairgoers: spaces for healing, spaces for quiet meditation, spaces for kids' crafts, spaces for advice, spaces to, well, feel *space*.

Great as buying local, handmade items and watching superb musical and spoken word artists can be, Anthony says, it's also nice to join in and be part of the group. And sometimes being part of the group doesn't mean walking along the dusty path or standing in the full sunshine. "The kind of activities we put out there are meant to be much

more participatory," she explains, and though some of those activities (kids' parades, kids' crafts) "are geared towards children, a lot of things are intended for people of all ages," she adds.

For instance, in the dharma garden, there are yoga classes and meditation space, and on one of the stages, the Fremont Players from Seattle perform a kind of theater known as panto. Panto, short for pantomime, has roots deep in theatrical tradition and encourages a huge range of audience participation, from hissing the villain to singing along with rowdy, rewritten but well-known songs. Then there's the Monkey Palace stage, where acts like Jason Webley are popular with the youth. Besides the development this year of a "processional ritual based on the imagery we've created," especially the flying heart, Anthony talks about jugglers sharing their craft, a healing arts booth, puppets and puppeteers (this year from Indonesia) and special performances from the March Fourth Marching Band. And, of course, the legendary Wavy Gravy will help celebrate the 10th birthday on Saturday afternoon as fair staff hand out cupcakes. "It's about creating your own art and having community; it's about celebrating in the broad sense, both as a happy community building time and experiencing the changes that happen in the community," Anthony says.

At the 10-year-old Altared Space, in what founder Nicki Scully calls "a little sanctuary in the heart of the fair" in a park just past Shady Grove, fair attendees can focus on their spirituality and get both advice and healing. The altar, Scully explains, includes "pieces, statuary and artwork symbolic of all different traditions and religions and ways of being."

There's a space Scully describes as "sacred crafting for kids, where we've made prayer flags and masks." This year, children and young adults will be making spirit dolls along with their parents and anyone else who wants to participate. "They're made with a prayer, made with an intention," Scully explains. The prayer flags that people made a few years ago now hang throughout the park after the Altared Space crew backed and rimmed them; that means "people come back and see their own prayer," Scully notes.

In addition, healers work a booth called "Altared Healing — 5 cents," which began as a light, fun idea with an imitation of *Peanuts*' Lucy and her advice booth. But the very first question, healer Kalita Todd says, showed the healers that things could get serious. That question,



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Scully recalls, was from a 15-year-old who was pregnant and didn't know what to do. "We do our best to really be present for anybody who shows up and bring all of our skills," Todd says. Like Scully, who is the teacher for many of the healers, Todd practices alchemical healing.

There's a meditation space where, Scully says, people can get a quiet break. "A mother can nurse her baby there quietly, or people can just kick back and relax and take a few minutes out of the chaos. It's a haven," she notes. Todd also likes the times in the morning when the

crew offers an invocation, prayers and meditation. For family and fairgoers alike, Todd says, the space "honors the spirit and really opens it up for all ways that people want to come find their sense of spirit."

The altar also provides a lovely area. "It's absolutely gorgeous," Todd says.

For those who live perhaps more in their heads than in their spirits, the 10-

year-old library run by Jim Evangelista (whom Rhys Thomas calls the noisiest librarian he's ever heard as Evangelista hawks his free wares) provides essential reading. "My hope has been to encourage everyone coming to bring a book ... and then they can look forward to finding the perfect book that another 'patron' dropped off just for them," Evangelista says.

Black Sun Books, Tsunami Books, the University Bookstore and Smith Family, among others, have participated in donating books for this space, which Evangelista has begun to light up at night for fair family and late night events. "The positive connections between the community at large and the fair family have been a valuable success," he says.

So whether fairgoers need a healing space, a great book, a chance to make a puppet or learn to juggle or simply a space to sit down off the beaten path, many people have worked to make new, family-friendly spaces where everyone can relax and enjoy the fair. Stop by and give a hearty happy birthday greetings to Chela Mela, Altared Space and the Library, about to enter their second decade of life.

EW



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