

PROBLEMS IN HISTORIC STONework AT SKINNER BUTTE

In addition to the historic trolley tracks unearthed every so often on Willamette Street, Eugene is bursting with historically significant elements that are out in the open, like the dry stone retaining wall on the north side of Skinner Butte built during the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

It's a vibrant piece of Eugene's history, but according to local stonemason Alan Ash, a 2012 project along the wall has compromised the historical integrity of the stonework, removing historic design features that cannot be recovered. Ash says the city of Eugene contracted to build a set of steps that have at least 70 design flaws negatively impacting the longevity and effectiveness of the steps. Now he's worried that similar problems will plague future dry stone projects.

"I love stonework; it's my thing," says Ash, a professional member and instructor for the Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain who has worked as a dry stone mason for more than 30 years in projects including the bridge at Spencer Butte and the Heceta Head Lighthouse. "This is part of the historical, cultural history of Eugene, and some of our landmarks are not being treated well."

Ash says that in 2012, he attended a pre-bid meeting for the project, but because of the short time frame, Ash decided not to bid, as he was working on another project and would not be able to complete it in time to start on the steps. By law, the city is required to take the lowest-cost qualified bidder, in this case, Oregon Woods, a local contractor.

Throughout the course of the project, the contractors made a number of departures from the specifications, according to the 2012 specs from the city of Eugene. Ash says the departures include sections of the wall that replace building stones with gravel, uneven heights between the supporting walls flanking

the steps, exceeded gap tolerances (the size of a space between two building stones), gaps filled with small stones (face pinning) and a complete absence of a foundation stone, filled in with gravel instead. "When you don't meet the specs, everything you do saves time and money," Ash says.

Jesse Cary-Hobbs with Eugene Parks and Open Space was contract manager and project inspector for the project, and he says the steps are "a lovely addition to the park." According to Cary-Hobbs, the steps were created to link the developed part of the Skinner Butte Park system to the natural landscape of the butte and to honor the character of the original wall, not perfectly match it.

Cary-Hobbs says that Oregon Woods encountered some difficulties working with the stones during the project, and due to cost and time limitations, he says that details like height tolerances in the finished project do not exactly match the original specifications. "When we are going out of the specifications, those are generally conversations we are having with the contractor and saying it's OK," he says. And while the columns at the front of the steps were built to complement the other stairs around the butte, he says the steps and patched wall are not meant to duplicate the look and historical structure of the original.

"We're in very bad shape financially right now, so we have to balance who we can get with the best price we can get. Ultimately, we feel we got the best project we could get for the money," Cary-Hobbs says. "Alan [Ash] would have given us a better project. We recognize the fact that the contractor we had wasn't at the same level as Alan, and we weren't going to get everything we possibly wanted."

According to the Skinner Butte Master Plan, one of the goals for the park is to "preserve, enhance and recognize Skinner Butte Park's rich natural and cultural history." Ash says similar issues affected a project at Hendricks Park, where the historic stonework in the picnic shelter was poorly copied. "You ruin the history and it's gone," he says. — Amy Schneider

PHOTO BY ALAN ASH



A couple of big plant sales are happening Saturday, May 10, just in time for Mother's Day giving. The eighth annual **Oregon Plant Fair** will be from 9 am to 2 pm at the Alton Baker Park shelters, sponsored by Avid Gardeners Eugene District Garden Clubs and a benefit for the Master Gardener Extension Program. The 23rd annual **Hardy Plant Sale** will be from 9 am to 2 pm indoors at the Fairgrounds, a benefit for the nonprofit Willamette Valley Hardy Plant Group.

May is Bike Month and the Toole Design Group is contracting with LTD and the city of Eugene to prepare a feasibility study about a **bike share system** in Eugene. An open house will be from 4 to 7 pm Wednesday, May 14, at the Next Stop Center, 1099 Olive. St. Formal presentations of the study will be at 4 pm and again at 6 pm. Email bikeshare@ltd.org for more information.

The city of Eugene's **Business Commute Challenge** is the week of May 10-16 and it's an opportunity for friendly competition among local enterprises to encourage employees to walk, bike, carpool or telecommute to work. Last year, 2,100 people representing 172 business teams participated. See commutechallenge.org for information and to sign up.

The 39th annual **Conference on Neighborhood Concerns** will be at the Hilton in Eugene May 21-24 and local businesses will be interested in hearing about trends and directions in the economy, food production, transportation, public-private partnerships and much more. Keynote speakers include urban planning expert Julian Agyeman of Tufts University, Seattle neighborhood organizer Jim Diers and author and consultant Michele Hunt. Registration is \$100 but scholarships and discounts may be available. See wkly.ws/1qt or call 682-5277.

The nonprofit **Aprovecho** Sustainability Education Center in Cottage Grove is offering workshops on permaculture every Sunday this spring on a "gift-economy basis." Participants can donate money or share skills or other forms of compensation. Permaculture training focuses on natural building, ecological gardening and farming, and sustainable livelihood. See aprovecho.net or call Jordan Chesnut at (805) 458-8361.

The **Springfield/McKenzie Welcome Arch** has been in the planning process for years and a 5-foot scale model of the arch is now on display at Springfield City Hall. One likely location for the full-size gateway arch will be on Hwy. 126, aka McKenzie Highway, at the east end of Springfield. The arch, similar in design to one in Glenwood that was wrecked by a flood in the 1920s, will serve as a landmark to promote the area and its natural attractions. The more elaborate new design features a drift boat on top. Email thomas.lincoln@comcast.net or call 726-1817 to help with the project.

The Eugene-based **ECO Sleep Solutions** is expanding to Corvallis and will have its grand opening June 1 at 113 SW 3rd St. The Eugene store and gallery are at 25 E. 8th Ave. The business, owned by Jim and Donna Byrd, specializes in organic mattresses, beds and bedding. Call 343-1022. The company also owns Accessible Bath Company.

The nonprofit Willamette Riverkeeper is now registering boaters for its 14th annual **Paddle Oregon** Aug. 18-22, often described as an "eco-tourism vacation." The 98-mile guided trip by canoe or kayak down the Willamette River includes environmental education, catered gourmet meals, yoga, evening entertainment, hot showers and campsites. The cost is \$699 and opportunities for crowd-sourced fundraising are available for the first time this year. The trip this year begins in Corvallis and ends at Molalla State Park in Canby, stopping at breweries and wineries along the way. Experienced paddlers only. See details at paddleoregon.org or see our 2010 cover story at wkly.ws/1qu.

CORRECTIONS

In our blurb about **Edge of the World Games & Comics** in this column April 24, we got the phone number wrong. Call 688-7529. The new retail store is at the corner of Hwy. 99 and Barger Drive and sells video games, comic books and collectable card games.



LADY JANGCHUP PALMO

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER