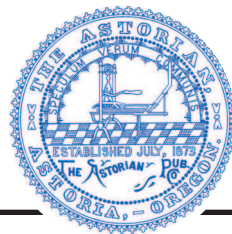


OPINION



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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

REMEMBERING TOM CHATTERTON



The Daily Astorian
Seaside's Tom Chatterton is remembered for his spiritual message and love of the city.

When Seaside's Mary Blake read a remembrance of Tom Chatterton at the Seaside City Council this fall, observers may have been unaware of his long history with and contributions to the city.

Chatterton, who died Aug. 5, was a renaissance man, a builder, landscaper, volunteer, preacher, counselor, adviser, mentor and more. Many of Seaside's public spaces bear his mark.

He was a member of the South Clatsop Interfaith Partnership, bringing together representatives of the secular and spiritual communities. He was a member of the city's landmark commission and the public library siting committee, and served on the tree board from its inception until 2011.



R.J. MARX

"He volunteered thousands of personal hours over his quarter of a century commitment," recalled Mary Blake, former longtime director of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District. "Without question it was a labor of deep love."

A love for animals

"Not only did Tom volunteer with us," Blake said. "He shared his talents and skills with others. He would perform commitment ceremonies, weddings, celebration of life gatherings for friends and community members. As well as services for our four-legged members of our families."

Perhaps his most legendary moment was when he conducted a service for Keiko the whale.

In January 1996, Chatterton sat mesmerized as he watched Keiko the orca being airlifted to the Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport, where the International Marine Mammal Project built a state-of-the-art rescue and rehabilitation facility.

When Keiko died in December 2003, Chatterton was moved to write a poem as a memorial, which he sent to the aquarium. He was contacted by Patrick Helbling, acting president at the aquarium, who told him that the aquarium had received many phone calls and emails about the whale's death. Chatterton suggested the remembrance service and was later asked to officiate.

More than 700 mourners turned out in Newport, as Keiko's former handlers recalled his love of games and gentleness.

Animals large and small were his passion. Chatterton was described as sharing his home with three cats and Buckley, a 6-year-old Lhasa Apso. "I think we're hardwired by creation to deal with nature's creatures on a deep level," Chatterton told a reporter.

Chatterton served as an independent chaplain and offered services for normal "passages-of-life events" and as a support in times of crisis. For many people, those times of crisis involved pets.

One of Chatterton's goals was to bring a pet cemetery to Clatsop County. "Some dear friends of mine lost their 13-year-old cocker spaniel about five years ago," Chatterton told the Seaside Signal. "She went into a grieving period and did not come out of the house for seven weeks. I thought, who responds to people who are hurting over an animal?"

His dream was to create a Clatsop County pet cemetery — alas, never fulfilled — and to expand his ministry to include veterinary chaplaincy.

Landscape dreams

But it was as a landscaper and designer that Chatterton ultimately left his mark on Seaside.

Within a year of moving to Seaside in 1992, he ran an ad in the local newspaper inviting individuals interested in forming a Unitarian Universalist Fellowship.

Within a year, the fellowship was formed. Chatterton had a deep spiritual passion and regularly attended other churches, including the Catholic and Lutheran congregations. He wrote about his faith in columns in both the Signal and The Daily Astorian.

It was the city's parks, nooks and crannies that his mark is the most evident. He filled in the spaces with his own majestic vision.

"The district, with the help of the city, just completed the construction of the Seaside Youth Center," Blake



Keiko was a fan favorite at the Oregon Coast Aquarium. Tom Chatterton led a memorial service in the whale's honor.



Oregon Coast Aquarium

The memorial in front of Keiko's exhibit at the Oregon Coast Aquarium.



The Daily Astorian

This rock garden area near the Sunset Aquatic Facility was designed and installed by Tom Chatterton.

said. "We had this beautiful building but it was stark naked! No landscaping whatsoever!"

Chatterton volunteered to design a landscaping plan and Blake agreed to support it with resources.

"That started our remarkable 25-year

relationship," she said.

His work was so good it grew to include the entire district, she said, from design to mentoring kids on how to pick out boulders to plant materials.

"Nothing was done without Tom's steady guidance, landscape mastery and

whimsical wit," Blake said.

They worked so well together, he helped transform a crumbling unused Scout hut into a community structure that today hosts civic and non-profit groups at no charge, known as the "Mary Blake Playhouse," intended to provide common areas where people can visit and get connected.

No detail was too small — Chatterton selected Idaho quartz for the layered rock fountain, designed so the quartz' mica content gives the fountain a slight iridescence when the morning sun shines. He even knew what time of day was best for viewing. Shrubs, plants and trees were "chosen in a nursery in the foothills of Mount Hood," he said at the time, noting that the grounds featured several species not often seen on the North Coast.

The remarkable landscaping was enjoyed by the community.

"It was a source of pride for all," Blake said. "It also was something that went through each season with great beauty and introspection. Tom was very spiritual. He connected with the divine through nature providing sacred spaces throughout our campus."

Lasting legacy

Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District board member Michael Hinton said in November that "I first met (Chatterton) through my work with the park district and his emergence as a volunteer during the early days of the district, as he designed the landscaping in and around the pool and youth center as well as the community center.

"He strove to maintain and enhance his work into the memorial garden near the skate park," Hinton said.

Chatterton continued to work with rec district director Skyler Archibald.

"He had strong convictions on all things landscaping, but was an amazing volunteer who never expected anything in return for his service," Archibald said. "That area doesn't have all the exact same features as it did when he designed it, but we've tried to keep the essence of the design while making the building a bit more visible from the road."

Archibald said he and Chatterton had been working together on a piece of art by the skate park to honor Jacob McCulloch, a volunteer firefighter, Seaside High School grad, skater and surfer-boarder who was killed in a car accident in 2005.

Other projects included design of a columbarium for the American Legion. An "ambitious" plan for a veterans memorial for Broadway Park reached the engineering phase, but remains an unfinished goal.

"His failing eyesight and health impaired his ability to keep up with his love," Hinton said.

City councilors Tom Horning and Tita Montero proposed that a tree of "appropriate species and size" be planted in his memory at Cartwright Park.

That appropriate species was a redwood — a sturdy giant.

"He was deeply engaged to help improve the quality of life for all of us," Blake said. "He will forever remain alive in our hearts, memory and beautiful naturescapes he envisioned and planted."

R.J. Marx covers South County for The Daily Astorian and is editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.