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KATHRYN B. BROWN
Publisher

DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW

Fix statue problem before it's set in stone

If you're alive, live in the city of Pendleton and have left your home at least once since Round-Up, you've probably been asked about statues.

It's less likely that you have an opinion on the matter.

Still, some of your fellow citizens have strong feelings about them, so it has become a topic of civil conversation. And because it has, the mayor's art commission and the city council has no other option than to revisit the decision to place a bronze statue of renowned PHS football coach Don Requa at Brownfield Park. They didn't expect this outcry but they got it; now they need to acknowledge it and take action on it.

Whether it's the size of the statue (it would be the tallest on Main Street), the theme (it doesn't fit the downtown Western motif) or the placement (he's a coach, put him at the high school), people have found plenty wrong with the Requa plan.

We don't have a strong opinion about what — if anything — should be placed at the historic location, on the old Oregon Trail, where Main Street crosses the Umatilla River. And we're inclined to support any organization (in this case the Linebackers Club) willing to raise serious dollars to support public art.

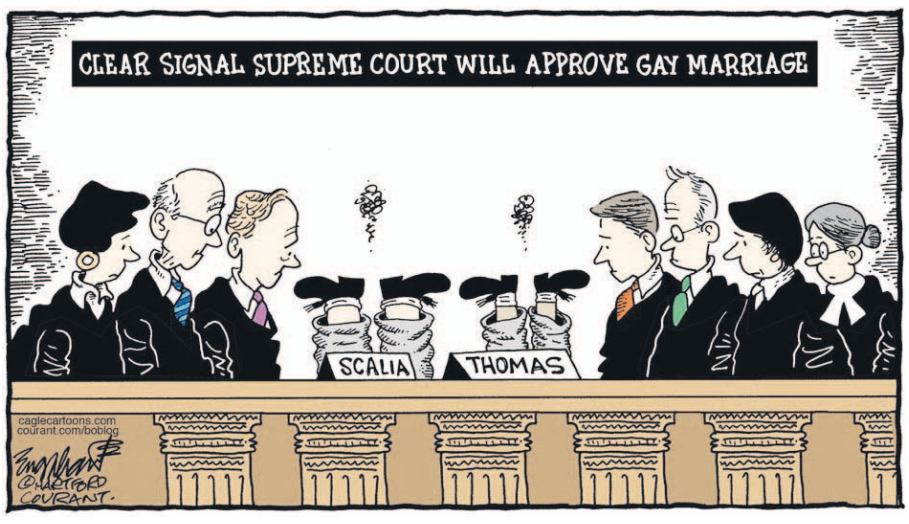
> The decision to place a statue of Don Requa in Brownfield Park needs to be addressed.

But it's pretty clear there is a sizable enough contingent against the current plan that it needs to be rethought. Landing on a workable compromise should be easy enough if both sides stay flexible and the good work of a good man can be made and displayed.

Worthwhile art is never going to make everyone happy — it's inherently subjective. And we shouldn't be afraid to build something that makes us a little uncomfortable, but gets at a deeper truth.

But community art that divides the community kind of defeats the purpose.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Powering electric cars

JOE NOCERA
Comment

Steve LeVine became interested in batteries in the wake of the financial crisis. LeVine is the Washington correspondent for Quartz, a news site covering the global economy, and he sensed, he told me recently, "a loss of confidence in the U.S. in our ability to create a real economy" - one based not on financial instruments or a real estate boom, but real products that would help create entire new industries.

The battery could be such a product. Not just any battery, of course, but a battery designed for electric cars and capable of powering them for 200 miles or even 300 miles per charge. A battery that could compete with — and eventually replace — the internal combustion engine and transform the electric car from a niche product to a mass-market automobile.

Such a battery did not yet exist. But if such a thing could be invented, it might well develop into a $100 billion-plus market in its first five or six years of existence, according to LeVine. A battery like that could vastly improve energy security. And with so much less exhaust spewed into the air, the effect on climate change could be lowered. The United States was trying to develop such a battery, but so were many other countries.

> A battery that could eventually replace the internal combustion engine would transform the electric car to mass-market automobile.

That interest led LeVine to the Argonne National Laboratory, one of the Department of Energy's 17 national labs. For the better part of two years he was given access to its Battery Department, emerging with a captivating book entitled "The Powerhouse: Inside the Invention of a Battery to Save the World."

With the closure or winnowing of many of corporate America's industrial labs - not least the famed Bell Labs, which is a shadow of its once-mighty self - industry now relies heavily on the U.S. government's national labs for basic scientific research. Thus it was that scientists at Argonne, which is in the Chicago suburbs, discovered the battery chemistry that made electric cars possible, called NMC (for nickel-manganese-cobalt). The Chevrolet Volt uses a version of NMC, as will, reportedly, the next generation of Nissan Leafs. Which also suggests its drawback: The Volt only gets about 40 miles on pure battery power alone before it switches to its gasoline-powered engine.

The core of LeVine's book is about the effort to take the next big step: create a battery that can achieve five times that mileage, while still remaining stable — stability is always a big issue with batteries — and affordable. The scientists at Argonne — some of them larger-than-life figures in the battery world — labeled this effort NMC 2.0. Though the writing can get technical at times, LeVine still tells a rollicking good tale. The scientists make a number of painstaking advances, inching the chemistry forward, only to discover problems. One such problem is called "voltage fade" — an instability that is serious enough to make the battery unusable in an electric vehicle.

There is also a private company in LeVine's narrative, a startup called Envia Systems. Licensing the advances made by Argonne, it claims to have solved the rest of the puzzle. Its executives are persuasive enough that General Motors contracts with them to create the battery for an electric car it is calling, internally, the Bolt, which is supposed to get 200 miles per charge.

LeVine told me that, for a long time, he fully expected that his book would end with Envia solving the riddle of NMC 2.0, and having a wildly successful public offering. But that's not what happens. As GM, Argonne, and LeVine eventually discover, the Envia claims were wildly exaggerated. After GM finds out the company won't be able to deliver after all, it ends its contract with the company and looks to LG Chem Ltd., the big South Korean company, to supply the battery.

Indeed, by the end of the book, scientists still haven't solved the voltage fade problem, and NMC 2.0 seems as far away as ever. Argonne wins a competition set up by the Department of Energy to create a "Battery Hub," in which more than a dozen national labs, universities and corporate partners will work together to completely rethink their approach to the conceptual leap the government — and everyone else — is hoping for. In effect, they're starting over.

There is grist in "The Powerhouse" for critics of President Barack Obama. He pushed for battery innovation just as he pushed for solar innovation. The latter gave us Solyndra; the former gave us Envia. Financing efforts to invent a new battery is, without question, a form of industrial policy.

But LeVine thinks this view is misguided, and so do I.

"France and Germany and China have renewed their push for electric cars," he says. "The stakes are so high and the dividends so rich that they keep going" - even if the quest seems, at times, quixotic.

Besides, batteries are, as LeVine puts it, "a hard problem." If the government won't try to solve that problem, who will?

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Joe Nocera is an Op-Ed columnist. Before joining The Opinion Pages in April 2011, he wrote the Talking Business column for The New York Times each Saturday and was a staff writer for The New York Times Magazine.

YOUR STATUE VIEWS

Arts Council, Arts Center not part of statue decisions

It's great that the community is engaged in a conversation about public art. One important distinction should be made.

The Arts Council of Pendleton (est. 1974) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that operates the Pendleton Center for the Arts.

The Pendleton Art Commission is the six-member appointed group, led by the mayor, that is asked to make recommendations to the city council on public art projects, including those sponsored by the city (funded by a combination of the Percent for Art fund of the Transient Room Tax and foundation grants) and those proposed by other groups that impact city property.

The Arts Council (Arts Center, PCA, "the old library") doesn't make decisions for the city on public art projects.

If you haven't been to the Arts Center in a while, stop by and see what's going on. Admission is always free and there are lots of free and low-cost opportunities for youth, teens and adults to get more creative energy in their lives. We're online at pendletonarts.org

Roberta Lavadour, executive director
Pendleton Center for the Arts

Pleased to see Pendleton appreciates Don Requa

I am very pleased that Pendleton (that I still consider to be my hometown after I had been a teacher there for 20 years) is honoring Don Requa, a war veteran, an educator and football coach. Over his years in Pendleton he continued to place a high commitment on the development of students and student athletes to be the best they could be.

I strongly support the placement of the bronze state of Don in the downtown location selected by the city council. The history of Pendleton is found in the people and students that attended Pendleton High School and have moved on in their lives to be successful people and have continued to make a positive contribution to our country.

Doss Knighten
Happy Valley, Ore.

Requa a great Pendletonian, deserves Main Street statue

The letter from Ms. Severe brings into focus what this statue uproar is all about. Mr. Requa moved here in the 1950s and was a school teacher. Doesn't deserve to be on Main Street. His parents didn't live here, he didn't ride a horse, and he didn't grow wheat.

Well, Don Requa was a friend of mine. We served together in Rotary. He assisted in starting the Rotary Rose Sale, raising literally thousands of dollars for scholarships for local students. My son was part of his football program. Don gave valuable input and advice on starting the Pendleton youth football program. He was a man of character and recognized statewide for his accomplishments.

While there may be a few wanting to change the council's decision in this matter, I assure you there are literally thousands who have been touched in a meaningful way by this man.

If you want to move Requa to the high school, then move the cowboys to the Round-Up Grounds.

Bill Bridges
Pendleton

Requa statue too tall for small Brownfield Park

Why would anyone try to place a nine-and-one-half-foot statue into the lovely little garden park — Brownfield — which isn't even big enough for the likes of a five-foot statue? My objection has nothing to do with the selection of one person vs. another. Rather that little garden park cannot accommodate a nine-and-one-half-foot statue because the scale, fit and proportionality of the statue will simply overwhelm such a small space and will permanently alter the beauty, design and ambiance of its garden nature.

The larger-than-life statue of Requa deserves and demands a much larger arena fitting of its size and the effect it will produce on its surrounding. It should not intimidate, destroy the focal point of that little garden nor dominate the scene to the exclusion of its surroundings. A nine-and-one-half-foot statue will do just that and will destroy the attractiveness of what has become one of Pendleton's loveliest little garden parks. I do hope there are much larger venues considered for the final resting place of this monolithic structure.

Note: The statue is 7.5 feet tall and would use a common pedestal of 2 feet. The pedestal provides information that extols the person honored by the statue.

Larry O'Rourke
Pendleton

Keep Don Requa statue at Brownfield Park

In regards to Coach Requa's statue, let's leave it where it was originally approved to be placed and let's move on to more important things.

I moved to Pendleton when I was one year old and my parents, Paul and Ann Cimmiyotti, ran Cimmiyotti's restaurant on Main Street for over 30 years. I worked with my parents out of college helping run the restaurant until I left to start my own business, which I've done in Pendleton for over 23 years. My father, Paul Cimmiyotti, was on the city council in the 1960s when Pendleton was booming; he served in Ward 2. He would have loved to have anything that would have brought people to downtown Pendleton.

It's been brought to my attention by reading the paper that the city council is thinking of moving the placement of this statue. Brownfield Park is the perfect location for everyone to see Coach Requa's bronze. If you walk down Main Street there are more things that we need to worry about than a statue location. I encourage the city council to stay with their original decision that was approved by them and the Arts Council many months ago.

John Cimmiyotti
Richland, Wash.

Pendleton downtown theme needs to stay Western

Now you see our government at work. At the last council meeting, February 3, most of the city council knew they had made a mistake. The Requa statue would be in the wrong place if it is put in Brownfield Park. The city manager stopped any attempt to change the original motion of January 7, 2014, unless it passed unanimously. The council was at a loss as what to do. Nothing was done. Not one council person asked the city manager or the city attorney how to proceed with a way to correct this dilemma. That is what the city staff is for.

I know the Linebackers Club helps raise money for scholarships and football programs. This is a good thing. But anyone who walks down Main Street can see the Requa bronze does not fit with the other statues. Put the Requa bronze at the high school where it will be an inspiration to all the upcoming athletes and students.

I am not in favor of all the statues, speed bumps and backward park benches on Main Street. A better time to have put all the taxpayers' money into Main Street would have been after the potholes were filled and maintenance of city property was taken care of. But the fact is the statues are there. The theme is western and pioneer. Keep it that way.

Rex Morehouse
Pendleton

High school football coach better choice than a madam

I am writing to request that the Don Requa Bronze be placed on Main Street by the Brownfield Park where more citizens, more visitors, more tour people can see it. I can't believe what I've heard that it was already about to be placed there when another citizen wants it placed at another location where less people can see it.

Don Requa was born and raised in Buhl, Idaho, and was a B-29 pilot in World War II, serving our country during the "Great War." He was, at one time, the football coach who had won the most games in the state of Oregon, having won 273 games. He coached at least one team member who became an NFL Hall of Famer, Bob Lilly, who was also the first player ever drafted by the Dallas Cowboys, the first to go into their Ring of Honor and the first from Dallas to go into the NFL Hall of Fame; he is known their as "Mr. Cowboy."

How can Don Requa not be placed on Main Street when Main Street already has Stella Darby, the head prostitute in old western history Pendleton on Main Street?

I really hope the mayor and city council and any others who are involved in this will reconsider and place the Don Requa bronze on Main Street by the Brownfield Park.

Dan Hereford
Mountain Home, Idaho

Requa will inspire locals and attract tourists to town

Pendleton has a unique opportunity to recognize a key figure in its history, and to add a striking piece of art to downtown. The city council and the Pendleton Arts Commission made the right choice in approving the placement of the Don Requa statue at Brownfield Park.

Don Requa positively changed the lives of thousands of teens during his distinguished career as one of the greatest coaches in Oregon history. He instilled the values of teamwork, self-discipline, mental toughness and aspiring for excellence. Those qualities resonated in the entire community, creating a legacy of pride and quality, while also transforming boys to men.

As an RV enthusiast, I am drawn to cities with public art. I enjoy the ability to shop, dine, and to take walking tours to see quality tributes to great accomplishments that are accessible and diverse. I enthusiastically support the placement of the Requa statue downtown to inspire local citizens of all ages, and to attract tourists.

Timothy Patrick, Eugene