

Heritage Square: Building common ground

by Felicia Struve Coast River Business Journal | Posted: Wednesday, April 18, 2012 12:00 am

ASTORIA — A once derelict block of downtown Astoria came to life Saturday, April 14.

Hundreds of people from as far away as China gathered for Celebrate Astoria, a block party at the western end of the recently dubbed Heritage Square, to celebrate the ground breaking of the Garden of Surging Waves, the reopening of City Hall, the official ground breaking for phase two of the Liberty Theater renovations and Astoria's 200th birthday (April 12).

City Councilor Arline LaMear said that the ground breaking for the Garden of Surging Waves was, in her opinion, the most momentous event of the day.

“I think there will come a day when we will look back on this day and think, ‘Was there ever a time we didn’t have a Heritage Square in Astoria?’” she said, drawing comparisons with the squares and piazzas of European cities.

The Garden of Surging Waves is phase one of three in the redevelopment of the block bordered by 11th and 12th Streets and Duane and Exchange Streets.

The City of Astoria has worked with designer Suenn Ho of Portland-based MulvannyG2 Architecture to recreate the block into a community gathering space complete with an amphitheater, a pavilion and a garden commemorating the contributions of Chinese-American’s to Astoria and Oregon.

The total cost of the redevelopment is estimated between \$3 million and \$5 million, which will likely come from private donations, the city, the Astoria Downtown Development Association, and grants.

Mayor Willis Van Dusen credited Chinese-Astorian Duncan Law for bringing to his attention that the Chinese were virtually absent from Astoria’s recorded history.

“Dr. Duncan Law is a great Astorian and he’s one of the main reasons for the idea of the Garden of Surging Waves,” Van Dusen told the crowd.

The Astoria Column was built as a legacy gift for Astoria’s centennial, Van Dusen said. “The bicentennial legacy is the Garden of Surging Waves so we can now tell the history of Chinese-Americans’ contribution to the northwest.

“Not all of the story is fun to talk about ... but we’re going to tell the entire story,” he said.

Huo Bao Zhu traveled to Astoria from Xian, China, to be present for the ground breaking ceremonies. All of the artwork for the Garden of Surging Waves was commissioned from his company, Shaanxi Yuan Kun Sculptural Arts Company.

Suenn translated his sentiments: “Although Astoria is very small and remote, it has a deep history of arts and culture to share,” Huo said. “Because all your effort has touched me, I am willing to donate to this.”

Huo donated a 6.5-foot-tall cast bronze lantern replica of a small 204 B.C. incense burner of wise monkey calming the dragon that stirs the waves.

The Garden of Surging Waves is named for this statue and a famous Chinese garden, Cang Lang Ting, which means “Surging Waves Pavilion.”