

Oak Ridge International friendship Bell and the World Bell Festival

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on July 23, 2012)

On Saturday, July 14, 2012, the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell represented the North American continent in the Apolda World Bell Festival originating in Apolda, Germany. This was the fourth World Bell Festival. This event had been over a year in planning and was a resounding success.

I want to use this *Historically Speaking* column to document this historic event and to inform you of the history behind it. We are a part of that history. We are truly an international city in so many ways and often, I am afraid, we may take that for granted.

In a letter from Micky Remann, of Apolda, Germany, sent on July 7, 2011, to invite Oak Ridge to participate in the international World Bell Festival in 2012, he said, "As a tribute to the bell making tradition of Apolda, the festival features the many sounds, the beauty and the significance of bells. The hub of the event will be in Apolda with live broadcast and intermissions of music and messages from international bell partners."

Don Miller signed the letter committing to be the Oak Ridge host and organizer of the festival. Don selected a committee consisting of Mary Ann Damos, Andrew Duncan, Jim Kolb, Patti Shelton, Shigeko Uppuluri and Bill Wilcox to assist with the planning. This group met regularly to plan the details of the festival.

Katy Brown, President of the Oak Ridge Convention and Visitors Bureau agreed to facilitate the event and the broadcast. Mayor Tom Beehan agreed to participate and to bring city government into the festival by creating a proclamation declaring July 14, 2012, as World Bell Festival Day in Oak Ridge (unfortunately, he had a scheduled conflict but Councilman Charlie Hensley filled in). I was pleased to be asked to participate in the broadcast as well.

The Livestream broadcast allowed us to welcome people around the world to Oak Ridge who were watching at various locations. The motto of the festival was "Bells are music, bells bring people together, bells make people listen". Our festival fulfilled that motto, in spades!

The festival in Oak Ridge was held at the Oak Ridge Associated Universities' Pollard Auditorium where a handbell workshop was held by Andrew Duncan, Director of the musical programs and Choir Director of the 1st United Methodist Church in Oak Ridge. The participants in the workshop learned the technique for ringing the bells to make beautiful music. Bells sure do make music, they bring people together and ringing bells surely makes people listen as is stated in the motto of the festival!

There were also international foods for tasting with Irish Stew provided by Patti Shelton, Italian, provided by Gondolier Restaurant, Chinese, provided by Magic Wok, and Polish, provided by Razzleberry's. Many festival participants enjoyed the free samples.

The Livestream feeds from the sites of Apolda, Germany; Cologne, Germany; Loessnitz, Germany; Helsinki, Finland; Jerusalem, Israel; Oak Ridge, TN, and Kathmandu, Nepal, were all shown on the flat screen monitors in the lobby of the Pollard all throughout the festival. It was interesting to see how each site chose to present their bells and the music they chose to feature.

Finally, the festival in Oak Ridge was capped off by a one-hour concert by the Chattanooga Metropolitan Bells, directed by Gary Bynum. These "bell ringers" really knew their stuff and performed an excellent program ranging from "Chattanooga Choo Choo," to "The Tennessee Waltz," to "The Lion King Medley," and finally to music from "Mary Poppins."

Our Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell was exactly 19 years old on July 14, 2012, having been cast in Kyoto, Japan, by Soutetsu Iwasawa, master bell maker, on July 14, 1993. It was a hot day in Kyoto and the casting furnace added to that heat. The date was special as the bell maker had delayed casting the traditional Japanese bell until a special friend and her entourage from Tennessee could arrive in Kyoto.

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Paul Watkins, University of Tennessee professor was one of the 14 member UT class led by Shigeko Uppuluri. Shigeko had talked to the class about a special event they would attend while on the trip to Japan that was a part of the Japanese culture class she was teaching.

Paul spoke at the World Bell Festival activities in Oak Ridge and read the audience a note he had written about "A Very Special Day in My Life!" The participation in the ceremony that accompanied the casting of this special bell impressed him greatly.

He wrote, "Iwasawa-san talked about his deep joy and humility in being able to create this peace bell. He talked about World War II and the sadness he felt about the war and his personal meaning of regret for the actions of Japan's military leaders during the war. As he talked, he wiped his eyes."

His note continued, "The bell he was going to cast was meant to be a sign of peace and utility. It symbolizes humankind coming together to move beyond the past and show that peace and hope should be sought after throughout the world. Then he talked about the design and symbolism used for the bell."

The Proclamation issued by the Oak Ridge City Council and read by Councilman Charlie Hensley, declaring July 14, 2012, "World Bell Festival Day" in Oak Ridge, added a formal touch to the ceremony. The *Statement of Purpose* adopted by the city of Oak Ridge when accepting the International Friendship Bell from the Oak Ridge Community Foundation, in 1996, as a lasting legacy of the city's 50th birthday celebration, was stated as a part of the proclamation.

The *Statement of Purpose*, "To express for the future the profound longing and commitment to work for freedom, well-being, justice, and peace for all the people of the world" was certainly fulfilled on July 14, 2012, when the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell was struck as a part of this World Bell Festival. The international recognition of our bell is a valuable asset and is a welcome addition to the world renowned "Oak Ridge" brand.

The four-hour World Bell Festival consisting of international live broadcasts from seven locations created a remarkable event and our bell was included. That is great recognition for our bell.

Another result of the bell being included in the World Bell Festival is that the committee recognized the need to replace the striker log. A new striker log was found, donated, transported from Florida to Oak Ridge and installed at the bell.

According to Don Miller, the new striker log is a Sable palm. Don says, "...our palm log is representative of a hardy freeze resistant tropical tree variety. It has been selected as the state tree in Florida and South Carolina. Also Sable Palm is about as hurricane-proof as a tree can be. They stand after many hurricanes have blown over the oaks and snapped the pines in two. They adapt well to small cutouts in the sidewalk, and can even create shade if planted on 6 to 10 foot centers. In other words, [Sable Palm] a sturdy reliable hard wood suitable for our use as a bell striker." - Don Miller

One web site featuring the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell says, "Visitors can strike the bell and enjoy the low tones that carry across the park. The vibrations from the bell can be felt. Doing so is an inspiring experience." I agree, the sound of the bell is special. With the new striker log, I believe the sound is even more pronounced.

Katy Brown said she always includes the bell in tours she provides to visitors to Oak Ridge. She says she always tells the visitors the story of Elise Campbell and how she, as an eighth grade student, led the initiative to free the bell for ringing by anyone at anytime. She then encourages the visitors to get off the bus and ring the bell themselves.

Without exception, Katy indicates, each group of visitors find personal pleasure in ringing the bell for themselves. The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell is now a symbol of Oak Ridge, a reminder of our 50th birthday and a unique instrument of relaxing sound for those who choose to ring it.

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If you have not gone there and rung the bell lately, try out that new striker log. I think you will be pleasantly surprised by the deeper and more resonant sound you will hear.

Katy says it brightens her day to hear it being struck when she is working in her office across the park. Let's all use it to "brighten our day," just knowing it is there and being rung by kids and visitors!



Shigeko Uppuluri demonstrates to Susanna Harris how to make a crane by folding paper – they have remained friends since Susanna created the artist panels for our bell

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Councilman Charlie Hensley encourages the kids to ring their handmade bells during the Livestream broadcast (Photo by Kathy Fahey)

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Andrew Duncan performs a solo on the handbells – he also taught several others to play the bells



Paul Watkins reads his story of “A very special day in my life” telling of this “life changing event” when the bell was cast in Japan

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Gary Bynum directed *The Metropolitan Bells* of Chattanooga in an hour of exceptional music from handbells