

BEYOND EXPECTATIONS! The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell Peace Pavilion

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on November 15, 2016)

On Thursday, November 17, 2016, at 5:30 PM, you want to be in a seat in the Pollard Auditorium!

You will want to see for yourself the remarkable results of a two-year effort to determine what is best for the next phase of the International Friendship Bell, what is best for the community and what is best for the Manhattan Project National Historical Park. I guarantee it will be well beyond your expectations!

What you will see at the Oak Ridge Associated Universities Pollard Auditorium is an amazing glimpse into the new location for the bell in Bissell Park. Architect, Ziad Demian, will bring to life, in images and narrative, the real and symbolic importance of the "Bell" that has become an important and unique icon of Oak Ridge. The new pavilion will immediately become a community landmark and contribute to the Bissell Park's "sense of place!"

Each time the striker sounds the bell, a fusion of personal and universal experience takes place. Ziad understands this and has translated those special qualities into a really great Pavilion and gardens design. The "Bell" is larger than just a sound making object, it has profound meaning for all of us and for visitors alike. This new design with its comforting arrangement of seating, walkways and gardens is well suited to the purpose of the bell as a community gathering place.

The resonating sound belongs to individuals who walk in the park or come just to hear the beautiful tones of the bell. The soothing sound belongs to families who participated in the war effort here and in the theaters of war abroad. It represents the lasting peace since that awful war! It belongs to our community as a place to gather and celebrate or remember someone who is gone...it is a peaceful place.

And, it belongs to the world through its message of peace for the tens of thousands of visitors who will come to our newly forming national park. Even in its present silent state, it is one of the first stops for visitors coming to Oak Ridge.

Arcs of walkways incorporated into the design represent the resonant, beautiful tone of the bell as it radiates out. The Peace Pavilion and Bell are highly visible, and the heart of a new gathering place for the community in the flat near center location in Bissell Park. The Bell Advisory Committee saw this visionary site plan last week for the first time.

We can't describe it for you in words; it would be woefully inadequate without the revealing visuals you will see. You have to be there on Thursday, November 17, at 5:30 PM and see this new design and the gift of a very special place we are all giving to Oak Ridge and to our visitors.

In 1959, our then Congressman Howard Baker wrote, *Oak Ridge can never become just another attractive American city. Its fame and its honors based upon past achievements are already too great for this and its heavy responsibilities for the future of both America and the world preclude the possibility of a quiet, completely normal existence.* (Jim Campbell shared this quote and his entire family is an active supporter of the bell pavilion project.)

Some 57 years ago, Senator Baker realized Oak Ridge's heritage and future were interlocked. In bringing this bell back to life and establishing the Peace Pavilion, we continue to accept our responsibility to the future.

At present the bell is sitting in the original location and cannot be sounded. To help those of you who may be new to our community it might be helpful to share a little history of this very special icon.

In the early 1990s Oak Ridgers were contemplating the 50-year existence of their city. A Committee of 50 was selected and charged with finding a way to commemorate our unique history and achievements. It is notable that what they chose to express then was not just about the past, but about the future: *Born in war, living in peace, growing through science.*

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The monument the committee selected to symbolize that phrase was the beautiful International Friendship Bell. Oak Ridge citizens have cherished it since 1993. Visitors and citizens alike identify the bell as an important icon of our city.

Shigeko Uppuluri and her late husband Ram were instrumental in presenting this concept to the committee. They were instrumental in working with Japan to make the creation of this Bell a partnership in Peace. Those members of the Committee of 50 and Oak Ridge citizens were, in a very real sense, taking on responsibility for the future.

Two years ago, during routine maintenance, the city discovered that water and weather had damaged beyond repair the equally-loved structure that housed the Bell; it had to be dismantled. It was a disheartening loss for the city but almost immediately a determined group of people began to discuss a solution.

Once again Shigeko, along with son Ram, led the way. They engaged the visionary talent and the heart of Washington D.C. architect Ziad Demian in proposing a new design and Peace Pavilion for the International Friendship Bell. The City named a Bell Advisory Committee consisting of co-chairs Alan Tatum and Pat Postma, along with Jon Hetrick, Ray Smith, Kay Brookshire, Tom Row and Shigeko and Ram Uppuluri.

The work of the Bell Advisory Committee and Mr. Demian for the last year and a half has been to talk with individuals in the community, the Recreation and Parks Board, with community leaders and above all, with the staff of the newly designated Manhattan Project National Historical Park to determine what is best for the Bell, what is best for the city and what is best for the implementation of the national park.

The special community information session is scheduled for Thursday, November 17, 2016, at 5:30 PM in the ORAU Pollard Technology Center. By being there you will have the opportunity to become as involved as you desire in the next steps to bring the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell to a new location hanging proudly and prominently in Bissell Park.

You can become an active partner in continuing to fulfill Senator Baker's impression of Oak Ridge. Together we can continue the tradition of ***Born in war, living in peace, growing through science.***

If you want additional historical information about the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell, you can go to the Historically Speaking archives at <http://smithdray1.net/historicallyspeaking/archive.html>. Starting at 05-6-08 there is an eleven-part series on the history of the initial efforts of how we came to have such a magnificent large bell in the center of our city.

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Shigeko Uppuluri rings the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell with Bill Wilcox, previous Oak Ridge City Historian, looking on

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Bill Wilcox, who wrote the words on the plaque that accompanies the bell and explains the International Friendship message, rings the bell with Shigeko looking on