

Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell and the Peace Pavilion Design Team

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on December 12, 2016)

On November 17, 2016, a tremendous step forward took place in the Oak Ridge Associated Universities' Pollard Auditorium with regard to "Raising and Ringing the Bell!" The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell sits on wooden blocks now, but not for too much longer!

After thorough study, well thought out plans have been developed and the effort to create a new and bold pavilion is well on its way. The new plans retain the values embedded in the Bell in its original location where it stood for 20 years and also brings a fresh new openness and a more welcoming atmosphere.

One key element to the success of the project to create a grand, open, and welcoming new site for the beloved icon which has become so meaningful to Oak Ridgers, is the creative, dynamic, energetic and experienced architect, Ziad Elias Demian. He has become immersed in the project and has taken a personal interest in creating a bold new design for the Bell's new Peace Pavilion.

Ziad is a founding partner of **demianwilburarchitects**, located on Capitol Hill in Washington DC. The firm leads full service architecture, interior design and planning projects for government, commercial, institutional, and corporate organizations. Projects have included urban planning, mixed-use and retail center development; a hospital workplaces, and educational facilities.

Ziad serves as a consultant and adviser on regional planning and master planning projects in the Middle East as well as projects in the US. The local members of the bell project team are certainly proud to have such a prestigious firm with so many successes working with us!

It was Ram Uppuluri, Shigeko's son, who brought Ziad and Oak Ridge together. Immediately after we learned, in 2014, that the original pavilion had to be dismantled, Shigeko Uppuluri and Ram moved into a mode of figuring out how to get our Bell back up again. Ram and Ziad had worked together on a community project in Washington DC, so Ram shared our dilemma with Ziad.

He was fascinated by what Ram told him about the town of Oak Ridge, and the choice of this huge and unique Bell as the commemoration of our 50th anniversary. He wanted to visit Oak Ridge and see for himself what Ram had described in such favorable terms.

Over the course of a couple visits in 2014, where he studied the original site of the Friendship Bell, met Shigeko, and heard our stories, he committed his heart to this peace project. Ziad saw this project as a perfect fit for demianwilburarchitects.

The firm's core mission is to develop places that touch people's lives deeply. They pursue and design projects that create social connections and benefit communities. Theirs is an interactive process. They want to be heavily involved in a collaborative process with the community, to understanding their objectives and needs to ensure the successful execution of a project.

That mission and process could not be better illustrated than in Ziad's work for our International Friendship Bell and Peace Pavilion in Oak Ridge. I can personally tell you that Ziad has immersed himself into the culture of our community and he fully understands the importance of the Bell to Oak Ridge and our heritage. I spent time with him and toured him over our city. He asked excellent questions and engaged in learning our history like few others I have ever seen.

He walked and photographed Bissell Park countless times. He talked to many of us about the Bell. He envisioned the original site as an open, inclusive community gathering place, a rather drastic change in emphasis when compared to the smaller pavilion that had stood there for 20 years.

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Even at this early stage of design, he saw the Bell not only as a symbol of our past but a symbol for the future. His contemporary Peace Pavilion design reflected an open and inclusive setting to reflect on the future of Oak Ridge.

When Ziad Demian was invited to design the new Peace Pavilion for the International Friendship Bell, his said his first thought was "cool project." After just one visit to Oak Ridge, he said he realized that this was a very special project. As he learned more about Oak Ridge's heritage, he began to realize the importance of retaining the values embedded in the Bell in its original location where it stood for 20 years.

In the midst of designing a Peace Pavilion for the original site, discussions were also taking place regarding other potential locations for the Bell. Consideration was given to including the Bell in the newly forming Main Street Oak Ridge. Also considered was collocating the Bell with the Manhattan Project National Historical Park visitor center.

Finally, after much thought and interaction with others, the committee settled on a new location in the heart of A. K. Bissell Park. Ziad was informed of that decision and he immediately wanted to see the new site.

Ziad's architectural design style is very much influenced by his sense of place in a location and his sense of feeling for the site itself. So, to say that Ziad wanted to again visit Oak Ridge to consider this new site, is putting it much too mildly. He insisted on coming right away!

As he returned to visit the new site for the Bell in Bissell Park, he discovered something more about the project. Ziad said, "I started to realize this is not just a project. It is an endeavor. It is a community endeavor. It is an endeavor for all of us," He grew to realize the true importance of the Peace Pavilion and its surrounding park. It is coming to be so much more than just a location for the Bell!

On November 17, 2016, the Washington, D.C. architect unveiled his striking design for the Peace Pavilion in its new location in Bissell Park to a large crowd of interested supporters from our community. The park around it appears like waves rippling out from the Bell, creating an image of the Bell spreading its message of peace throughout the world.

Wow, this design was such a huge hit with the crowd in the Pollard Auditorium that night! It was exciting to watch his enthusiasm for the new design and location be picked up by the audience.

Ziad said, "We wanted to create a sense of place, a garden within the park, where you can read a book, sit down, have lunch, or just go ring the bell," He went on to explain, "the ripples flowing from the Bell and Pavilion turn into benches near the garden, where there will be stepping stones among the plants and trees."

The Peace Pavilion will be a cantilever concrete structure – "strong, representing determination and strength of the relationship," to quote from Ziad's enthusiastic presentation. Modern materials, such as carbon fiber, may be used in the trellis above the Bell. Surrounded by a footpath, the Bell's new home will be down the hill from its original site, near the Oak Ridge Civic Center, creating an anchor for Bissell Park.

Ziad related to the audience his thoughts which he wrote about the Bell on his way to Oak Ridge:

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"Every time the hammer strikes the Bell, a fusion of personal and universal expressions takes place. An immense temporal event, sound, dissipates forever but can be repeated over and over...One personal experience is instantly connected to a global one. An impossibility not to participate, either actively or passively.

"The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell is:

A story of individuals, of a group and of a community.

A story of a city, a nation and a world.

A story of two nations expressing a mutual resolve for reconciliation and peace.

A representation of harmony, complexity, and contradiction that is life itself.

"This is the power of the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell.

Ziad concluded his remarks by stating, "The mission of this project is to create a forum and an opportunity for a visitor to have a unique experience, personal or collective one, to have a journey, short or a long one, but surely a memorable and a reflective one."

An example of the type of engagement Ziad has with the Peace Pavilion is the muscadine grapes he has included in the design. His first exposure to the local grapes was at the Farmers' Market in Jackson Square. As we were touring the historic sites in Oak Ridge, I took the opportunity to immerse Ziad into the cultural event that is the Farmers' Market. I knew it would have an impact on him, and it surely did!

You can experience much of what Ziad envisions for our Bell by viewing the excellent video he created: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sY2iF4hqQ4>

On a most personal note, I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know Ziad. He is an amazingly talented person and he is devoting his attention to helping us take a giant stride by designing a truly grand "gift" to Oak Ridge. The iconic Bell will become even more a symbol of Oak Ridge when it is housed in the expertly designed Peace Pavilion.

A note from Pat Postma regarding contributions to the effort to **"ring the bell again:"**

"It was very disappointing when we learned that our special Oak Ridge symbol, the International Friendship Bell, had lost its home because of water damage to the wood pavilion. But if ever there was a silver lining to a cloud, this new design for the Bell and Peace Pavilion in the heart of Bissell Park is it.

"The Bell now becomes much more visible. It provides benches and places for contemplation. It will be illuminated at night by lighting. It will be much more accessible to visitors who come in vehicles. And while the Bell belongs to Oak Ridge, visitors who come to this peaceful place and hear the beautiful sound of the Bell will carry away a visual and emotional memory of us that they will not forget.

"In making this place a reality, we have the opportunity to give our town an elegant and permanent gift. Such opportunities don't come along very often and, often, if the vision is there the means are not apparent. But now, we are within reach. This is our moment.

"Thanks to UT-Battelle's founding gift of \$150,000, and to generous pledges of CNS Y-12, ORAU and several families who want to inspire others and ensure that this happens, we are already more than halfway there. The cost for all the engineering work and materials of building the new plaza, cantilever

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and beam support, moving the Bell to the new site, the gardens, walkways and benches is about \$750,000. We have commitments for \$525,000!

"By the end of 2017, we need to raise another \$225,000. We have applied for some grants that will help us get to that goal, but above all we need you, the individuals and families who live in this town, to give with your hearts. We can do this!

"We now have donors in all eight categories and every donation of any size is important - but for this message of peace, for this piece of our history, for this beautiful place, we need each of us to stretch as far as we can to get there. Can you consider being a Champion of the Bell (\$1,000 to \$2,499)? This builds our community. Can you be a Community Builder (\$2,500 to \$4,999) or even reach to become a Landmark Donor (\$5,000 to \$9,999). We can do this!

"Your gifts are tax deductible. To make them by check write your check to "Oak Ridge Rotary Community Fund" and on the memo line write "For the Bell project". Your donation should be mailed to:

"International Friendship Bell Fund
C/O David Carr
Oak Ridge Rotary Community Fund
P O Box 6331
Oak Ridge, TN 37831

"Let's ring the bell!"

Or if you want to give online to help support the project, you can contribute at: <http://friendshipbell.com/>



Ziad Demian, a founding partner of demian\wilbur\architects, who has taken a personal interest in the design of the Peace Pavilion for our International Friendship Bell

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The Friendship Bell and Peace Pavilion will be open and visible from all directions (artist rendering courtesy of demian\wilbur\architects)

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The Bell and Peace Pavilion can be approached from many places in the park, but the main access for visitors will be from the entrance to the walking loop not far from the Civic Center parking lot (artist rendering courtesy of demian\wilbur\architects)

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View from the original Bell site which will be connected by a walkway and bridge as well as some of the elements of the original pavilion will be reinstalled there (photograph courtesy of demian\wilbur\architects)

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Gardens and walkways with benches surround the plaza and create a peaceful place to contemplate
(artist rendering courtesy of demian\wilbur\architects)