

Promoting Peace in Newberg

Local clubs will be responsible for half of the 100 poles planned as part of partnership between Rotary and city of Portland.

The Northern Oregon district of Rotary International has a strong reputation for peace advocacy, one of the service organization's core causes, thanks to its strong support and participation in the Rotary Peace Fellow program.



Newberg Rotary is planning to plant 50 peace poles, like the one at Francis Square, across Newberg and Dundee in coming months as part of a greater Rotary project that will plant 100 or more poles in the greater Portland region.

So it's not too surprising that a peace project was put forth when representatives from district clubs met with the mayor of Portland and the Portland police chief in hopes of building a partnership. After a member from Lake Oswego mentioned the success of his club's peace pole project, the police chief came on board quickly and suggested having one at each precinct.

Portland Rotarian Al Jubitz eventually suggested they shoot for 100 poles and offered to provide financial support through the Jubitz Family Foundation. After being invited to participate, the Newberg Rotary clubs definitely raised some eye brows when they pledged to plant 50 in Newberg alone.

"We were talking about having five or 10 and, all of a sudden, groups come back and say they want five or 10 themselves," Newberg Rotarian Mike Caruso said. "So it's been very well received." Caruso himself, though, wasn't all that surprised that the idea took root so fast in Newberg considering the number of peace-minded groups and organizations, such as Peace Village Newberg and the George Fox Centre for Peace and Justice that operate here. Several of them, in fact, organized a vigil and march for peace to coincide with President Trump's inauguration last month.

"When I talked to the (Newberg) school superintendent, she said this is just coming at the perfect time because of the need to have a discussion on conflict resolution with non-violent means," Caruso said. "Everybody has conflict. It's part of human nature. I think if we can get the discussion started - maybe people will see them at

a park and the next day see one at a school or city hall and inquire about it - it will be worthwhile."

A dedication ceremony for the overall project is planned for April 21 and will coincide with a Rotary district from Seattle's visit to Portland that weekend. The hope is those clubs will learn about and attempt to replicate the project in Seattle. Because the project has taken root so widely in Newberg, the local Rotary clubs will host their own dedication event April 14, though specifics for any ceremony or ceremonies have yet been determined.

Caruso said that just under 40 peace poles have been approved to be installed around the city so far, including 10 at various Chehalem Park and Recreation District parks and facilities. Because CPRD Facilities Manager Jim McMaster is a member of Rotary, Caruso said organizers first reached out to CPRD, but they got a similar response from the Newberg School District, which will install 11, the city of Newberg (seven) and George Fox University (five). Single installations have also been confirmed at Portland Community College's Newberg campus, Newberg Urgent Care and Newberg First United Methodist Church.

Caruso said Rotary is now inviting local churches to participate on a first come, first served basis and expects to reach the goal of 50 before long. "The idea is to get conversation going," Caruso said. "Especially in the climate we have, people do much better when they talk things out rather than yell at each other or refuse to compromise in various situations."

The cost for the poles themselves, which can be adorned with text in four to 16 different languages, will be covered by the Jubitz Foundation and Newberg Rotary, so participation is pretty much free for local organizations.

Peace poles, which were the brainchild of a Japanese survivor of Hiroshima in 1955, are already installed at North Valley Friends Church, Memorial Park and Francis Square in Newberg. Caruso said he expects the 50 new ones will be installed well before the April 14 dedication event.

"The first peace pole was planted in Japan in '77 and internationally it started in about '84 or so," Caruso said. "There are hundreds of thousands in the ground now all over the world."