

## Heritage Center's gift shows its class

Bill Church

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Smart-alecky readers will conclude after the next two paragraphs that I'd rather spend time with a retired teacher than Jennifer Lopez.

I don't mind bragging that my Wednesday and Thursday evenings lately have involved hanging out with J.Lo. (My couch time may explain to Dodge truck media buyers the weird demographic blip from "American Idol.")

But those who know Virginia Green realize that when she invites you to show up somewhere, you show up. Even if it means jilting the lovely Jennifer.

That explains why the name tag indicated I was supposed to sit at Table No. 3, yet I wound up at Table No. 4. Virginia's table, of course, where she was honored Thursday by the Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill.

Virginia chided me — lovingly, I might add — for losing my name tag, not speaking up, not following orders and, for all I know, slouching at the table.

Did I mention that Virginia is a retired teacher?

I would have benefited from being in her classroom — likely sitting up straight and in the front row next to her desk.

She's also another reason Salem is a remarkable place to be. Virginia is one of those apolitical activists who knows more about city politics than the folks sitting in those seats.

Not too long ago, she started a blog that documents the city's history from year one. John Hawkins tipped me off about Virginia and, one email and office visit later, she became a contributing history columnist for the Sunday Statesman Journal.

Virginia has become a friend and one of my favorite readers. She's often the first email in my Sunday in-box, recounting in great detail all the reasons why that morning's newspaper made her day (or just missed).

Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill presented its 19th Annual Heritage Awards with Virginia receiving the prestigious David Duniway Historian Award. The Statesman Journal was among

**Winners of the 19th Annual Heritage Awards presented by Willamette Heritage Center at The Mill:**

-Heritage Enterprise — Statesman Journal

-Heritage Education — Dr. M. Lee Pelton

-Heritage Center Service — Adele Egan

-Board Service — William Mainwaring

-George Strozut Award for Preservation — The Friends of Bush Gardens

-Willamette Heritage Center Volunteer — Christopher Hackett

-David Duniway Historian — Virginia Green

the seven honorees, but this column is not about us. It's about the company we keep.

The Willamette Heritage Center is led by Peter Booth, a Texas transplant whose love of history is academically honed and passionately exuded. He's got a small but dedicated staff, a well-intentioned board and wonderful volunteers and supporters.

Their organization also has a lot of class.

That explains why one of Willamette Heritage Center's beloved treasures, the Kalapuya shovel-nose canoe, is being given back to The Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde.

The news came Thursday from Kathleen Tom, a tribal member who sits on the Willamette Heritage Center board. Kathleen's surprise announcement came after tribal chairperson Cheryle Ann Kennedy's stirring presentation on how ancestral heritage should be reflective and renewing.

Now, back to the name tag. I somehow managed to tear it and lose it while journeying between tables No. 3 and No. 4.

Leave it to Virginia to find the pieces and patch it back together, if slightly ajar, on my blazer pocket.

No J.Lo, but what an evening.

Great company.

Great fun.

Great inspiration.

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