

A pitch for a peacemakers museum in Salem

Written by Barry-Lee Coyne Guest Opinion

Jul. 20

statesmanjournal.com

It's summer in Salem and something beyond the usual array of lovely flowers has actually begun to sprout — a unique concept for an international peacemakers museum.

Most of the world is unaware that Salem's biblical name stems from "shalom" in Hebrew and "salaam" in Arabic. Both words equate with peace. Thus Salem is sometimes portrayed as the City of Peace. Look at the existing evidence: Peace Plaza next to Salem's City Hall, the windows for peace exhibits at the public library and the Salem Peace Mosaic outside the Salem Family YMCA.

Even the EcoEarth Globe in Riverfront Park reflects the quilt of countries making up our beloved planet.

But aside from the Mission Mill Museum (now part of the Willamette Heritage Center), there is no popular history-prone museum in town. The Hallie Ford Museum displays art but does not delve into our roots of culture and social achievement.

That gap can be filled by a peacemaker museum. It would pay tribute to more than a century of recipients who achieved the Nobel Peace Prize. It could tell the stories behind the prizes each had won.

Before the community gets involved in fundraising (as it did for EcoEarth several years ago), we must say those benefits that would come our way. So let us peer into the future just a bit:

- The economy benefits. Museum admission attracts locals and tourists aplenty. A bookstore equipped with books, videos and CDs brings added income. Local businesses will see more profits, from clothing stores to curio shops to restaurants.
- Education prospers. With Willamette University taking on leadership, we could envision student interns supplementing library staff. Research into peacemaking can result.
- Salem's image gets upgraded. As the only state capital whose name translates into peace, we can finally help the public make the connection. Yes, Salem is more than just state government.
- Social justice gets conveyed. The wonderful work at WU begun by Bryan Johnston in doing conflict resolution studies gains more traction. This becomes our mantra against violence.

These four principles can propel our progress. Let that be so lest rest in peace visits us all.

Barry-Lee Coyne, 71, of Salem has visited some 30 nations. He welcomes words of support as well as suggestions to luckycoyne@yahoo.com.