

FEATURE



CITY OF ASTORIA
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The Garden of Surging Waves

Grand opening of an Astoria garden honors Chinese pioneers

“For whatever reason, the true history of the many contributions from Chinese pioneers was not properly included in Astoria’s history,” said Astoria Mayor Willis L. Van Dusen. That officially ended when the Garden of Surging Waves held its grand opening at the corner of Duane and 11th streets in downtown Astoria, Ore., on May 17.

“This wonderful park will forever tell the important stories, benefits, and projects provided by the Chinese community,” according to the Astoria Chinese Heritage website dedicated to the park. “The Garden of Surging Waves is the legacy gift to the City of Astoria from our Bicentennial in 2011.”

Ground was broken at the park site in April 2012, and construction began in the spring of 2013. The park was opened to the public in February of this year.

The park was financed by a combination of public and private funds, including grants and individual contributions. Private gifts have been received from donors as far away as China, Germany, Serbia, and other foreign countries, though the majority of contributions have come from U.S. donors. The park also received many hours contributed in-kind by businesses, volunteers, and other supporters.

The Chinese played a significant role in the history of Astoria, working in the canneries, building the city’s sewer system, constructing railroads that would connect Astoria to Portland, and building the jetties at the mouth of the mighty Columbia River, according to Astoria Chinese Heritage. The Chinese written characters for the words “surging wave” are also used to express hardship and struggle — experiences shared by many of America’s early immigrant groups.

The Garden of Surging Waves seeks to honor the experience of the early Chinese immigrants and to celebrate their collective accomplishments and contributions to the Lower Columbia River Basin.

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“The stories must be told and passed on in order to make connections for generations to come,” said Ho. “The Astoria mayor always likes to remind us that these are not Chinese stories, these are U.S. stories, these are our stories.”

Ho noted that few people outside Astoria know about the contributions the early Chinese immigrants had on the building and economic development of Astoria.”Although the garden is completed, she said, “many more untold stories in this region are yet to be respectfully brought out and recognized.”

According to Greg Nokes, author and former Oregonian reporter, about 2,000 Chinese once worked in Astoria, most in the salmon and tuna canneries that once were the foundation of Astoria’s economy.

“The Garden of Surging Waves is a major new addition to the effort to resurrect the history of the Chinese who lived and worked in the Pacific Northwest,” said Nokes.

