Downtown Chehalis Businesses Enhance History Through Plaques for Popular Walking Tour

By Christopher Brewer

Historic buildings in downtown Chehalis have changed hands over more than 100 years, and their purposes have become completely different than what they were originally intended, but their histories can come alive once again as part of a free self-guided walking tour that has been in place for two years.

That tour, popular since it started in 2009 as part of a push to renovate the Chehalis Community Renaissance Team, is receiving an enhancement these days as small custom plaques will bear the name of each building’s original name.

The aim is to make the walking tour more interactive and act as sort of a wayfinding point for places referred to in the booklets that document historic places in the self-guided walking tour.

CCRT member David Hartz, who owns Book ’n’ Brush, a mainstay in downtown Chehalis that was once home to a department store with quite the creative name that boggled itself at the largest between Portland and Tacoma, said the history of his building comes alive each day he’s there — and he wants to share that history with people in greater downtown Chehalis area.

“It actually called itself ‘The Big Department Store’ because it occupied both stories,” Hartz said, calling his portion of the history of this place.”

But the Chehalis Foundation took interest in the history of the Mint City. “It’s exciting to see what this will do not just for people learning history here, but it will help bring them into the stores as well,” Hartz said, calling his portion of the work a big history lesson. “It’s really special my eyes to what all is down here. Everyone that has the opportunity should learn about this history of this place.”

According to the city of Chehalis, more than 4,000 of the books have been printed, signifying a popular interest in the history of the Mint City. But the Chehalis Foundation took the idea one step further, donating $4,500 for the plaques to be installed — an anonymous donor contributed $1,000 and each building owner was asked to contribute $100. So far, the response has been positive.

“There is so much value in our history here in Chehalis that I don’t know of anyone who has hesitated to contribute,” Hartz said. “I do wish they had immediately when they asked me.”

The team plans to install all of the plaques over the coming weeks and months.

Booklets for the tour are available at Book ’n’ Brush, Chehalis City Hall, the Vernetta Smith Chehalis Timberland Library, Lewis County Historical Museum and A Taste of Eden.

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**Streets to See**

- First Avenue
- Centralia Avenue
- Market Boulevard
- Pacific Avenue
- Washington Boulevard
- Kiona Avenue
- Market Street
- Pacific Street
- Washington Street
- Main Street
- Garden Street
- Front Street
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