



January 25, 2024

"Mayors' Grove Park in Pullman, Washington, stands as a testament to community spirit and environmental beautification. Initiated in October 2000 by former Mayor Karen Kiessling, the park kick-started the Grand Avenue Greenway Project, a transformative effort to enhance the aesthetic and communal value of Grand Avenue. This endeavor began from a simple yet impactful complaint about the lack of greenery along the avenue, leading to a movement that would forever change the street's character.

Mayors' Grove was the inaugural project, where former mayors, including Kiessling, selected and funded trees to be planted in a dedicated grove. This gesture not only marked the beginning of the Greenway Project but also symbolized the deep-rooted care and commitment of Pullman's leaders towards their community. The dedication ceremony, attended by past mayors and community members, featured performances and discussions that highlighted the grove's significance in Pullman's history.

The Rotary Club of Pullman has since assumed the stewardship of Mayors' Grove Park, maintaining its beauty and ensuring it continues to serve as a beacon of community values and collaboration. Following the Mayors' Grove success, additional projects like the WSU Presidents' Grove and the Chamber of Commerce Presidents' Grove have further contributed to Grand Avenue's transformation. Mayors' Grove Park remains a cherished space in Pullman, embodying the collective effort to enhance the city's landscape and the enduring spirit of its people."

Eric Hollenbeck  
President, Rotary Club of Pullman  
District 5080

## The Mayors' Grove-Initiation of the Grand Avenue Greenway Project October 2000

The Grand Avenue Greenway project began with a complaint made to me at a book club meeting. I have been a member of the Fortnightly Club, a very structured book club that was founded in 1893 by Harriett "Hattie" Bryan, wife of Enoch A. Bryan, the first President of Washington State University.

The book club, dedicated to the study of literature, meets fortnightly during the academic year, the second and fourth Tuesday afternoons of the month. I was at a meeting when a new member of the group, Rosemary Waldrop, complained to me about the look of Grand Avenue. She said she and her husband Barney had lived here 30 years earlier when Barney was in law school at the University of Idaho. "Grand Avenue was a gritty industrial street then and it looks the same now. Why aren't there trees and flowers along Grand Avenue?"

My reply was to realize that she was correct. One tends to come to town, notice the blight in places and then get used to it and forget it. I did. So my reply to her was, "Well, Rosemary, why don't we offer to see if we can raise money to plant trees and flowers along Grand Avenue?"

Shortly after that I saw Mayor Mitch Chandler and City Supervisor John Sherman on the street and asked them what they thought about the idea. John was fast off the mark and said it sounded great to him, Mayor Mitch quickly agreed. I asked for the city's help and they responded with a dedicated budget category labeled Grand Avenue and said money sent to the city for that purpose would be held there and used only for that. A city staff member was assigned to our 'committee' - at that time to two of us and we began to see what we could make happen.

I wanted to manage one project before the end of 2000. The most likely thing would be something with the former Mayors because I had served as Mayor from 1976 - 1980. With the city staffer help we found a piece of land along Grand Avenue that was owned by two developers but was a small and not of a size for building. I asked Ron Beasley, who owned most of the piece land along the creek and owned Beasley Realty, if we could use it for a grove to kick off the improvements along Grand Avenue. He immediately said yes and we got the same response from Kevin Kirkman, who owned a small piece of it. I then asked all the former mayors if they would choose a tree from the list of choices prepared by the city staff member and contribute the roughly \$400 each to purchase it for planting here. Mayor Jim Dunne, Mayor Pete

Butkus, Mayor Carole Helm, Mayor Al Halvorsen and Mayor Mitch Chandler and I chose our tree and contributed the funds. We planned to dedicate the Mayors' Grove in late October of 2000. Carole Helm and Pete Butkus lived in other places in the state and 'came home' for the ceremony as did Mayor Dunne, who lived in Oregon. We had the pep band of the high school play and we gathered under an awning to officially declare the Grove as the initial event in the Grand Avenue Greenway.

One very nice but unplanned part of this event is that I held a wine and nibbles evening at my home on College Hill the night before the dedication. The mayors were there and we had a grand time reminiscing about the highs and lows of the office. The next day we dedicated the grove and then the mayors had lunch together at Gladish Community Center and were on a panel discussion that was moderated by former Whitman County Commissioner Nora May Keifer. We each talked about what we felt were our accomplishments and what were the glitches. It was filmed by the League of Women Voters of Pullman and given to the Whitman County Historical Society for the archives.

Carole Helm and Pete Butkus went home to their respective towns but stayed in touch, went skiing together and returned *at* year later, in the fall of 2001, to be married in Lawson Gardens, a park they had both worked to accomplish for Pullman during their terms as Mayor. In honor of that event a number of us went to the Mayors' Grove and tied yellow ribbons on the branches of the trees to celebrate this fine event. The bench was added in honor of the marriage.

The Rotary Club of Pullman has taken on the care of the park and keeps it looking very fine indeed. It was the initiation of a wonderful effort to make that street more attractive and to better express the values of the community.

The Mayors' Grove was succeeded by the WSU Presidents' Grove and the Chamber of Commerce Presidents' Grove and walk. Businesses along the route joined in the effort to make the street more handsome and continue to maintain the plantings. The plan was to provide the drip system irrigation, install the vegetation and ask the business owner to pay the water bill for that irrigation.

Business owners agreed to do that. Many did additional projects of flowers on their own and have maintained their areas. The walkways have been made attractive and sculptures have added to the value of the scene.

Hundreds of people sent checks to the city to be used for the Greenway. As soon as the first project-the Mayors' Grove -- was begun the funds started arriving. Small checks and large ones. We had some give hundreds of dollars every year because those trees expressed their values and they wanted the change to continue. I chaired the committee for ten years, what I said I would do at the start of the project. Rosalie Harms stepped in to chair it for the second decade and we closed the project in 2021. It has been a wonderful success, something I remember thinking I wanted to do for Pullman so that when I went for that ride to my place in the cemetery I could know I had done something to make Pullman, a place I love, an even better place to live.

Karen Kiessling      January 15, 2024      For Pullman Rotary Club records