

## The Dalles works to refurbish image

The following article was published in the Oregonian on Sunday, June 13th, 2003. Crandall Arambula, PC worked with CH2MHill to design an underpass that gives pedestrians and automobiles access to the river, linking the downtown area with the waterfront. The photo was taken by Crandall Arambula.



THE DALLES – Residents of The Dalles don't seem to mind that their city – the largest city in the Columbia River Gorge – is shrinking faster than any city in the state, according to U.S. Census figures released last week. Rush hour is five cars at an intersection. Parking is free. Sprawl isn't a problem. Plus, it's quiet, with just 12,006 people.

Besides, local officials point out, Oregon's official population statistics, compiled by Portland State University, show the town has grown by an average of 1 percent annually during the past decade.

Now the city is starting to see results from the efforts of a team of local officials working to obtain federal financing for local projects. **Thanks largely to that team's work, the city has renovated three downtown buildings and a main thoroughfare.**

**It is midway through opening an underpass beneath Interstate 84 that will allow residents for the first time in decades to reach the Columbia River from downtown. ...**

"We are going to drive ourselves out of this economy," The Dalles Mayor Robb Van Cleave said. "We're not going to wait around for the rest of Oregon. We are controlling our own destiny."

The Dalles is the county seat of Wasco County, which has one of the highest unemployment rates in Oregon at 10.6 percent.

The town used to live off its natural resource industries such as lumber and aluminum, but the lumber mill burned down, and the main aluminum plant closed. Farmers have struggled in recent years with low cherry and wheat crop yields. ...

But the town of mostly mom-and-pop businesses, with a handful of chain stores, is holding its own, said Philip Klindt, who owns Klindt's Booksellers & Stationers in downtown. "It's been a little tight the last year, but I don't think we're suffering as much as many are," Klindt said. ... Klindt and others in town see the city's Downtown Renaissance Program as a breath of life. ...

### Promising portal to Columbia

**Klindt points to the Columbia River portal as one of the more promising projects for the economy. The underpass beneath I-84 that links the downtown to the Columbia River will restore The Dalles to the riverfront community it was before the interstate cut off the connection in the 1960s. And it will open a multitude of potential tourist attractions, Young said.**

**The underpass mirrors the architecture of the oldest commercial building in The Dalles and includes a few artistic features, such as lighted glass walls and theater lighting along the sidewalks, Young said.**

The city has plans for a commercial dock, allowing river ferries to drop off passengers to visit The Dalles, and a natural area as well as renovation of Rock Fort, a Lewis and Clark historic campsite on the river.

Until the \$7.1 million underpass opens in September, people will continue to drive a 3-mile route along I-84 to an exit that crosses the interstate to reach their own waterfront.

New image needed Residents acknowledge The Dalles sorely needs a new image. Passers-by on I-84 see warehouses, rundown buildings and a cherry-processing waste plant.

"You've heard it," said Toda, the community college president. "A dirty little wide spot in the road between Bend and Portland."

Toda is one of five local officials on the Community Outreach Team, which visits Washington, D.C., once a year to discuss local project financing with congressional leaders.

It's a new approach for The Dalles, which used to leave it to the individual organizations to request federal money with little success.

"We decided we were going to have a model of 'All for one and one for all,' " said Susan Huntington, executive director of The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce.

Huntington is also a member of the team, which includes the mayor, a county commissioner, a city councilor and Toda.

The group approach appears to work. The team has pulled in \$2 million in direct federal financing and assisted in another \$2 million in the past two years, Young said.

The team members' success seems to hinge on several factors. They never ask for federal money unless they've already put local money into the project.

"We never ask for the first dollar," Mayor Van Cleave said.

"Smart book" for Congress They give each Congress member what the team calls a "smart book," which is a portfolio of single-page descriptions of completed projects, those in progress and proposed ventures.

Their success lies not just in their cooperation and presentation to Oregon's congressional delegates but largely in who they are, said Josh Kardon, chief of staff for Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore.

"They've done a good job with the book, and they've done a good job of marshaling their resources," Kardon said. "But perhaps the most important thing they've done is to put their best faces forward."

The Dalles' high unemployment makes it a priority for federal financing, Kardon said. "It doesn't hurt that the (team members) are very likable people and very optimistic."

This year, their proposals totaled \$7.7 million and include two training programs for health care jobs at Columbia Gorge Community College, additional financing for the fiber-optics cable and two phases of riverfront development.

The team's mission is to improve the quality of life for residents, whether through new jobs or simply a fresh image. If it entices more people to move to The Dalles, so be it, as long as it's a trickle and not an explosion, Huntington said.

"From a chamber of commerce perspective, we would like to have lots of new business," she said. "But from our citizens' standpoint, I think they appreciate the quality of life, and they wouldn't appreciate the kind of growth in Redmond or Bend."