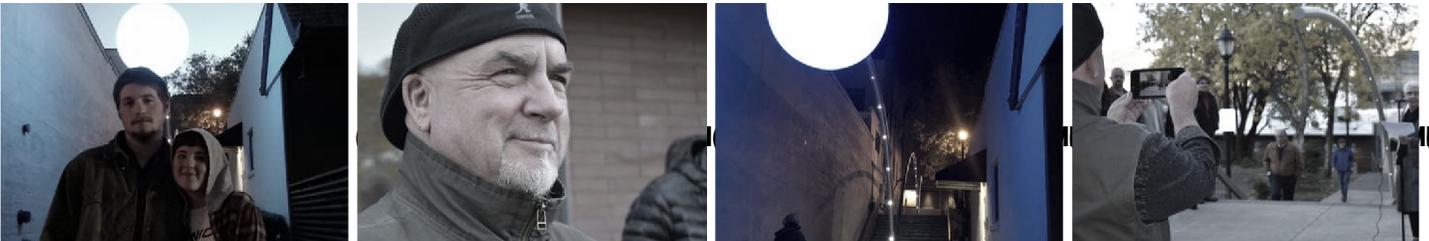


Ashland walkway gains 'Velocity'

BY MAUREEN FLANAGAN / BATTISTELLA FOR THE TIDINGS | November 08, 2018

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After five years of planning, public comment and design work, a metal art installation known as "Velocity" is in place just off Main Street in Ashland's downtown. The [Ashland Public Arts Commission](https://www.ashland.or.us/CCBIndex.asp?CCBID=212) (<https://www.ashland.or.us/CCBIndex.asp?CCBID=212>) dedicated the installation on Wednesday evening with artist [Gordon Huether](http://dailytidings.com/archive/-theater-corridor-artist-selected) (<http://dailytidings.com/archive/-theater-corridor-artist-selected>) on hand and a crowd of public art enthusiasts. Mayor John Stromberg led a toast to the new art with hot cider warming both the spirit and the hand as the evening deepened to dusk.

"The project was particularly interesting because it was particularly challenging," explained [Huether \(https://www.gordonhuether.com/\)](https://www.gordonhuether.com/) at the dedication. "We weren't allowed to touch the walls. We can't obstruct the stairs. We had to light it the whole way down and there were a whole lot of other weird things."

Gordon Huether: "Public art is not for sissies." (Tidings video by Bert Etling)

Capped by a 48-inch lighted sphere at the end of a 126-foot long curved structure, "Velocity" is centered in the narrow walkway that joins downtown East Main Street to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Thomas Theatre and the public parking garage on Hargadine Street. "Velocity" suffuses the walkway with light and energy, defining the corridor to passersby.

"I didn't know that this walkway was here and now I do," Kate Khosla of Ashland said. "It's kind of like a crystal ball, to see how the future plays!"

The location for this public art piece was originally identified by the ad hoc [Downtown Beautification Committee \(http://dailytidings.com/archive/council-considers-where-100k-in-beautification-funding-should-go\)](http://dailytidings.com/archive/council-considers-where-100k-in-beautification-funding-should-go) with the intent to visually and spatially enhance the experience of pedestrians on the corridor and adjacent sidewalk, activating the use of the walkway both during the day and at night, according to the Arts Commission event announcement.

The lighted sphere softly shifts between a muted blue and purple and a line of LED lights are built into the length of the work. The lights rotate through a full color spectrum, but because of the density of the sphere, the blue and purple colors are most evident. The

entire passage is lit, giving the corridor a warmer, safer feeling in the dusk and in the morning, too, when local shopkeepers are opening up.

What do you think of "Velocity"?(Video by Maureen Flanagan Battistella)

"Velocity" enchants Ron Khosla, walking down the sidewalk with Kate. "What a great idea! I like that it moves! I like the color," he exclaimed, gesturing grandly overhead. "I like that it's like moving — I mean it feels like it's moving. I like that it's changing color, like it's alive!"

The art looks like a big super ball to Ben Bloom, who has two dogs with him. "I love it and I love when it changes colors in the morning when I'm walking."

Myra and Maria, walking home from work in the dusk, also like the brilliantly lit art. "You can't really see it, but when you come here, the focus!" said Maria.

"I feel like it would be a really cute to take pictures, like my senior pictures," Myra says. "This would have been a really pretty place."

Not everyone cares for the artwork. "It looks like an oversized ball that was thrown off the stairs and is now currently in motion. I don't like it even though it's aligned perfectly," Tyler commented, stopping to talk about the art. "I feel like it's coming at me."

When asked to name the installation, those who stopped to talk about the sculpture earlier this week mostly named the artwork "Bouncing Ball." One person suggested "Bouncing Orb." No one referred to the work by its given name, "Velocity," though

another suggestion, "Motion Going Forward," came close.

Huether referred to his proposed art project as "Bouncing Ball" throughout the design process, but when it came time for the build, his crew objected. "My staff wanted something a little more sexy," Huether said.

The Theater Corridor project is budgeted at \$110,000 with funding allocated from the transient occupancy tax paid by visitors staying at lodgings in the city. A request for proposals for the artwork was posted on the city of Ashland website and sent to art organizations and artists throughout the western United States in June 2016. An independent Ashland panel selected Huether's submission in December 2016.

Email Ashland freelance writer Maureen Flanagan Battistella at mbattistellaor@gmail.com (<mailto:mbattistellaor@gmail.com>).

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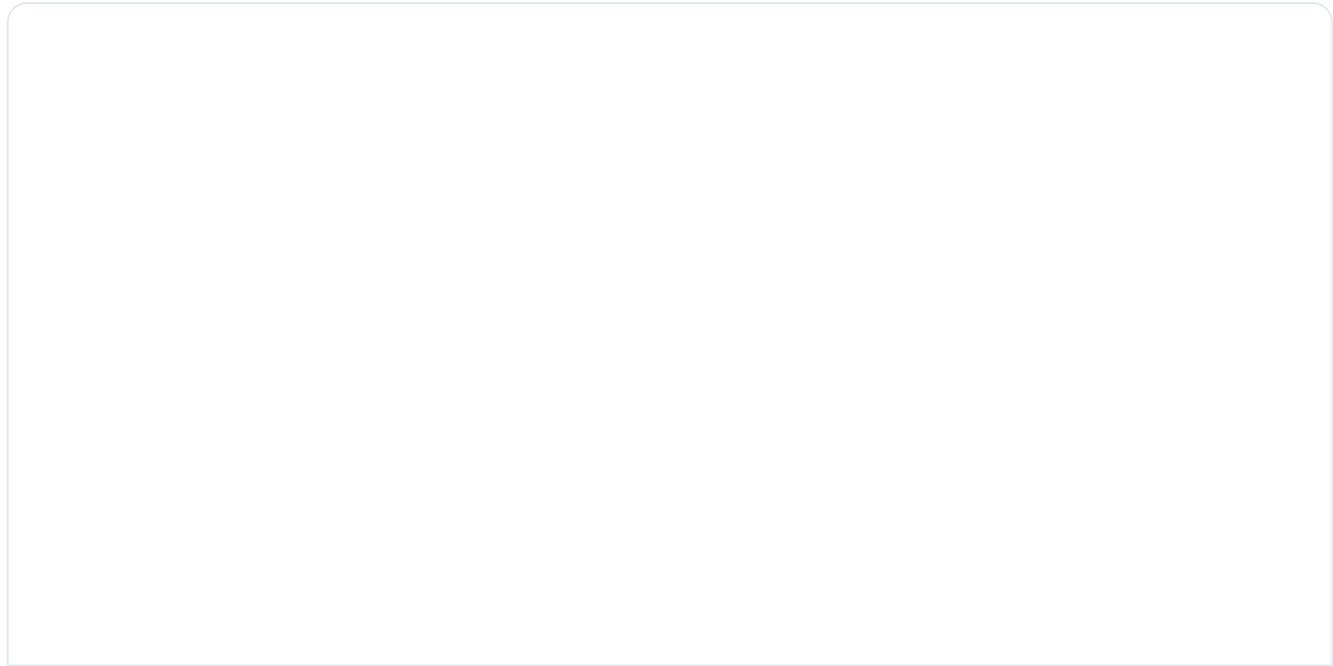
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