Bear Fountain Renaissance
Smashed by a Truck Almost Forty Years Ago, Its Myriad Ties to Campus Come to Light on Its Rebuilding
by Fran Marsh

What a Berkeley vice chancellor doing at Marin Circle on a rainy Sunday morning with a pitcher of water?

He—and scores of other folks with campus ties—have joined 3,000 neighbors to dedicate a North Berkeley fountain.

The Sept. 15 dedication, one of the largest ceremonial events in the history of the city, illustrates both civic pride and the extent of connections between campus and community.

"It's a piece of public art that people can identify with and understand," said Steve Fincom, a planning analyst for Physical and Environmental Planning. "You don't need an artist's explanation to tell you what it is."

The fountain replaced an original, Berkeley's first public piece of art, which was installed in 1911 and lost in the late 1950s when a truck coming down steep Mariposa Avenue demolished it.

Since then, the circle has presented necessities entering the Northbrae community with an uninviting, weed-choked patch.

The restoration was a grassroots neighborhood effort with more than 1,200 contributors who gave the money to rebuild the fountain and landscape the circle.

"The whole Marin Circle restoration and dedication event was a wonderful celebration of Berkeley with a proper appreciation of positive town/gown connections," Fincom said.

Here are some examples of campus ties, past and present.

- The original fountain was designed by John Galen Howard, supervising campus architect, who also designed the Mining Circle pool.

- Vice Chancellor Horace Mitchell, invited to be one of four honorary "water bearers," christened the new fountain with water from Mining Circle. Berkeley Mayor Shirley Dean, also a campus staff member in Undergraduate Admissions and Relations With Schools, accepted the fountain for the city.

- The fountain's four bear cubes symbolize both the university and the state of California. The original fountain was put in place when locals were attempting to have the state capital moved to Berkeley.

- By coincidence, the bears on the fountain (designed in 1911) closely resemble the Cal Bear's "paw held bear" symbol that appears on Bond literature and drums.

- Sylvana McLaughlin, co-founder of the Save the Bay Movement, a water bearer at the ceremony, is the wife of the late Engineering dean and UC Regents Donald McLaughlin. McLaughlin Hall is named after him.

- Local historian Trish Hawthorne, who spoke about the first fountain, is an alumna, former president of Pytanean alumni and recipient of the Alumni Association's Rosalie Stern Award for her community service.

- The Cal Bear, the Golden Overtones and the Senior Men's Octet performed at the dedication along with the Berkeley High School jazz ensemble.

- The ceremony was partly based on one that former campus Public Relations director Professor Gerald Wilson devised for the dedication of Kriouer Plaza fountain emphasizing fun elements like pouring symbolic water into the fountain.

Steve Fincom composed his own verse for the occasion. He attended one of the first public meetings to discuss one square mile, and as a member of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, had the pleasure of endorsing the plans.

Dedication Verses

Alums whispered to our favorites:
"Tawny and Schuyler--"

Jug them in a city

Dramatized occasionally

Here on slopes of golden grassland
Where once grizzles roamed alone
They caught spring within summer
Glorified by four bears of stone.
A thousand suns of rolling billboards
A thousand homes, one with a view
Clipped around the sparkling fountain
As a Northern young and new

Stuck down by a crash in traffic

Broken, spilled, and swept away

The fountain created lovely in memory
That this Dedication Day

This is our own return fountain
Drunken from sweet and clear springs
Berkeley need not serve a mountain
Fountains are built of smaller things.

- Sara Fincom

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