

THE HAWTHORNE PLAQUES AND THE MT. TABOR ENTRYWAY

Hawthorne Boulevard is one of Portland's oldest and most lively commercial districts, home to a broad range of locally owned and operated businesses. Originally named "U Street" when it was the southern boundary of the town of East Portland (NE Glisan was "A Street"), later designated "Asylum Avenue" for the mental-health clinic operated by Dr. James C. Hawthorne at roughly Seventh and Hawthorne, it was finally named "Hawthorne Boulevard" after the doctor, a beloved and highly respected member of the community, passed away.

When the initial meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) for the City of Portland's Hawthorne Transportation Plan (HTP) were held in 1996, many of the participants hoped that the plan would include aesthetic improvements along the boulevard as well as functional ones. As the planning process moved forward, however, it became clear that the City's budget for this project would be stretched just to achieve the transportation improvements. The Portland Office of Transportation had no money to spend on any kind of public art or even on landscaping, other than occasional street trees. If there were to be aesthetic enhancements to the boulevard they would have to come about through citizen efforts.

The HTP was developed over the course of 1997; four years later, in 2001, the CAC was reconvened to refine the plan in order to meet the available budget. John Laursen, a designer and business owner on Hawthorne who co-chaired the CAC and is also a member of the Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association (MTNA) board, devised the idea of locating a neighborhood entryway for Mt. Tabor on the City's new curb extension at SE 50th and Hawthorne. This effort was endorsed by the Hawthorne CAC and supported by the MTNA. Laursen's design for the entryway features a basalt wall with a cast bronze sign to signal eastbound vehicles that they are leaving the commercial boulevard and entering a residential neighborhood.

As the entryway design was developed and refined, it made sense to enliven the pedestrian side of the sign with a narrative bronze plaque recounting the history of Mt. Tabor, and the idea quickly followed of adding a matching plaque relaying the history of Hawthorne. When Laursen presented the plans for the entire project to the board of the Hawthorne Boulevard Business Association (HBBA), that group was enthusiastic about the MTNA's willingness to include a Hawthorne history plaque on its entryway and suggested proposing to Multnomah County the inclusion of a matching Hawthorne history plaque on the County building at SE Grand and Hawthorne, thus bookending the boulevard with a narrative history plaque at each end.

The County generously embraced this proposal, and the HBBA secured a grant from the Alliance of Portland Neighborhood Business Associations to fund manufacture of the additional plaque. Countless hours of design and project management for both the entryway and the plaque on the County building have been donated. And the Mt. Tabor entryway project has been entirely privately funded, paid for with seed money from the MTNA and a large number of individual citizen contributions, ranging from ten dollars to several thousand.

The combination of the entryway and plaques is thus a collaboration between citizens, a neighborhood association, the business association, and two local governments. Saturday, August 18, 2007, has been designated "Hawthorne Day," in recognition of the long-awaited completion of the Hawthorne Transportation Plan and the dedication of the entryway and plaques. It is hoped that both the County and the City will issue proclamations to this effect.

The HBBA is organizing a variety of events the length of the boulevard in celebration of the occasion. In addition, the Mt. Tabor Neighborhood Association is hosting a neighborhood-wide party on Hawthorne Day, to celebrate completion of the new neighborhood entryway. SE 50th Avenue will be closed just north of Hawthorne and there will be live music from noon to three. The entryway sign will be unveiled at 1:00.