

WAYNE MORSE FREE SPEECH PLAZA
Lane County Courthouse
East 8th Avenue and Oak Street
Eugene, Oregon

The Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza was envisioned by the Wayne Morse Historical Park Corporation (WMHPC) and first approved by the Lane County Board of Supervisors in 1984 to “better enable Lane County Citizens to exercise the precious rights of free speech and assembly.”

At the first celebration of the site – marked then only by a commemorative plaque near the courthouse entrance -- in 1984, a former Senate colleague, William Proxmire of Wisconsin, offered that “To speak out fiercely when we know that what we say is not popular. . . That is Wayne Morse’s legacy of freedom.” His remarks were followed by those of an 87-year-old World War I draft resister, the first among thousands who have come to the spot to express their views.

With the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Wayne Morse’s birth, new efforts began for a memorial complex on the Courthouse Plaza. Public and private funds made construction of the existing Plaza possible. The private portion was raised by WMHPC through sale of wall plaques and ground pavers. It underwrote the larger-than-life sized figure of Morse by renowned Mexican sculptor Gabriel Ponzanelli and the placement of plaques and pavers around the Free Speech area. The County bore the responsibility for lowering and rebuilding the courthouse entrance.

Some 50 sponsored wall plaques surround the podium and the statue of Morse. More than 700 granite pavers of various sizes make up the floor of the Plaza, and 87 of the smallest pavers name Morse contemporaries or events that happened during his lifetime.

Sculptor Ponzanelli captures Morse in a typical “speech-giving” stance. He consulted widely with those who knew Morse in an effort to “give life to the Senator’s spirit.” A rose which Morse often wore to signify he was going to give extended remarks is on the lapel. Morse carries a copy of the U. S. Constitution.

The Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza was dedicated March 15, 2005, at a ceremony which included Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, Gabriel Ponzanelli and members of the Morse family.

At no time in our history has the need been greater to discuss, feature and work for integrity in politics and government. National elections have demonstrated the importance of participation in the political process.

The Morse Free Speech Plaza serves these and other purposes. It is a designated outdoor space for local and visiting speakers to air ideas. It provides a public place to reflect on the thoughts of the notable men and women whose inscribed words are part of the Plaza design. It stands as an enduring memorial to Senator Morse, who throughout his life embodied the spirit and

independence of Oregon. Perhaps most importantly it is a place where young people can put a face on the concept of political integrity and realize the importance placed on citizen participation in the process of governance.

Visitors are invited to stroll about the Plaza, identify with the history of the 20th Century and rejoice that we, the people, can gather to speak freely and openly about issues of the day.

Sculptor: Gabriel Ponzanelli

Paver and Plaque carving: Liza Ponder, Heritage Stone, Eugene