

Signs For the Times

I'm not totally sure where the impetus for the pedestal sign project came from. Perhaps it was an extension of the long needed artwork for the 3-paneled kiosks. Or, perhaps it was kindled by the signage Chappell Studios helped Dave White and I create for the bio-retention pond in the Industrial Park.

Whatever the origins may be, what I do know for sure is that around 2010/2011, I began looking into two reputable companies – Pannier Graphics and I-Zone - to try to assess the cost of printing these kinds of signs. At the same time, I looked into ready-made ped bases. The costs of signage and pedestals were astronomical, something in the area of \$500 pr sign. That didn't include graphics costs either! Probably \$650 total!!

A few years later, the JCCB built a 3 panel kiosk at Whitham Wds. Not long thereafter the left hand (northern) panel was filled with an attractive graphics piece done for an Eagle Scout project. I made inquiries and the printing job was traced to Sign & Design in Mt Pleasant.

The substrate was 1/16" vinyl, UV resistant 4 color inks, then laminated onto 1/4" PVC backing. Total cost about \$85! It caught my attention, big-time. Project still on the back-burner.

I had had discussions with Greg Vorhies over the years about us designing our own pedestal bases but it never went anywhere, mostly because the sign costs were prohibitive.

Fast forward to Jan, 2013. I'd be turning 65 that March so I went over to the JCHC for a free consultation re Medicare. The ever-energetic Judy Cox met with me and we discussed options

At the end of our meeting she brought up the subject of the upcoming Rotary Auction and would the Trails Council be interested in being a recipient? I asked her what would be required – mostly ticket sales – and then told her about our signage projects (kiosk and pedestal). She thought it was a perfect match. So did I. Finally, the funding presented itself.

Just a few days later, I'm walking out my front door heading to my car and there strolling down the street is Paul Siemsen, an avid trail user and accomplished graphic artist. I waylaid him.

It didn't take much to sell Paul on the project concept and he agreed to create a mock-up that could be used to show Rotary, the JCTC, and others. Diane Porter was enlisted and provided us with copy/photos of local birds. The mock-up was gorgeous.

I took the mock-up over to Greg Vorhies and it allowed us to really come up with a realistic base design. Details would need to be fleshed out but the price tag was realistic. Paul quoted his cost for graphic design. \$275 pr sign for everything. Doable.

The project then becomes multi-dimensional: ticket sales for Rotary, getting photos/narrative for the kiosk panels, deciding which topics and which locations are appropriate for ped signs, getting all of that content, and refining the base design.

Ticket sales were over-the-top and local Rotary gave us \$3,500.

Just as important, Doug Flournoy works with me on a statewide Rotary grant that will cover the balance of costs for all the signage, the posts/hardware/concrete. Everything.

This necessitates a break-down of in-kind labor: the City will augur all the holes, the JCTC will assemble all of the units, and the Rotary club will do all of the installation work – putting in the posts and concrete, then attaching the sign to the post.

The kiosk panels were easy to accomplish: there were only 9 to be created (I know I'll be asked: 8 for our 4 kiosks and 1 for the south panel at Whitham Wds) and the content had been decided upon years ago. Sign & Design does an excellent job. In the meanwhile, Pete Tollenaere, Jim Salts, and Don Cummings do some painstaking rehab work on all four 3 panel kiosks.

Fairfield Lumber gives us a good quote on 4" x 4"s, hardware, and Quikcrete. Greg and I refine pedestal design: he'll use ¼" aluminum, with an 1/8" piece of polycarb to protect artwork.

Here is where the plot thickens (or sickens, depending upon perspective). Paul had given Copperfield Chimney notice but they couldn't find a replacement. He's on the hook for their Winter catalogue ... which means he has to work on the ped signs in the evenings and weekends. It means possible burnout.

In the meantime, many of the contributors to the ped signs are not cooperating in a timely manner. In fact, a few are obstinate in what they want/don't want to see printed. Coaxing. Lots of coaxing. Paul is spending way too much time on each sign design. Rotary wants their logo added now. Paul is fuming.

We want these signs in the ground by late Sept/early Oct so they

can be enjoyed before Winter. Rotary hasn't heard yet re statewide grant. They say it's a shoe-in but it's not a 100% done deal. However, I'm already committing those funds to Paul's work and Sign & Design's estimated costs. My palms are sweating and it's not just because it's Summer in Fairfield.

Paul is experiencing trouble with his hands/fingers because he's having no downtime from his computer work. He needs to take a week or two off from the project. Twice. Yikes.

Contributors are slowly sending in their content. We need high quality, high res photos for some of the signs. Internet search begins. Some photos can be downloaded; some need to be purchased via iStock, like the fish or mammals in some of the signs. We have to be careful to post photo credit on all photos.

Greg V. is behind schedule to fabricate bases. Paul is taking his sweet time in finalizing each design. Contributors are still slow. Uphill struggle now. Why am I volunteering to do this???

The Rotary grant comes through. Greg and I find a clip that allows the polycarb and artwork to be held in place on base. Paul is coming into the home stretch. Sign & Design begins printing the ped signs after difficulty in downloading and opening files.

In the end, Loop Trail magic prevails and all is well: the signs look brilliant, the ped bases are well-constructed, 2 volunteers and I assemble all of the ped signs, Pam's crew augurs all of the holes, Rotary does an outstanding job of putting in the posts and attaching the ped signs, and in late Oct all is done! Small clusters of trail users are soon seen stopping and reading the various signs scattered along the trail. Mission Accomplished!

FOOTNOTE: Unbeknown to me, Paul Siemsen had never drunk a beer in his adult life. When we finished the last sign design he emailed and asked if we could get together sometime soon and have a beer. So, Yes, working with Ron Blair on various trail projects could, and did, drive one person (at least) to drink!