

Message from a 'high place'



The "Peace on Earth" sign is lit during the holiday season on top of Ya-Po-Ah Terrace. [ANDY NELSON/THE REGISTER-GUARD]

Ya-Po-Ah Terrace, tallest building in Eugene, may change, but its message of peace still remains

By Christian Hill
The Register - Guard

A year into construction at Ya-Po-Ah Terrace, its residents are noting many welcome changes to their apartments: new windows, flooring, cabinets and air conditioning.

But one thing that isn't being altered is the "Peace on Earth" sign atop Eugene's tallest building that has illuminated the holiday season above the city for more than four decades.

This year's installation took a bit more coordination than previous years with the

ongoing construction, said Kelsey Weilbrenner, the building's administrator, but "we knew it had to go up there."

Through its history, the sign has been missed even when it hasn't been missed.

The sign traditionally is installed on the first good day of weather after Thanksgiving, Weilbrenner said. But Ya-Po-Ah Terrace can expect to receive calls from local residents even with the slightest perceived delay in that schedule, she said.

It's traditionally taken down on Jan. 5, marking 12 days since Christmas.

The two-year \$29 million construction project will bring new comforts to the building's elderly residents

but, most importantly, ensure that its 210 units of subsidized housing for senior citizens 62 or older is available for decades to come. The building's make-over was crucial for federal housing officials to agree to continuing providing rental subsidies.

The building, which opened at the foot of Skinner Butte in 1969, was the brain-child of the Evergreen Union Retirement Association, a private nonprofit organization formed by five local labor unions that saw a community need for low-cost housing for senior citizens in Eugene.

The building's name means "very high place" in the language of the Kalapuya Indians who inhabited the Willamette Valley prior to

the arrival of white settlers.

After the building's opening, Jack McCulloch, the building's administrator at the time, and his family discussed putting a holiday message on Ya-Po-Ah Terrace's rooftop.

There was much family discussion about the message until McCulloch's wife, Mary, came up with "Peace on Earth," McCulloch told an employee during an interview long after his retirement.

The employee, projects manager Deane Lange, provided the notes from the interview to The Register-Guard. McCulloch and his wife have since died.

Later, larger letters were cut and lights were added

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