

Dedication Concert for *The Porch* at Boulevard Park Set for June 20

by Joanna Nesbit

If you've taken a walk at Boulevard Park recently, you'll see The Porch at Boulevard Park is complete. Besides being an exciting addition to Bellingham's public parks, The Porch is a tribute to Mark Witter, a Cascade Joinery co-worker who died unexpectedly of a heart attack at age 50 in 2004. Witter, who played harmonica for the band Howlin' Wood, was passionate about woodworking, music, and community. Jeff Arvin, co-owner of Cascade Joinery and originator of the project, wanted to honor Witter with a tribute that reflected Witter's interests. With the help of Arvin's co-workers and Witter's widow, Susan Witter, the idea for The Porch was born.



Mark Witter

On Saturday, June 20, at 6pm, Cascade Joinery and Bellingham Parks and Recreation will host a dedication concert at The Porch to celebrate five years of planning, designing, fundraising, and building.

With more than 200 individuals and businesses contributing to the project, the dedication will be a special event for many, celebrating and recognizing the effort of everyone who made the project possible. The concert is free, and the public is welcome to join in.

The concert will feature the Bellingham Youth Jazz Band, an organization Witter supported, and Howlin' Wood, the last band he played with. The headline act will be The Mark Dufresne Band.

Mark Dufresne is one of the preeminent blues harmonica players in the Northwest and was acquainted with Witter through Witter's work with the Pacific Northwest Jazz Alliance. In addition, a spectacular piece of artwork commissioned from Bellingham artist Tom Wood will be unveiled.

In January, The Porch still required approximately \$80,000 in community donations for completion (in addition to the \$100,000 already raised). Those donations came through. "We were very successful in raising funding," says Arvin. "We had a couple donations in the \$5,000 range, but most of the donations were small, which means a lot of people came forward and helped us create this."



Photo by Mark Fuller

Providing a beautiful and durable legacy that honors Witter's community spirit, the Porch is a permanent timber-frame pavilion of intimate scale perched at the north end of Boulevard Park. It will serve as a covered stage for the summer concert series, as well as a shelter and stage for many other activities, both formal and informal. **However, The Porch will not be available to reserve for events such as weddings. Other than the scheduled summer concert series, The Porch is available only on a first come, first served basis.** Testament to the integration of craft and design, the pavilion is built from recycled timbers, crafted stone, and hand-forged iron work, with the timbers across the front designed in the shape of a harmonica comb, Mark's instrument.

"The Porch took longer than anybody expected, and more work, but when all is said and done, I think the process went relatively smoothly. Construction has gone very smoothly," says Arvin. He says the plan stayed on track and "was executed to a T."

The public is welcome to use The Porch. "One of our goals for the project was for it to be useful 365 days a year," says Arvin. "There is seating that faces both south and north and from those spots, it captures some really nice views and I think people will discover that."

If you're interested in contributing to the cause, the Whatcom Community Foundation is accepting donations. Please send contributions to Whatcom Community Foundation, Witter Pavilion Fund, 119 Grand Ave., Suite A, Bellingham, WA 98225. Make checks payable to Whatcom Community Foundation. The funds will be used to benefit the community. For more information, call Cascade Joinery at 527-0119 or visit www.ThePorchLive.org or <http://www.cascadejoinery.com/index.php/discover-more/blog>.

Joanna Nesbit is a frequent contributor to *Entertainment News Northwest*. Her work has appeared in *FamilyFun*, *Wondertime*, and online. She also writes for Bellingham's parent website, www.neighborhood-kids.com, where she can be found blogging as Moxie Mom on the parent life.

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