

George 'Bing' Crosby Sheldon Jr.

May 08, 1934 - April 30, 2016



"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." – Winston Churchill

Bing Sheldon, FAIA, made a remarkable life by professionally and personally giving back to the city of Portland and the community, and he inspired scores of others to do the same.

It was 1964 when Bing moved to Portland at the age of 30. He brought with him a young family, a Bachelor of Economics at Tufts University and a Master of Architecture at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University.

Within four years, he co-founded SERA Architects and it wasn't long before he had an agenda: he wanted Portland and its citizens to achieve their potential. At that time, there was a lot of work to be done. The dying downtown core had no access to the river, air pollution was a serious concern, and the prevailing attitude favored building demolition to make way for the new. Bing saw architects as "being in a unique position to support and strengthen our civic infrastructure through our commitment to community values" and he carried the torch for change.

Bing spent four years on the City of Portland's Planning Commission, serving as chair in 1974. He led the state's largest citizen-driven planning effort to produce the Portland Downtown Plan, which revitalized the city's core with pedestrian-friendly development, reclaimed access to the river, and affirmed a commitment to clean air and alternative transit. In short, Bing advanced Portland's transformation into a place that exemplifies the best a city has to offer and brought it national acclaim.

As an architect, Bing's thoughtful approach honed in on the essence of the project goals rather than the directives, and he frequently found solutions that realized the project in completely new ways. In partnership with developers, building owners and government officials, Bing saved many of Portland's now most-treasured buildings. For some projects like Portland City Hall, Bing led the charge to restore their historic grandeur while making them functional and welcoming. For other buildings, such as Montgomery Park and Albers Mill, Bing's innovative adaptive reuse strategies gave them new vitality. In 1999, the American Institute of Architects recognized his contributions to architecture and historic renovation and distinguished Bing as an AIA Fellow.

Bing was fond of quoting the inscription on Portland's oldest piece of public art, the Skidmore Fountain, which reads, "Good Citizens Are the Riches of a City." It was a sentiment that underpinned his drive for public involvement. As a community advocate, Bing brought the capacity for both vision and action. Bing was famous for vocalizing his opinions, but he was also an open-minded and intent listener. He enjoyed promoting invigorating dialogue, then spurring people toward progress. Bing knew the importance of an individual's contribution (he even cast a ballot from his hospital bed) and the power of the collective to

effect real change.

In 1979, Bing became a founding board member of Central City Concern to help people overcome addiction, end homelessness and achieve self-sufficiency. Aspiring to help the suffering find peace and joy in their lives, Bing gave 35 years of guidance and pro bono services to the organization which now offers housing for 2,200 people and services to 13,000 people each year.

Bing's leadership in public and private civic institutions was extensive. He was active on boards and committees for public education, visual and performing arts, voter participation, city planning and design, and historic preservation. To name just a few of them:

- Founding Member, Portland Forward
- Board Member, Oregon League of Conservation Voters
- Board Member, Children First for Oregon
- Board of Trustees, Chair of Long Range Planning Committee, Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust
- Founding Board Member, Central City Concern
- Chairman, Mt. Hood Cultural Center & Museum
- Past Member and President (1974), Portland City Planning Commission

Bing's unflagging commitment did not go unnoticed. In 2014, the Portland Metropolitan Association of Realtors gave Bing a First Citizen award and in 2013, Multnomah County declared June 13 as Bing Sheldon Day.

Bing became a mentor to architects and planners that worked at the firm, as well as professionals in a variety of areas in the community. His ability to examine a situation and keep an even keel made him a valued friend and confidante to old and young alike.

Bing's concern for the city's future in the wave of new growth became a catalyst for Portland Forward, a new initiative to ensure millennials will pick up the torch and make Portland thrive and grow as a sustainable, equitable, livable city.

Family held special meaning for Bing. He asserted that the key to retaining young people in Portland for a positive impact on the city's future was "families – people who make a commitment to another person and who put down roots in their neighborhood are the glue that holds a healthy city together." In his own family, Bing was a loving partner to his wife, Carolyn for nearly 60 years. He was a caring and invested father to his three children, Jonathan "Yon," Graham and Lory; and he was a very special role model and grandfather "Papa B" to his grandchildren, Colten, Lana, Cassie, Alli and Lizzie.

At home, Bing was an avid reader who delighted in the symphony and Oregon wines. When he wasn't attending board and community meetings in town, Bing enjoyed travel, downhill skiing, foraging for chanterelles with his family adjacent to their Mt. Hood cabin, and rebuilding the Ashland Creek Inn as a family project.

Bing died from a lung disease shortly before his 82nd birthday. Bing's family will honor him with a memorial from 5 to 7 p.m. Sunday, May 22, 2016, at Montgomery Park. Donations may be made in Bing's name to Children First for Oregon, www.cffo.org and/or the Oregon League of Conservation Voters, www.olcv.org

Bing truly believed that good citizens are the riches of a city, and because he adopted Portland as his home, the city has prospered abundantly in countless ways.

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