

The 'news' in this letter is a report on the Friends Annual Meeting earlier this month. The venue was again at the Market's beloved Pink Door featuring its delicious appetizers and spacious room. The program was a review of the Market High Stall Sign Restoration, with a loop of photos of the work from beginning to end on the stage screen. The sign restorer, Paul Affolter, of Zepellin studio, held the members' attention with a discourse on the techniques and solutions of historical sign restoration. On your next trip to the Market, look up at his work on the Main Arcade.

The business meeting elected officers and added five board members. Ed Singler, Paul Dunn, and Jennifer Zanella were joined by Judy Ogliore replacing the indomitable LeAnn Loughran as Treasurer. The Board was strengthened with five new members. Ernie Dornfeld, retired as keeper of Seattle's Municipal Archives; Christine Vaughn, a fabric artist with over 20 years on the craftline and two terms on the PDA Council; Carla Rickerson, retired head of University of Washington Library's Special Collections; Sara Patton, retiring after three terms as Friends' representative on the Market Historical Commission; and Paul Dorpat, noted photo historian and author.

Volunteer Alert: Friends' must fill an open position on the Historical Commission. Members with time and inclinations to take an active role in preserving the Pike Place Market should call ([206 587 5767](tel:2065875767)) or write this newsletter. A more fun way to help the Market Senior Center & Food Bank by attending the 27th Annual Great Figgy Pudding Caroling Competition 5 TO 8:30 in Westlake Center on Friday, December 6th.

Plans for the 50th Anniversary year of Friends of the Market are being are firming up. Member input is welcome and a framework will be featured in next month's Newsletter. We will be asking for your ideas and probably some volunteer effort, too. Enjoy the Holiday Season.

Signs as Icons

Signs often become so important to a community that they are valued long after their role as commercial markers has ceased. Such signs are valued for their familiarity, beauty, humor, size, or even their grotesqueness. In these cases, signs transcend their conventional role as vehicles of information. When signs reach this stage, they no longer advertise, but are valued in and of themselves. They become icons.

Michael J. Auer, U.S. Department of the Interior, Heritage Preservation Services.

Seattle has a living museum of iconic signs on eleven acres of land on a bluff above the bay. This museum has no single management, funding source, curator, or spokesperson, and no admission fee. It is open to all who will look up, down and around as they shop for food or favors. The exhibits in this museum are the signs of Pike Place Market.

Some would consider the Market Historical Commission the ex officio sign curator for the Market, since it applies two and one half pages of sign rules in its Guidelines which date from 1971. Prior to that date signs went up or came down with an agreement between the business tenant and private landlord. The Commission rules, though lengthy, allow wide discretion for design and expression from the merchants. Restrictions are sensible regarding primarily safety or pedestrian obstruction. It does not rule on taste.

Identifying signs by type tells us something of their history. Blade signs and neon signs predominate in the Market. But, flat wall signs, door and window treatments, and restroom tile images are signs too. Brass plaques narrate their own story but Rachel and Billie and the brass pigs' feet in the sidewalk as well as the salmon swimming upstream on the pergola columns are signs of past donor contributions to the Market. Building names painted or incised in brick and limestone are some of the oldest and most permanent signs.

Categories of signs in the Market include painted, neon, gilded, blade or hanging, symbolic (barber poles, a tooth, the Taxi Dog), plaques, and even impressions in concrete (Victor Steinbrueck and Rich Haag's handprints in the park). The informational and directional signage designed RMB Vivid is the newest signage in the Market. The red neon Public Market Center with its clock is the Market's most famous sign, thus it's most iconic.

The five enamel panels created by Aki Sogabe memorialize and commemorate the role of Japanese-Americans in the Market and their sacrifices during and after WWII internment.

The Main Arcade, from Rachel the pig to City Fish is a colorful corridor of neon, from the past to the present, from Loback's Meats to Soundview Cafe. Under the marquee from Stewart to Virginia Streets hangs a forest of blade signs, 20 in all. It is a directory for pedestrians, if they choose to look up. There are also neon and blade signs in the lower levels of the Market and the interiors of the Economy, Sanitary and Soames/Dunn Buildings, plus upper Post Alley.

Painted signs over business entrances are attention-getters. On Western Avenue the Spanish Table sign has four charming country scenes bracketing its letters. Bold lettering draws attention to signs for Ugly Baby and LaRu. Back up on Pike Place, Pike and Western Wine presents a classic all-capitals sign on its store front.

Most gilded signs - gold foil applied to opaque or glass panels - are historical, since most of the skilled artisans are gone, replaced by simpler vinyl applications. Yet gilding still announces the LaSalle Hotel entrance and the doors to the Fairmount and Alaska Trade Buildings on First Avenue and many interior offices throughout the Market.

The main hall of Level 2 Down/Under has non-structural cross beams between the massive tree trunk building columns holding strips of small incandescent light bulbs on each side with signs of adjacent businesses below. The lighting style was a theatrical touch of Arthur Goodwin's in the 1920's. The same lighting style decorates the Main Arcade and is a signature style of the Market. This Down/Under space is rich with neon and white light. Old Seattle Paperworks' Giant Shoe Museum and interactive coin trap rises above signage to museum exhibit.

The three steep hillside streets, at Pine, Stewart and Virginia show distinctive neon, blade, and painted signage. On Pine, the Steelhead Diner's neon logo is an actual fishing lure, in blue gas and glass. Above its windows is the whimsical neon imperative: "time to eat". The staid Inn at the Market, opposite, lists its commercial directory under glass held in massive brass frames at its mid-block entrances. Beecher's Cheese and Sur la Table have large understated black painted signs on their building faces.

The Stewart House's big projecting block letters attached to its south wall were done in this century. The Japanese Gourmet has a blade sign, plus a display of plastic entrees under glass.

At First and Virginia the 1903 Virginia Inn sign has been redone in neon to match the shape and message of the original. A little further south on the block is the entrance to the original Butterworth Mortuary. In tile in front of each of three entrance doors are the words: PRIVATE, OFFICE, CHAPEL.

At Virginia and Pike Place the new pergola announces the Pike Place Market in neon. It has a glassed-in pictorial history display above the upturned and locked bench seating and displays a recent paper sign: No Trespassing / Prohibido el Paso RCW 9A.52080 SMC 128.40. Passages is sorry to see so much of the Market's wealth of lively and historic informational signage being missed by distracted visitors ambling through, staring at their hand-held devices, pausing only occasionally to take a photo.

In October, Zeppelin Studio's Paul Affolter artfully completed the repair, repainting, and restoration of the six (of eight) remaining high stall produce signs on the Main Arcade. These post-World War II arcade signs had been weathered, dirtied and degraded during over fifty years of advertising fresh produce. The restoration of the signs was the last and largest project in Friends of the Market's year-long Market Art Project.

As with all good restoration, you may not be able to detect the work at first glance. But look again! They are the newest old signs in the Market.