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INVITATION TO Ashland

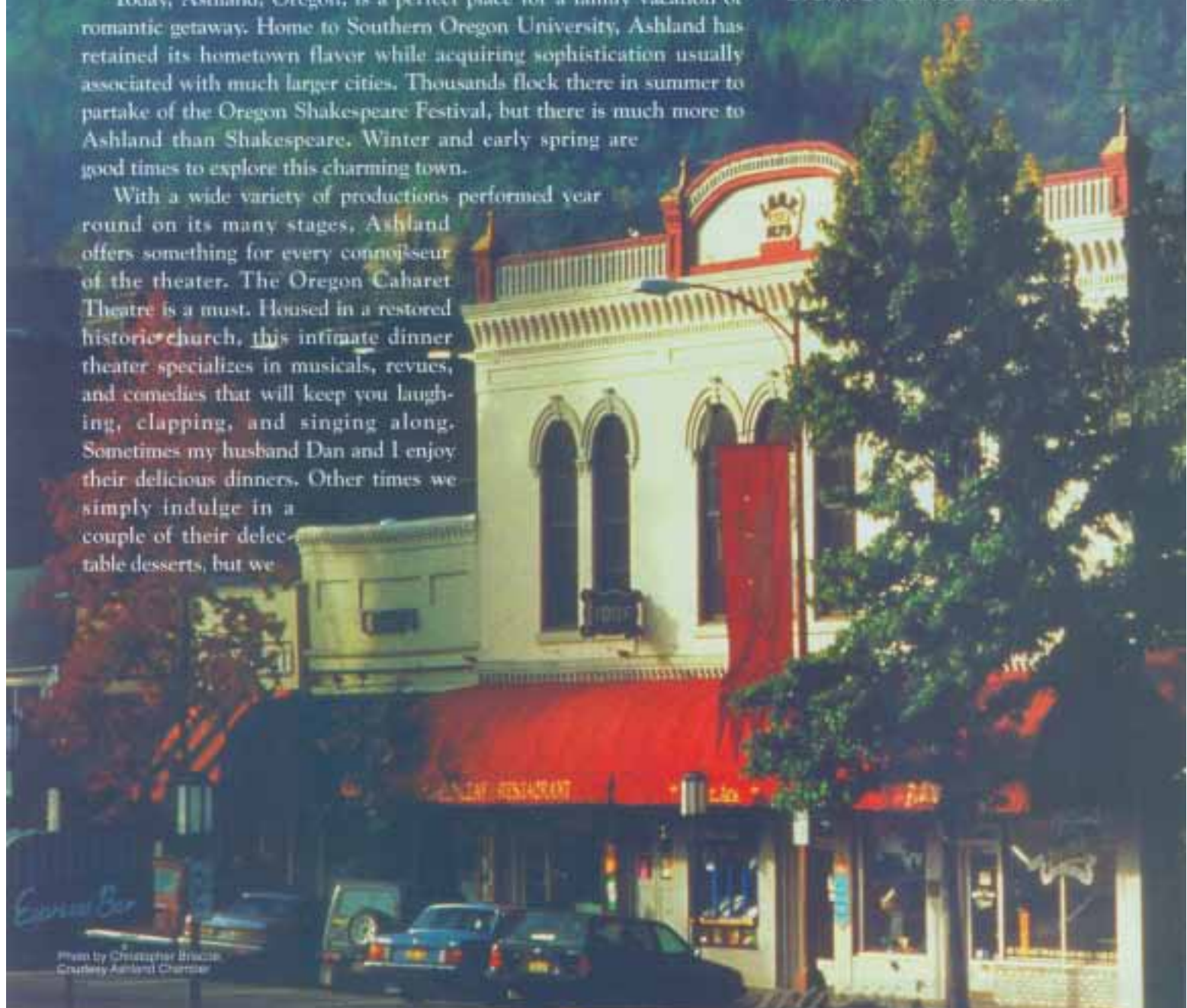
THEY SAY LOCATION is everything, and Abel Helman knew a good one when he saw it. In May 1851, he left a soggy Northern California gold camp and headed for the Willamette Valley. Descending the Siskiyou Mountains in Oregon Territory, he noticed a spot near a rushing stream, surrounded by magnificent stands of timber, overlooking the beautiful Rogue River Valley. Less than a year later, he gave up gold mining, returned to the site and, with the help of friends, built a grist mill and saw mill. He named the settlement Ashland after his Ohio birthplace.

Today, Ashland, Oregon, is a perfect place for a family vacation or romantic getaway. Home to Southern Oregon University, Ashland has retained its hometown flavor while acquiring sophistication usually associated with much larger cities. Thousands flock there in summer to partake of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, but there is much more to Ashland than Shakespeare. Winter and early spring are good times to explore this charming town.

With a wide variety of productions performed year round on its many stages, Ashland offers something for every connoisseur of the theater. The Oregon Cabaret Theatre is a must. Housed in a restored historic church, this intimate dinner theater specializes in musicals, revues, and comedies that will keep you laughing, clapping, and singing along. Sometimes my husband Dan and I enjoy their delicious dinners. Other times we simply indulge in a couple of their delectable desserts, but we

This small town is a cultural and recreational hub in the heart of Oregon's Rogue Valley.

STORY BY CAROLE NIELSON



LEFT: Duck Pond in Lithia Park.

FACING PAGE: Ashland Plaza.

always come away with our spirits buoyed.

If you like the outdoors, hiking trails and winter sports abound. Within an hour's drive of town, cross-country skiers can glide over 80 miles of trails at Mt. Ashland, Lake of the Woods, Fish Lake, and Howard Prairie Lake. Ice fishing also is popular at the mountain lakes. Crater Lake National Park is only two hours away.

With four chair lifts, 23 runs accommodating beginners to experts, plus night skiing Thursdays through Saturdays, Mt. Ashland offers enough action to keep any "downhill" or "snowboarder" exhilarated for hours. A trip to the mountain is worth the drive for the views. To the south, Mt. Shasta rises an awe-inspiring 14,000 feet and, in clear weather, the 9000-foot cone of Mt. McLaughlin looks near enough to touch.

After a day on the slopes, you can spend a romantic evening at the Mt. Ashland Inn watching the moon come up over Mt. McLaughlin while soaking in a jetted hot tub.

Hungry? Travel down the mountain to Callahan's Siskiyou Lodge for a home-cooked Italian dinner. As teenagers, Dan and I had our first taste of pizza there. Warm yourself by the huge stone fireplace and dance to live music. You may want to snuggle into one of their pillow-top king-sized beds for the night.

Ashland offers accommodations to fit everyone's needs—four-star luxury resorts, enchanting bed-and-breakfast inns, and modest motels. A downtown landmark is the newly restored Ashland Springs Hotel where you can dine in its elegant ballroom, enjoy afternoon tea, or listen to a variety of music in the Bull's Eye Bistro.

From inexpensive to elegant, Ashland has wonderful restaurants to suit every palate and budget. Our favorite hamburger joint is Big Al's. The Standing Stone Brewing



Photo by Don Melach

Company has excellent homemade breads and pastries, plus live entertainment. The Monet and Chateaulin restaurants serve award-winning French cuisine, and you will find Thai, Mexican, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian restaurants downtown.

Hankering for a bit of the Old West? A scenic trip to the Greensprings Box R Ranch in the high Cascades is fun for everyone. The Rowlett family will happily show you around the historic 1906 ranch house that was originally a stagecoach stop, and you can climb into a sleigh or wagon pulled by Weylon and Willie, two caramel-colored Belgian draft horses, for a ride along the Applegate Trail. For a restful night, rent a log cabin overlooking the 100-acre meadow where pioneers camped on their way to the Oregon Territory.

If poking around boutiques in historic buildings is your idea of the perfect diversion, check out such places as The Golden Unicorn and Paddington Station along Main Street. Spend time in Bloomsbury Books and Cripple Creek Music. The Ashland Rock Shop stocks Northwest gems and exotic fossils from all over the world.

Need a break from shopping? Watching a movie at the downtown

Varsity Theatre, housed in a 1937 art-deco building, is a good way to spend a winter afternoon or evening.

The Plaza, lined with buildings from the mid-1800s, is the heart of Ashland. Stop in American Trails with its fine collection of Native American basketry, pottery, and jewelry. The artistic wooden creations in the Ashland Hardwood Gallery will amaze you. Browse through Renaissance Rose, Rare Earth, and many other intriguing shops along the Plaza. When your feet need relief, slip into one of the several bistros or cafes for lunch or refreshments. Later, indulge yourself with homemade ice cream or melt-in-your-mouth fudge at one of the sweet shops.

Before leaving the Plaza, have a drink of effervescent Lithia water. The sign on the fountain says it contains healthful minerals. On hot summer nights, we used to fill a thermos with Lithia water to make lemonade.

Across from the Plaza is the entrance to Lithia Park. Strolling along trails that wind beneath oaks, ponderosa pines, incense cedars, and Douglas firs while listening to the



IF YOU GO

Ashland is located on I-5, 15 miles north of the California border and 11 miles south of Medford, Oregon.

The Rogue Valley International-Medford Airport is 15 miles north of Ashland. Greyhound/Trailways offers transportation in and out of the Rogue Valley. Amtrak has a station east in Klamath Falls and south in Dunsmuir, California.

More Information:

Ashland Chamber of Commerce, 10 E Main St., PO Box 1360, Ashland, OR 97520 (541-482-3436; www.ashlandchamber.com).

Southern Oregon Reservation Center, PO Box 477, Ashland, OR 97520 (541-488-1011; www.sorc.com).

Ashland B&B ClearingHouse, 765 Siskiyou Blvd., Ashland, OR 97520 (800-588-0338).

Mt. Ashland Ski Resort, 1745 Hwy 66, is 18 miles southwest of Ashland off I-5. The

ski season starts Thanksgiving weekend, weather permitting, and continues into April.

Jacksonville is located on Hwy 238, about a 25-minute drive from Ashland along an old stagecoach road through pear and apple orchards and vineyards.

Eagle Point, home of Butte Creek Mill, is about 21 miles north of Ashland, on the Crater Lake Highway, Hwy 62. Down the street from Butte Creek Mill is the Eagle Point Historic Museum and the Old Antelope Creek covered bridge.

The Greensprings Box R Ranch, 16799 Hwy 66, Ashland, OR 97520, between milepost markers 22 and 23, is approximately 23 miles east of Ashland (541-482-1873; www.boxranch.com).

The ScienceWorks Museum, 1500 E Main St., PO Box 1177, Ashland, OR 97520 (541-482-6767; www.scienceworksmuseum.org). ■



Photo by David Cooper.

Open to the sky, the outdoor Elizabethan Stage seats 1,200 people. For the 2003 season the Festival presented Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and John O'Keefe's *Wild Cats* on the outdoor stage. Featured in the photo below is the 2002 set and cast of *Titus Andronicus*.

sounds of Ashland Creek, it is difficult to believe you are still in a city. In early spring hundreds of rhododendrons, dogwoods, and azaleas punctuate the evergreens with color. Our grandchildren delight in picnics, playing tennis, wading in the creek, and feeding the ducks in Lithia Park just as much as we did as youngsters, plus they enjoy a year-round playground and an ice skating rink from November to March.

Exploring the side streets of

Ashland, you will discover gingerbread Victorian mansions, many restored to their former glory and some converted to bed-and-breakfast inns. Don't miss the newly renovated historic Railroad District with interesting stores, art galleries, and good places to dine. Families will especially like the new ScienceWorks Museum, which has more than 80 interactive exhibits, live performances, and numerous hands-on activities.

From folk music to opera, blue-

THEATER MUSIC DANCE

Act III Seniors of Southern Oregon

(541-488-0188)

Actors' Theatre

(541-535-5250)

Artattack Ensemble

(541-282-8815)

Arts Council of Southern Oregon

(541-779-2820)

Artwork Enterprises

(541-482-4357)

Ashland Community Theatre

(541-482-7532)

Ashland Independent Film Festival

(541-488-3823)

Ballet Rogue

(541-535-4112)

Chamber Music Concerts

(541-552-6154)

Historic Ashland Armory

(541-482-1271)

Oak Street Dance Studio

(541-482-5021)

Oregon Cabaret Theatre

(541-488-2902)

Oregon Shakespeare Festival

(541-482-2111)

Rogue Valley Symphony

(541-552-6354)

Song & Dance Studio

(541-482-3650)

Southern Oregon Repertory Singers

(541-488-2307)

Southern Oregon University Theatre Arts Department

(541-552-6346)

St. Clair Productions

(541-535-3562) ■

grass to chamber music, Ashland has it. Besides live music in many of the night spots around town, the Southern Oregon Repertory Singers, the Rogue Valley Symphony, and the Rogue Valley Symphony Chamber Players present performances in the Southern Oregon University Music Recital Hall, and a Blues Festival is held each January in Historic Ashland Armory.

With the Schneider Art Museum and the Gallery at Stevenson Union,

Oregon
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Festival

2004
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both on the Southern Oregon University campus, plus two dozen art galleries, Ashland is ranked one of the 10 best small art towns in America.

History buffs will want to take the 25-minute drive through rolling hills past orchards and vineyards to Jacksonville, which sprang up when gold was discovered there in 1851. California Street, the main drag, is lined with false-front buildings right out of the gold rush era. With more than 100 historic buildings, Jacksonville is a National Historic Landmark. There are unique shops, fine dining, Victorian homes, old churches, walking tours, and special activities year round. Be sure to visit the Jacksonville Museum housed in the 1880 Courthouse with a one-of-a-kind children's museum next door.

Butte Creek Mill, one of America's oldest original grist mills, has been turning out stone-ground

flour in the quiet town of Eagle Point since 1872. Owners Peter and Cora Crandall will gladly show you around, and their stone-ground pancake and muffin mixes are as delicious as they are healthful.

Ashland native, Nola O'Hara, sums up her town like this, "There are so many wonderful things to do here—fine restaurants, theater, cultural events, historical sights, outdoor activities. Ashland has it all and still manages to keep that hometown feeling."

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