

The lure of the labyrinth

Local landscape architect discusses peaceful aim of design work



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Shibley designed and built this labyrinth for Mt. Tabor Presbyterian Church.

Stephen Shibley prepares for his interview by climbing a very tall ladder.

He needs it to find the best angle to soak up the full picture of the labyrinth he designed, now under construction outside Happy Valley City Hall.

The winding, circuitous path is in place around the center space of honor for the tree (soon to be replaced with a bigger tree).

Eventually, the labyrinth will be mostly encircled by a concrete seating wall.

Shibley explains his "big picture" vision after climbing down.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Shibley designed this labyrinth under construction outside the Happy Valley City Hall.

The Estacada-based landscape architect and contractor is used to “big picture” projects.

You might have seen a few of them around town such as the labyrinth in the plaza behind the Flora Room of the Estacada City Hall.

In years past, Shibley helped lead the development of a sacred garden master plan for the Springwater Presbyterian Church and was contracted by the city of Estacada for Phase III of Wade Creek Park, to name just a few.

He also was brought on as a project manager for a recent Ford Family Foundation effort to improve the lighting in the Estacada Auditorium at Estacada Junior High School. (His fiancée was part of the Ford Family Foundation cohort that took on the project.)

Among Shibley’s recent local projects, he designed the bike plaza installed near City Hall and served as the landscape architect for the Broadway Streetscape Project underway in downtown Estacada.

Shibley promises the completed project will be beautiful.

New trees will line Broadway Street alternating with street lighting draped with seasonal hanging flower baskets.

The wider sidewalks and added benches will afford pedestrians more room to pause and enjoy. And there will be a lot of green to enjoy, he said, with plantings at the tree bases and intersection bump outs.

Shibley spoke excitedly of the planned mix of hardy, easy-maintenance, disease resistant plants.

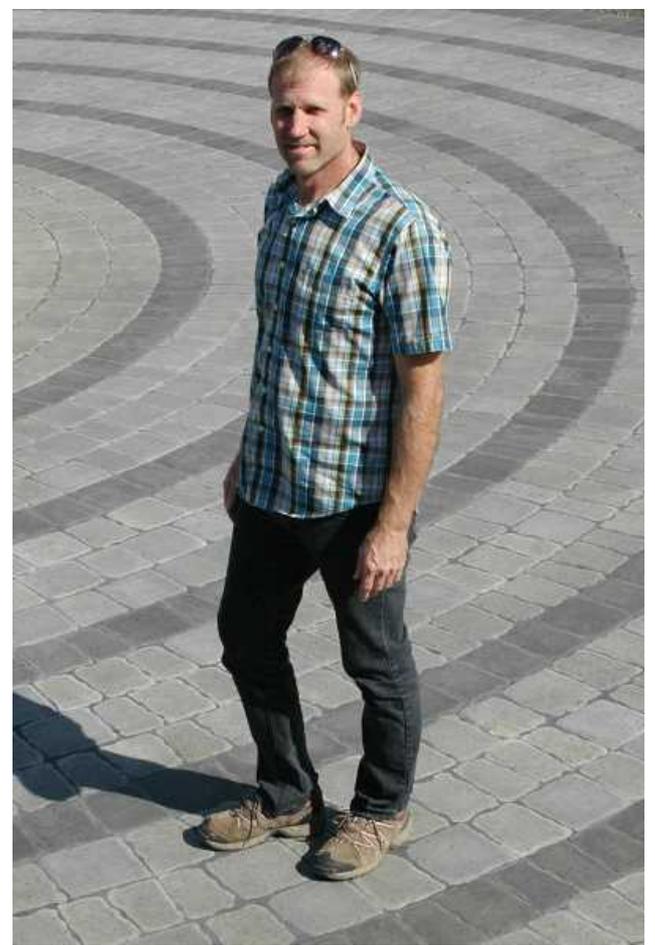
He said that careful attention was given to make sure there would be plant-action year round.

Spring flowers will give way to brightly colored fall foliage, then the eye will be drawn to evergreens in the winter.

“The idea was that these planting beds would always have something interesting going on, they’d look nice year-round,” Shibley said. “The community should know that the system is well designed so that it can grow and thrive and be a welcoming asset to the community and the downtown core. It’s going to be a really nice welcoming environment.”

Shibley’s name is likely to appear in connection with most major projects in town.

“I have a vested interest in the community,” said Shibley, who has lived in



ESTACADA NEWS PHOTO: ISABEL GAUTSCHI - Estacada-based landscape architect and contractor Stephen Shibley walks the labyrinth he designed outside the Happy Valley City Hall. The space serves as the location for the town's annual tree lighting ceremony. Shibley enjoys bringing peace and balance into settings with landscape design.

Estacada for nearly 25 years. But his local family history dates back farther than that.

Shibley's ancestors came to Oregon on the Oregon Trail. There's a family farm in Springwater from the mid-1860s.

The present day Shibley family has stayed close to the area.

Though Shibley grew up in Portland, his parents, Gilbert and Barbara Shibley, aren't far from his new home in Estacada.

Barbara is the director of the Estacada Area Food Bank.

Last year, Shibley led the creation of a garden at the Estacada Junior High School to grow fresh produce for the food bank through SEED (Stewarding an Edible Estacada District School & Community Gardens) which he co-chairs. Shibley said that the garden was able to produce about 2,000 pounds of fresh produce for the food bank.

Gilbert is a small woodland owner and a retired forestry program assistant for the Oregon State University Extension Service in Clackamas County.

Growing up, Shibley said he had liked gardening. As a teenager, he maintained yards for money and enjoyed the work.

At Portland Community College, he pursued a landscape design and technology program before heading to the University of Oregon where he earned a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture in 1987.

Shibley said that he was drawn to landscape architecture because landscapes add to the "overall health of the people that enjoy it and use it."

"People recognize that when they go out for a hike in the woods, or climb a mountain, you're just really in awe and at peace with the world and nature," Shibley said. "Our built environments pave over a lot of things.

To find a balance, and as a landscape architect, to help recreate a balance of these living green environments that are intermixed with our built hard surfaces, I think it becomes a more inviting, more lively, more restful place to want to be.”

The career has taken him in many directions, but in the last decade, Shibley has cultivated a deep love of labyrinths.

The obsession started about 10 years ago, with a book his mother gave him.

No sooner did he start reading about labyrinths than he wanted to start designing and building them.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Shibley has been obsessed with labyrinths for the last decade. He built his first in his own backyard and walked it daily to process a difficult time in his life.

He started by carving a labyrinth into his own backyard and walking it every day through a tough time in his life.

“It allowed me to journey with what was happening in my life and to learn to enter each day with gratitude and openness to the journey,” he said.

"You don't always know what's going on or where it's taking you, but you trust the path and you trust the process, and consequently, you don't get stuck."

Shibley explained that labyrinths are fundamentally different from mazes, which are filled with dead ends and intended to confuse and disorient.

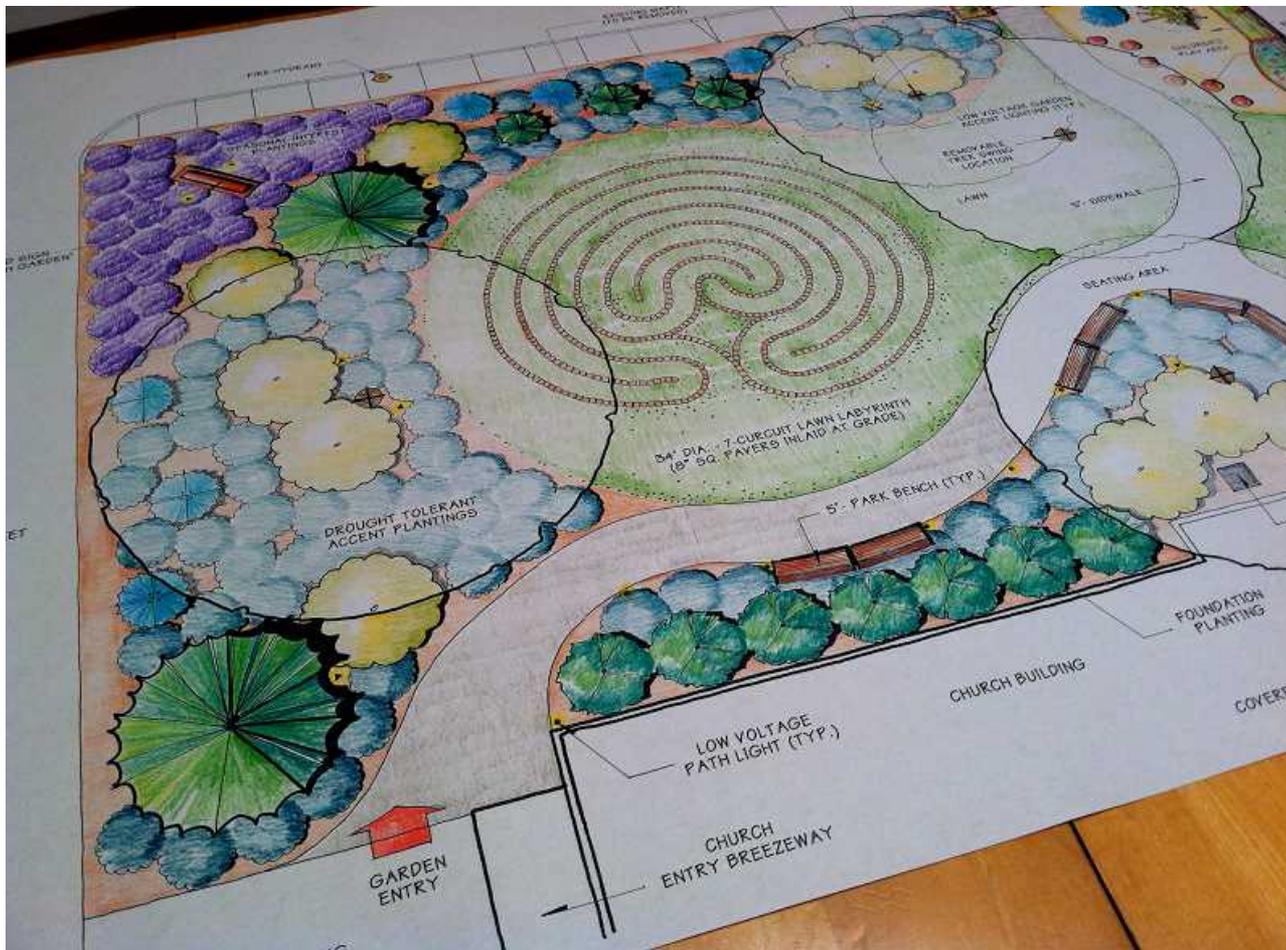
Labyrinths, however, are circuitous paths.

"You don't always think you know where you are and you may feel lost, but if you keep following the path, you're never lost," he said.

Shibley said he thinks labyrinths are good tools for quieting the mind.

"You don't have to think, you can just be," Shibley said.

It's no surprise that Shibley has been called on to create labyrinths in places where people seek peace of mind.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Shibley shared this plan for a labyrinth and landscaping for a church in Riddle, a town in Southern Oregon. Shibley said labyrinths are excellent tools for clearing the mind and moving through difficult times.

Shibley designed a project for Hazelden Springbrook Campus including a paver labyrinth and 12 “sacred garden respites” along a trail reflecting each step in the 12-step program for overcoming addiction.

Labyrinths are welcoming and inclusive, Shibley said.

“Anybody can come to it, with any background, with any belief system, with any story, and they can use it how they want,” he said.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO - Shibley has designed numerous labyrinths in civic, academic and religious settings. This labyrinth is painted on concrete at a private residence.

Shibley is engaged to Theresa Cherniak. He has two daughters, Micah and Alder Shibley.

Volunteer for SEED

Shibley is a founding member and current co-chair for SEED (Stewarding an Edible Estacada District School & Community Gardens), a group that advocates and runs local school gardens. SEED is in need of volunteers. Learn more at seedestacada.org.

For more information:

Stephen Shibley is an Estacada based landscape architect and contractor with a penchant for designing and building labyrinths.

For more information for his large and small scale project services, contact him at fertilegroundserv@gmail.com.

You can find more information [Online](#), but the website is under construction.