

# Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation



Fall Newsletter — 2020

*“Preserving and sharing stories of human enterprise  
and the power of the great Falls of the Willamette River.”*

Yes, this issue *is* a little bit different!

Our previous format used an 11”x17” sheet but we are currently unable to obtain that size. The good news is that this issue was printed on our very own West Linn mill’s *new* paper called **reHarvest!**

This revolutionary product, manufactured by **Willamette Falls Paper Company**, was generously donated by them for this edition. We felt it was quite fitting to showcase their latest, locally-produced, environmentally sustainable paper. We also thought it would be nice to hear about the reHarvest story directly from one of the mill’s key managers who was responsible for literally rolling out this new product.

## On a Roll with reHarvest!

By **Dr. Phil Harding**

In August 2019, the 130-year old manufacturing site many of you think of as “The Mill” reopened and began producing paper again. West Linn Paper Company had been shut down for 18 months prior to that as Mill Manager **Brian Konen** worked tirelessly to attract an investor willing to commit to operating the mill. Ultimately, he was successful. He made contact with **Mr. Ken Peterson**, a lead investor in the Columbia Pulp, LLC, which is a new venture that had recently opened North America’s first tree-free pulp mill in Eastern Washington.

This new pulp mill’s mission was to make papermaking fiber out of agricultural residue left over from wheat harvests. Straw that had historically been burned or tilled into the soil was now being reclaimed and baled and then sent to Columbia Pulp’s mill in Dayton, WA.

Mr. Konen’s message to Mr. Peterson was simple: *“You bought yourself a pulp mill. Now you need a paper mill to go with it.”*



**Phil Harding, Ph.D., P.E.**  
Director of Technology and Sustainability  
Willamette Falls Paper Company



Papermaking ‘wizad’ **Cafer Arac** with the first roll of reHarvest coming off the paper machine.

— photos courtesy of Phil Harding

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## On a Roll with reHarvest

Mr. Peterson was eventually convinced and the two of them began working with PGE, Metro, and the State of Oregon to secure operating assets, purchase equipment, and arrange a lease. It wasn't long before Willamette Falls Paper Company was born and the 130 tradition of paper making at The Falls resumed.

One of the mill's first goals was to complement the world-class papermaking of the past (primarily in printing and writing grades) with new sustainable fiber sources and paper grades built around sustainability. This resulted in the birth of the "reHarvest" family of printing and writing papers. reHarvest products include coated papers (for which the mill was best known), uncoated offset paper, and envelopes. Working closely with printers and customers resulted in an optimum wheat straw fiber contribution of 10 percent based on paper properties and shade. This may not seem like a lot, but when you consider that just one of the mill's paper machines makes about 10 tons an hour. That means about one of those tons every hour is not coming from wood fiber — and that's a lot of trees! This is an interesting proposition indeed.

The papermaking crew at the mill, however, was not done. Led by papermaking wizard **Cafer Arac**, the team began to develop the "reHarvest Natural" family of products and sought to expand their offerings to other new packaging grades. These products can contain up to 50 percent wheat straw fiber and provides a beautiful golden hue compared to traditional "brown" packaging grades. In fact, one trial production run resulted in large paper bags made from 50% wheat straw and 50% recycled paper, a truly tree-less paper.

Unfortunately, the pandemic and economic situation has resulted in a temporary shutdown of Columbia Pulp and a pause in wheat straw fiber production. All involved, however, remain enthusiastic about the amazing papermakers in West Linn, restart of the pulp mill, and the bright sustainable future for Willamette Falls Paper Company.



Success! A happy crew poses with the first roll of reHarvest.

*front row, left to right:* **Phil Harding**, **Brian Konen** (President), **Ken Peterson** (Owner), **Cody Wagner**  
*middle row:* **Barb Ness**  
*back row:* **Richard Anderson**, **Kyle Zirker**, **Irv Turner**, **Jeremy Blair**, **Todd Oakes**



The first sample piece of reHarvest paper.  
— photos courtesy of *Phil Harding*





**Troy Bowers,**  
President WFHF

## **President's Message: A Year to Remember?**

**2020:** A year that many of us will wish to forget.

That said, your friends at Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation have been pressing on to preserve the rich economic and industrial history at The Falls that have made this one of the West's most unique and special places. We keep working to save the stories, historical pieces, and iconic industrial and architectural remnants at the heart of the Oregon Territory.

Whether it's the Willamette Falls Locks, Historic City Hall, the West Linn paper mill, or our past and current Sullivan Power Plant, they all have treasures within treasures that deserve to be preserved and shared.

Our Board annually recommits to our mission through our annual planning in early January. There we focus on how to make the best possible progress within the limited resources we have and based upon the urgency of need so we can protect what may be otherwise lost. We ask for your continued support to help us *Save the Future of Our Past*. Thank you for your help

## **Living through 2020— Stories to Save**

**By Sandy Carter**

This is a unique heritage moment. Here at The Falls, as in the rest of Oregon and the country, the pandemic has affected everyone. It has changed and challenged our old approaches to ordinary life – our work, our play, and our daily existence. Covid-19 has reached into all of our lives, given them a brisk shake, and continues to change them as we watch.

As the Foundation's some-time oral historian of mill work, I encourage our supporters to think about doing personal, family projects that capture the stories, emotions, experiences and thoughts of this time, creating an important record of the pandemic's effects on real people.

Now is the time, we think, for these oral history projects. Even with just your iPads or phones, you can create and preserve an informal archive of a year which has wreaked such havoc. Technology will be your assistant; love and trauma will be your guides...



**Sandy Carter,**

- \*WFHF Board member
- \*Willamette Falls Locks Commission Co-Vice Chair
- \*Author and Historian

## Meet WFHF's Newest Staff Member: Shira Ribakoff

A lot goes on behind the scenes at WFHF and much of it wouldn't happen without the enthusiastic help and technical expertise of **Shira Ribakoff**. Shira is a much needed addition to the Foundation and her assistance is greatly appreciated! Here, in her own words, is a brief introduction:

*"Back in 2019, I was driving along the Willamette River and then saw it — hidden between the trees, the Falls. I was mesmerized by the secrecy of the tumbling waters and the natural beauty of the place. I soon moved to the area and after graduating from Portland State University, I wanted to become more involved in the community and especially around the Falls. That's when I joined the Willamette Falls and Landings Heritage Area Coalition and later, the Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation.*

*I started working for the WFHF as an assistant right before Covid-19 lockdown back in late February. I first met the Board in person and as time went on, I got to know them more over video chat, phone calls, and lots of emails.*

*As an assistant, most of my work is administrative such as assisting the treasurer and designing the e-blasts. I enjoy working for the Foundation because I get to work with wonderful people who want to teach and preserve the history of the Willamette Falls, the Locks, and the Paper Mill."*

Welcome aboard Shira!

## Help WFHF Keep History Alive: [Donate Now!](#)

**The Willamette Falls Heritage Foundation**  
is a 501(c) (3) charitable organization.  
Please send your **tax deductible** contributions to  
the address below!

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*(All photos by the editor unless otherwise noted)*



Even a foggy day at the Oregon City viewpoint doesn't dim Shira's interest in The Falls' natural and industrial scenery.



Shira capturing images in Mill A  
— photo courtesy of Peter Schwarz

### Looking Back: LockFest 2010



As it was meant to be... operating locks, crowds of visitors, river traffic passing through, and a fascinating locks museum. We hope to experience scenes like this again in the future.  
Help us to share our vision for Willamette Falls Locks!

Please check out our expanded digital newsletter on our webpage at:  
[www.willamettefalls.org](http://www.willamettefalls.org)