

Curating Mason County History

A look at Mason Clinic's new artwork



An Edward Curtis photograph (1913) depicting a Skokomish Indian chief's daughter graces the entrance to the Skokomish portal at Mason Clinic. This photograph was donated by the Skokomish Tribe.

Many have described stepping into Mason Clinic as taking a journey into the history of Mason County, as if one were walking through a museum or an art gallery.

Mason General Hospital Foundation's Arts Commission played the primary role in selecting the art that graces the halls and waiting areas of Mason Clinic, and Cooper Studios in Shelton was an invaluable partner to the Commission from the start.

Beautiful, expansive historical photographs decorate the walls of the lobby, and each portal that leads patients to their exam rooms features a historical photograph that has been restored, enlarged and custom-fit into the entrances by Cooper Studios.



Mason Clinic's lobby features a photograph likely taken by Dean Palmer in May 1953 of two members of the Mason County Forest Festival Court.

"We originally came on board as consultants to the Arts Commission on image selection and restoration," said **Amy Cooper**, co-owner of Cooper Studios with her husband, **Forrest Cooper**. "We brought the images to the table from the Mason County Historical Society

and let the Commission know that we could provide restoration services." The Skokomish Tribe and Squaxin Island Tribe also donated historical photographs for the project and are considering donating additional pieces of artwork for Mason Clinic.

TGB Architects designed Mason Clinic and had a vision that each portal would feature a photograph – but the process by which the photographs were adhered, mounted and wrapped around the wall corners had never been done before.

Cooper Studios stepped forward to fulfill the architects' and District's vision.

"Photography is a tool for our overall means of expression," said Forrest Cooper, who has a background in fine arts and sculpting. "We're artists and this was right down the path that we wanted to go for our business. The vision was incredible, and for us, we wanted to bring it forward and display it in a museum-like setting."



The Lilliwaup portal features a photograph by W.S. Heckman taken at an unknown date displaying the early days of transportation and shipping on Hood Canal by boats such as the Fortuna.

The Coopers enlarged the photographs using high-quality archival ink, adhered the prints to aluminum, covered the new product in lamination film, and then custom made sheet metal that could affix to the piece and then bend with the whole package.

The pieces – 27 in total, including the names of the portals – were then acrylic bent with a heat bender and the edges were beveled, shaped and polished off with a hydrogen oxygen flame polish to make the pieces crystal clear. Each portal piece is 40 inches by 50 inches.

The bend was a challenge and unique to the project.

"Making the photographs and art pieces bend around a corner, that was a whole new ball game," Amy Cooper said.

The Coopers also drilled and mounted the pieces.

Cooper Studios was involved in the custom-made 10-foot neon art piece displayed downstairs in Mason Clinic as well. The art piece was the inspiration of **Brent Wilcox**, Mason Clinic project manager with OAC, and created in a joint effort with Cooper Studios, the Arts Commission and the District's Development Office team and Mason Health staff.



This custom art piece was designed by Cooper Studios.

The custom art piece features a neon, lit 'M' logo, and words that employees submitted when asked "What do the Mission, Vision and Values of Mason Health mean to you?" The words are printed on the art piece in the employees' own handwriting.

"The team wanted to capture this moment in time, which includes the people that were here during this moment in time," Forrest Cooper said. "It was a super rewarding project."

The Coopers worked hundreds of hours on the Mason Clinic project, on top of running their business and raising their daughter.

"We have been working with Mason Health for 11 years and to be part of this new era, it's a great opportunity," Amy Cooper said. "There's more to come." ■