



Secretary of State

Kim Wyman

News

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Washington joins Magna Carta 800 celebration

Washington state is taking part in a national and international celebration of the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta, the foundational document for the rule of law and individual liberties.

The Washington Supreme Court is hosting the state celebration at noon on Monday, June 15, on the Capitol Campus. All are welcome.

The event is organized by a citizen committee led by retired Supreme Court Justice Gerry Alexander and history exhibit designer Sue Lean of Olympia. The celebration is sponsored by the Washington Courts Historical Society and supported by Secretary of State Kim Wyman, the State Archives, Washington State Arts Commission, Washington State Historical Society and the Thurston County Courts History Committee.

The National Association of Secretaries of State, the American Bar Association, and others are promoting a year-long celebration. The United Kingdom is staging an elaborate commemoration.

“The Magna Carta represents a turning point in people’s relationship to their government and to the fundamental notion of human rights and the right to a trial by one’s peers,” said Secretary Wyman. “The legacy lives on today in our national and state constitutions, individual liberties and equality, and in our legal system.”

Lean noted that the Declaration of Rights in the Washington Constitution has its roots in the Magna Carta, or Great Charter, sealed by King John under pressure from English rebel barons all those centuries ago.

“Not much legal history is taught and it’s important for citizens to understand and appreciate what it means to live under the rule of law,” she said. “It’s the basis for both peace and commerce, because fundamental fairness can be sought and enforced in courts of law.”

Justice Alexander, a history buff now in private law practice after a long career in the judiciary, said the 800th anniversary celebration is a great “teachable moment” to focus on the rule of law and personal liberties.

Alexander and Charles Johnson, the associate chief justice, will provide the welcome at the noon event, and speakers will include British Consul Robin Twyman of Seattle and Robert Stacey, history professor and dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington. Magna Carta-themed books will be presented to State Law Librarian Kay Newman by Twyman and Terry Church, president of the Thurston County Bar Association.

The proceedings on the 15th day of June will be interrupted at precisely 12:15 p.m. – for the year 1215 – with bells and cheers. A reenactor, Olympia attorney Allen Miller, will portray Thomas Jefferson, reciting the famous “Free Man Clause” that subjected the King and everyone to the rule of law for the first time.

That clause is reflected in the state Constitutional provision that “no person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law.”

Gabriella Sipe of Olympia High School will recite Rudyard Kipling’s “What Say the Reeds at Runnymede.” Ms. Sipe was an award winner in the Arts Commission’s state Poetry Out Loud competition.

A special Magna Carta 800 cake will be serveds at a reception sponsored by the Sacajawea chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. A tour of the Capitol and a botanical tour of the grounds will follow.

Sue Lean is available at 360-352-3569.

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