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James Stegenga stands with his sundial on Tuesday, Sept. 30 in Lions Park in south Everett. (Will Geschke / The Herald)

Everett park gets a new (old) way to tell time

A former professor built and donated a sundial for Lions Park in south Everett.

By Will Geschke

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EVERETT — What time is it?

If you hear that question, the first place you probably look is at the watch on your wrist. Maybe you check your phone, look for a clock on the wall.

Now, Everett residents will have another option for checking the time: a newly built sundial in Lions Park at 7530 Cascade Dr. in south Everett.

A former professor turned sundial enthusiast, James Stegenga, built the ancient time-telling machine and donated it to the city. He got his start building sundials after he retired in Brazil following his time teaching international relations.

“Making sundials is sort of natural for me,” he said.

Sundials, [first invented around 3,500 years ago in ancient Egypt](#), use the light cast by the sun to measure time as the Earth makes its daily rotation on its axis.

Stegenga originally thought about building a sundial outside of an Everett office building that was the former home of The Daily Herald. After failing to contact the building’s owner, he reached out to Everett’s parks department to see if there was a public place available where he could install one.

Parks staff were enthusiastic about the idea, he said. They chose Lions Park for its eventual location as Stegenga lived nearby and the park had enough open space to install it. Cutting Edge Manufacturing, a local metalworking [shop](#), donated a triangular metal gnomon, which casts its shadow onto the dial, allowing people to read the time.

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James Stegenga's sundial in Lions Park. (Will Geschke / The Herald)

“It is a great addition to Lions Park and a great accomplishment for Dr. Stegenga,” city spokesperson Simone Tarver wrote in an email. “... We are so appreciative of his time and donation of supplies to build the sundial.”

City staff also built a stand for him to install the sundial on. Stegenga built the sundial out of concrete over the summer and completed painting it a few weeks ago. It's shaped like the state of Washington and includes dots signifying major cities across the state.

“A lot of times when I've been working on this, the kids come down from the Boys & Girls Club. They're more interested in this than their grownups,” he said.

According to the North American Sundial Society (Stegenga is a member), which tracks the locations of sundials across Mexico, Canada and the United States, there are about a dozen sundials in Seattle. The closest known sundial to Snohomish County is located in Shoreline.

There's a bit of irony to building a time-telling device that requires sunshine in one of the rainiest parts of the country. But Stegenga said he has an optimistic outlook about it.

“A lot of people said, well, why would you want to put a sundial in rain city? Well, once there was a guy that pulled up in this convertible, and I said, ‘I'm not sure I'd buy a convertible in this area, it rains every third day,’” Stegenga said. “He said, ‘Well that means there's four days of the week I can have the top down.’ So why not have it?”

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James Stegenga's sundial in Lions Park. (Will Geschke / The Herald)



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