

## Rainier Beer “R”

### Rainier Beer -- A Snapshot History

“For more than a century, Rainier Beer, brewed in the Georgetown area of Seattle, has slaked local thirsts. The original Georgetown plant was a brewery established by Edward Sweeney in the early 1880s. Ten years later, Sweeney merged his plant with two others to form the Seattle Brewing and Malting Company, which grew to become the world's sixth largest brewery. After the end of Prohibition, Rainier Beer was acquired by Fritz Sick and his son Emil, who enlarged the original Georgetown plant near S Spokane Street and Airport Way S, and later installed a giant red "R" neon sign (now in the collection of the Museum of History and Industry) that became a local landmark. Rainier and its brewery were purchased in 1977 and passed through several corporate hands until 1999, when Stroh's abandoned the beer business. Production of Rainier shifted to Tumwater, Washington, and Tully's Coffee purchased the idle plant for its new headquarters.”

In 1999 the Rainier Beer R, a beloved Icon of Seattle’s Industrial heritage was removed from its perch above the old Rainier brewery building in Seattle’s Georgetown neighborhood. Tulley’s Coffee Company bought the building and used it as its roasting plant and the R was replaced with the big green T that is still there today. The enormous R, a longtime gateway into the city for motorists traveling north along I-5 eventually ended up in the Museum of History and Industry where it is currently on display in the museum gift shop.

[http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file\\_id=2523](http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=2523)



### Rainier Avenue South

Rainier Avenue South is one of the most important arterial streets in Southeast Seattle that runs from the Central District to the southeastern corner of the city. The street’s name stems from an important view corridor to Mt Rainier which on clear days seems to float above the right-of-way when one is driving in the southern direction. Rainier Avenue was a key link in the region's interurban rail system which operated from the late nineteenth century up through World War I. Rainier Avenue was also home to a baseball stadium which was built by a local beer mogul, Emil G. Sick. Sick's Stadium concrete and steel structure, was home to the Seattle Rainiers. During summer days at the Sick fans could

watch the Rainiers play, take a sip of Rainier beer while gazing at Mt. Rainier floating in the distance. The Sick's Stadium site is now occupied by Lowe's Hardware Store.



### Proposal

The northern terminus of Rainier Avenue South would be an ideal place for a roundabout focal point with the rainier beer R sign in its center. Currently the intersection, located at the nexus of Seattle's nascent Little Saigon neighborhood is, from the urban design perspective a sparse and undefined space. Placing the R at the Head of Rainier Ave S not only references the history of the area, it acts as an urban design pun. The "Rainier" in Rainier Ave S would hence fourth be a reference to both the Mountain and the R. The R would sit in an important eye-stop and could serve as both a gateway and a wayfinding device.

While the Museum of History and Industry does provide a place for Seattleites to view the R, placing it back in the public realm would allow more people to enjoy this sculptural neon treasure.

