

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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Humpbacks to the rescue

Whales become part of our economy and biological diversity

In one of the more implausible movies of the late-1980s, *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, Capt. Kirk and crew travel back in time to rescue a pair of humpbacks that are about to be harpooned by venal whalers.

Transported by spaceship to the year 2286 when humpbacks are extinct, the whales save humanity by using their ethereal song to ask others flying in a vast "spacewatertank" to spare us.

Conceived and directed by Spock actor Leonard Nimoy, the popular film undoubtedly played a part in convincing nations to more strongly enforce a ban on whale hunting. Compared to a prewhaling population estimated at 120,000, there are now thought to be a still-healthy number of 80,000 humpbacks worldwide, with perhaps 20,000 of these in the North Pacific.

Because of their mysterious songs and a practice of throwing their massive 80,000-pound bodies out of the water in displays of awesome exuberance, humpbacks are among the rock stars of the whale world.

When it became apparent during Buoy 10 salmon season this August that they were entering the Columbia estuary in pursuit of schools of bait fish, it was both newsworthy and somewhat worrisome. There is ongoing concern they might have been forced into the river by this year's warmwater "Blob" and El Niño, or by a vast bloom of algae that sometimes produces a potent toxin.

One researcher offers a much more positive view — that they have ventured into river waters simply because there now is a robust humpback population that is exploring new habitats. Because they remember good feeding grounds and pass this information on to their young, it's possible humpbacks might visit the waters around the Astoria Bridge year after year.

Their presence has already brought a noticeable up-

ward bump in tourist traffic in what should now be a distinctly slowing season. Even before print publication of Josh Bessex's outstanding whale photos, online humpback coverage in *The Daily Astorian* and *Chinook Observer* attracted more than 270,000 viewers.

Exciting as it is to have dramatically huge new wildlife in the neighborhood — biological diversity is a key benefit of living here — it would be hard to overstate how much this could mean for the Lower Columbia's economy.

Efforts at the Oregon Coast Aquarium in the 1990s to nurse Keiko the killer whale back to health poured millions into Newport's economy. Well-wishers and school children came to see Keiko, who had starred in *Free Willy*, a movie partly based in Astoria.

It's important that we act responsibly with respect to the humpbacks. This means boaters should give whales the right of way and maintain a significant distance to avoid disturbing them. NOAA publishes a complete set of guidelines and rules at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/education/viewing.htm.

Whale watchers should park in turnouts along U.S. Highway 101 and motorists must keep an eye out for distracted drivers and pedestrians — the miles between the McGowan Church and Dismal Nitch reportedly have been something of a circus at times in recent days.

How amazing it is to have humpbacks in our neighborhood, easily observable from shore. This is a rare privilege and there is no certainty it will be repeated. Let's appreciate these enormous and enormously appealing guests.

The editorials on this page are written by Steve Forrester, editor of *The Daily Astorian* (sforrester@dailyastorian.com) and Matt Winters, editor of *The Chinook* ([Wash. Observer](http://www.chinookobserver.com)) (mwinters@chinookobserver.com).

FYI: Clippings from the press of the Pacific Northwest and the nation

More money for wildfires

Wildfires that have burned more than 8 million acres and are still raging in the West are draining the budgets of federal agencies and forcing them to divert money from essential environmental and land conservation programs to fight the fires. That is why Congress needs to start budgeting for forest fires in a different way, treating them more like natural disasters rather than a continu-

ing expense. The Agriculture and Interior Departments have been making this case for some time, and it's a good one.

Those members of Congress who reject or belittle the science of climate change should pause for a moment and try to imagine a future with even more devastating fires than the ones they see now on the evening news.

— *The New York Times*

GUEST COLUMN

Where's The Way to Wellville?

By SUE CODY

For *The Daily Astorian*

The Way to Wellville started as a nationwide competition to choose five communities to spend five years improving the health of their populations.

Clatsop County was one of the chosen five.

In its first year, the Health Initiative Coordinating Council (HICcup) is focusing on forming a strategic council, creating community partnerships, identifying Clatsop County's health and wellness needs, then building a business plan to support those needs.

The other Wellville Five communities are Lake County, Calif., Niagara Falls, N.Y., Spartanburg, S.C. and Greater Muskegon, Mich. Representatives from each area attended a meeting in Florida, where it was decided that it would no longer be a competition, but a cooperative enterprise where the communities could share ideas and strategies.

"The whole point of The Way to Wellville is to help communities apply well-known techniques in sustained initiatives that are accountable, measurable and ultimately fundable," initiator and investor Esther Dyson said.

Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) and CareOregon sponsor The Way to Wellville Clatsop County. They offer resources, such as training, communications and staffing. "Clatsop County had built-in infrastructure through the CCO, so we could implement changes and hire Sydney Van Dusen as coordinator," said Debbie Morrow, a member of the strategic council.

Among the 14 council members are educators, business people, health care professionals, and others.

"We have a solid cross-section of leaders at the table who are working on identifying goals for our focus areas. The end goal is to connect the people who are doing similar work and promote collaboration to create a healthier society," Morrow said.

Strategic Council Chairman Jeff Hazen said the council is meeting monthly and creating a business plan from the ground up.

The council refined four focus areas:

- Emotional Health,
- Community Wellness,
- Health Care Access,
- Economic Opportunity.

Within each category, there are nu-



Sue Cody



Sue Cody/The Way to Wellville

From left, Way to Wellville Coordinator Sydney Van Dusen, Gail Galen and Tessa Scheller pose at The Way to Wellville booth at the Sunday Market Aug. 16. The booth was shared with the Northwest Coast Trails Coalition, where all three serve on the board. The coalition has expanded from what was formerly the Warrenton Trails Association.

merous sectors to be addressed.

For example, Seaside Heights' retired Principal Dan Gaffney is leading the Economic Opportunity team. He presented studies to the strategic council about the direct correlation between reading proficiency in the third grade and high school graduation rates. Clatsop County's high school graduation rate in 2014 was 70 percent and the percentage of children who were fluent in reading by third grade was 69 percent. Those fluent in reading by third grade have more economic opportunities in the future.

In light of that information, the council opted to focus on early childhood education.

Five years won't be long enough to measure change in graduation rates, but it will get us started, said Gaffney, who is leading the Clatsop Kinder Ready program. Clatsop Kinder Ready is a partnership focused on preparing children for kindergarten and being fluent readers by third grade.

Sample goals to reach by 2020:

- Reduce substance abuse by 50 percent in Clatsop County children (from 33.9 percent in 2014 to 17 percent in 2020).

- Improve mental health of children by reducing childhood trauma.

- Increase the number of quality preschools using the quality rating and improvement system.

- Improve the high school graduation rate of children in Clatsop County (from 70.5 to 90 percent).

- Improve the third-grade reading proficiency (from 68 to 90 percent).

- Increase the community mentoring programs (from 42 participants to 200 participants).

Pay for Prevention

Ensuring patients get the best possible care is a key part of improving a

community's health. The Way to Wellville sponsors are working with local clinics to improve health delivery and offering "pay for performance opportunities. They reward providers who meet the state and federal metrics for ensuring their patients receive needed care.

In 2015, Columbia Pacific CCO allocated \$1 million to improve access and clinical quality in their service areas, Tillamook, Columbia and Clatsop counties.

Currently, 88 percent of health care spending goes to medical services.

With the pay for performance model of funding, government resources are directed toward social programs that provide positive results. The model taps private funders to cover up-front costs of social programs.

The Way to Wellville provides an opportunity to develop investment processes with the support of HICcup and other interested entities. Supporters help find ways of investing in upstream supports and services that prevent poor health outcomes in the future without taking away from existing resources.

"We need to make a paradigm shift away from archaic social programs that do not address the current issues of this generation and instead make strategic investments into programs that we know work," Morrow said.

See more reports on local projects, such as Northwest Parenting, Clatsop Community Action Regional Food Bank, early childhood education programs, exercise, events and more on Facebook, <http://bit.ly/W2Wfacebook> and our website www.waytowellville.net

Sue Cody is communications lead for The Way to Wellville Clatsop County. She is the former deputy managing editor of *The Daily Astorian*.

Supporters help find ways of investing in upstream supports

So long, House Speaker John Boehner

By GAIL COLLINS

New York Times News Service

Farewell, John Boehner, farewell.

These departures are a little wearying.

It was not long ago that we said adieu to Rick Perry. And then Scott Walker. And of course we are gearing up for the moment when the political world says goodbye forever to Donald Trump.

Good times, all.

Boehner's leave-taking is a bit more of a mixed bag. The surprise announcement came the day after he sat proudly in the background while Pope Francis gave his address to Congress. You will not be stunned to hear that crying occurred, none of it involving Francis.

And there was a private meeting, in which reliable sources said the pope admired Boehner's tie. But there is no indication he grabbed the speaker by the shoulders and cried: "You're surrounded by crazy people! Get out while you can, my son!"

Not that it couldn't have happened. The pope is infallible.

Maybe Boehner fell on his sword to keep the government from being shut down. We'll probably never figure that one out, since it's impossible to discuss the question without using the term "continuing resolution."

The Republicans want to defund Planned Parenthood. There are many, many reasons that idea is not going anywhere. We will not enumerate them, since it would require the mention of the term "budget reconciliation process." However, the minority leader, Nancy Pelosi, had expressed confidence that Planned Parenthood would be safe even if the Republicans "vote their alleged hearts out."

We should spend more time quoting Nancy Pelosi. Also noting that in recent years, the nation has avoided a raft of political cataclysms because Pelosi has delivered crucial votes whenever Boehner could not get his own majority to behave in a minimally responsible manner.

Anyway, under normal circumstances, Boehner would have used the Democratic votes to keep the government funded. Then the right wing would have descended on him like a band of vicious wombats.

No more. The speaker may still need the Democrats, but once it's all over, it'll be ... all over. Boehner is retiring and everybody loves him. There's nothing like an imminent departure to make a politician popular.

("A patriot," President Barack Obama said. "To say that I will miss John Boehner is a tremendous understatement," the Senate minority leader, Harry Reid, said.)

OK, not popular with totally everybody. The right-wing Value Voters Summit burst into applause when Sen. Marco Rubio announced the resignation news.

"I'm not here today to bash anyone," Rubio said, slightly inaccurately. "But the time has come to turn the page ... and allow a new generation of leadership in this country." Rubio is always promising to usher in an era of fresh new ideas, which appear to involve lowering taxes on the wealthy.

So who would you like to see as the next speaker of the House? (Really, you don't need a reason. People will just be impressed you have an opinion.) Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California is the favorite. Some say he's a little dim, but there are



Gail Collins

worse things in the world.

Then there's the majority whip, Steve Scalise of Louisiana. He's a red state guy, which seems appropriate. And he has no memory of giving a speech at that white power convention.

Or what about Paul Ryan? No, wait — take Paul Ryan back. The former vice presidential nominee declared he was inel-

igible since he is the father of young children.

"This is a job for an empty nester," he told reporters.

It was a grand moment of gender progress. Someday, perhaps, ambitious women will be allowed to say stuff like that. Maybe even under circumstances that do not involve trying to dodge a politically disastrous assignment.

Boehner claimed he had always been planning to retire at the end of the year. He was going to announce it on his birthday, Nov. 17. But then he suddenly decided it might be better to do it ... Friday. To end "leadership turmoil."

The bottom line is that the next time the Freedom Caucus decides it cannot support any legislation that fails to defund Planned Parenthood, repeal Obamacare and eliminate the Department of Homeland Security, it will be somebody else's problem.

John Boehner won't be around to worry about continuing resolutions. Or the coming crisis over how to keep highway construction going. Or funding the national debt. And after that it'll be Thanksgiving and time for the next government shutdown.

Boehner won't care. No sirree, he'll be back in Reading, Ohio, peacefully carving the turkey. Or maybe in his Florida condo. Soon, he won't even have to set foot in Reading, Ohio, again unless he feels like it.

He hung out with the pope and now he's hanging up his hat. Canny fellow.

We should spend more time quoting Nancy Pelosi.