

Nicole Abbenhuis leaving Sisters for Las Vegas

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

A familiar face at Sisters City Hall, Nicole Abbenhuis, public works operations coordinator, is leaving Sisters for the big city — Las Vegas and Los Angeles.

The girl who at age 17 came to the U.S. from the Netherlands on her own to work as a nanny in the small enclave of Pinebrook, New Jersey, has called Sisters home since February 2005, when she moved north from Redondo Beach with her young son, Orry.

Adjusting to Sisters took some doing for Abbenhuis. She describes herself as a “city slicker who loves the hustle and bustle of big cities like New York and San Francisco.” She enjoys sitting in a busy airport and watching all the people arriving and departing. This self-described impulsive extrovert thrives on stimulation and lots of action.

“Driving to Portland makes me happy,” she admitted.

Abbenhuis is thankful to “the village” that helped her raise Orry. At the top of the list is Peter Storton, who was her first employer at RE/MAX Realty where she worked as his administrative assistant until the downturn in 2007.

“I will love that man forever,” she said. “He is like my adopted father.”

Abbenhuis has love and respect for all her co-workers at the City, where she started working as a temp with the Public Works Department in April 2008 and was made a full-time employee in July 2008.

“The Public Works Department has an amazing crew,” Abbenhuis said. “I hope the people of Sisters know how lucky they are to have this crew.”

She said the beauty of a small team is that they all

work together and learn from each other. She has worked for five City managers in her tenure with the City. Her first job when she joined the Public Works Department was to do a complete inventory of all the equipment and materials in the Public Works shop.

“I didn’t know what anything was called. Nothing was organized,” she remembered. One of her co-workers, Josh, brought her up to speed, teaching her all the proper terminology, like the saddle is the strap that goes around a sewer pipe, not equipment for a horse.

Abbenhuis has seen the old shop replaced by the new large facility out at the treatment plant at the end of South Locust. She has been part of the establishment of Fir Street Park, the Cascade Avenue redesign, and most recently, the construction of the Barclay/Highway 20 roundabout.

“The roundabout art installation was my favorite project. We began the process in 2016 with the selection of the art committee,” she recalled.

Abbenhuis was particularly pleased with the public process of selecting the art by a vote of the citizens.

“Explaining the models that were in the lobby was like being a tour guide again, pointing out the features and details of each piece when people visited City Hall to cast their votes,” she said.

The part of her job she enjoyed the most over the years was working with organizers on their special events requiring assistance from Public Works.

Abbenhuis loves the way “people take care of each other” in Sisters. She is especially gratified that Orry had the opportunity to attend all grades in the Sisters School District. She made note of the many special classes Orry was

able to take.

“Where else can your child learn to make an Adirondack chair, when in the second grade perform on stage with Mike McDonald in a Starry Nights concert, make a guitar in the luthier class, take four years of Chinese, and travel to China after his sophomore year?”

Orry made good use of his years in school, graduating with honors in June, and receiving a renewable scholarship to the University of Oregon, covering everything but room and board.

During Orry’s junior year, Abbenhuis opened her home to one of the Chinese teachers, Laura, who lived with them. One of the added benefits was the Chinese dinners Laura prepared for them two times a week.

Abbenhuis explained that when she came to Sisters, she was on a mission to successfully raise her son and get him through school. Now that he is leaving the nest for college, Abbenhuis is returning to life in a big city with a warmer climate and little snow.

“Snow freaks me out,” she admitted.

Having been raised in the Netherlands, Abbenhuis is multilingual, fluent in English, Dutch, French, and German. That ability landed her a job with American Tours International in Los Angeles in 1990 when she came back to the states after returning home to live and work, when her year as a nanny was completed.

She stayed with ATI for 15 years, working as a tour guide, in the office, on the passenger services desk, and with AAA. After her son was born, she was able to work from home. In October 2001, following the 9/11 attacks in New York City, she returned to the Netherlands for four months, a move she called a big mistake,

which prompted her to return to the U.S. and ATI.

Growing up, Abbenhuis’ best friend was a Dutch girl whose family had lived in Australia for years and she credits the time spent at their house for her fluency in English. In return she taught her friend to speak Dutch. Dutch TV is also mostly in English with Dutch subtitles so she grew up hearing English spoken.

Her last day at City Hall was

July 1. Immediate plans called for Abbenhuis to put her belongings in storage until September. On July 10, she and Orry are leaving for Europe to visit his father’s family in Ireland and then travel to Amsterdam. She is keeping their arrival in Amsterdam a secret in order to surprise her sisters, who still live in the small town



PHOTO BY SUE STAFFORD

Nicole Abbenhuis has served the City of Sisters for several years.

where they all grew up on land that was reclaimed from the sea.

Upon returning to the states, Abbenhuis is returning to work for ATI, at least temporarily, as a tour guide, living in Las Vegas and commuting to LA. She starts right out with two back-to-back

See **ABBENHUIS** on page 23



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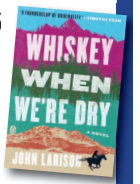
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Mark your calendar for Author Presentations...

Sat., July 6 • 6:30-8 PM JOHN LARISON

Whiskey When We're Dry In the spring of 1885 Jessilyn Harney finds herself orphaned on the family's remote ranch. She cuts her hair, dresses in men's clothing, and sets off to reunite with the only kin she has left — a big brother turned notorious outlaw. Told in Jess' wholly original and unforgettable voice, the story is an epic as expansive as America itself.



Wed., July 10 • 4-5:30 PM KAREN BARNETT

Ever Faithful Return to the height of the Great Depression when FDR's New Deal offers a glimmer of hope for unemployed young men. Nate Webber is one of many to join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to help provide for his family, but it means leaving everything he knows in Brooklyn for the untamed West. Elsie Brookes grew up a ranger's daughter, but dreams of being a teacher. She takes a teaching position in the CCC camp to help reach her goal. Elsie is drawn to Nate, but has a secret that she keeps hidden. As their friendship leads to romance, suspicious fires casts a shadow over the park. They race to uncover the truth before losing everything they have worked for.

Thurs., July 11 • 4-5:30 PM THERESE ONEILL

Ungovernable Feminist historian Therese Oneill is back to educate you on what to expect when you're expecting a Victorian baby! Oneill conducts an unforgettable tour through the backwards, pseudoscientific, downright bizarre parenting fashions of the Victorians.

Fri., July 12 • 4-5:30 PM JANE KIRKPATRICK

Everything She Didn't Say In 1911 Carrie Strahorn wrote a memoir sharing the most exciting events of 25 years traveling and shaping the West with her husband, Robert Strahorn, a railroad promoter, investor, and writer. *Everything She Didn't Say* imagines Carrie 10 years later, sharing what was really on her mind during those years. Kirkpatrick's rich imagination draws out the emotions of living to give readers a window into the past and their own hearts.

Sat., July 13 • 10 AM-2 PM MARIE BOSTWICK

Join us as we host *New York Times* bestselling author Marie Bostwick for an in-store signing of her books, including her newest, **HOPE ON THE INSIDE**.



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