

After the fire, poetry and pottery are changed

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Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

“To arrange the deck chairs on the Titanic / while it’s sinking, ... would it be so foolish after all?” asks the first poem in my chapbook “Only So Far” (Main Street Rag Publishing Co., 2019). Imagining the ruin that would follow a Cascadia Zone earthquake, the poem’s speaker confesses:

Still I spend hours arranging pictures on the walls of bedroom, guest room, living room, study.

Then, in the poem’s final lines, she defends this apparently foolish activity:

I want these imperiled walls to sing in the face of threat complex harmonies eyes can receive and mind hold close.

As it turned out, it was not earthquake but fire that

destroyed those walls and the pictures so carefully arranged on them. And as it happened, the six months of sheltering at home to avoid exposure to the novel coronavirus gave an exceptional opportunity to take in deeply the “complex harmonies” of those arrangements. Now, even though the actual walls and pictures have been reduced to ash, my mind still holds close the pictures arrayed on them and the way they resonated together.

Of course, it wasn’t only pictures that I sought to arrange harmoniously, but small objects like vases and bowls, including some few made by local potter Mark Hebing, whose studio, attached to his Santiam Canyon home, my husband and I had visited.

“The Potter’s Studio,” a poem in my book “No Constant Hues” (Turnstone Books of Oregon, 2015), attempts to evoke Hebing’s studio as it was when we visited it. Then mountain-forest colors filtered into the

studio, settling “on the white clay sides of the vases, / planters, and bowls that the potter lift[ed] / from the wheel.” The poem envisions those colors of Douglas fir needles and bark, of salal and sword fern, as inspiring the hues of Hebing’s glazes.

Like our home, Hebing’s pottery studio was destroyed in the Beachie Creek fire. In the rubble of our house, we found a few pieces of pottery that had survived flames hot enough to melt aluminum. One of them was a vase by Mark Hebing. It was uncracked and retained its shape, but the deep teal of its glaze had darkened nearly to black, as much changed as the fir forest that may have inspired it.

Another piece of pottery that survived the fire but was transformed by it is the focus of an earlier poem of mine, “To a Great-Aunt,” in my book “Green Novem-

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Nellie Taylor with FEMA's Applicant Services assists Santiam Canyon residents with the wildfire recovery process on Monday at the Community Center in Stayton. PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL DOLLINS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

FEMA has paid \$17 million to Oregonians so far

Bill Poehler
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A major concern of Santiam Canyon residents impacted by the Labor Day wildfires is assistance: would they get it, and when.

In the month since historic wildfires decimated regions of Oregon including Santiam Canyon cities such as Detroit and Gates, FEMA has paid out \$17 million to people impacted in the state, FEMA spokesperson Jann Tracey said.

“We can’t put things back together. We can give them a jump start, and that’s what our mission is,” Tracey said.

Tracey said in the past month, FEMA has received 10,849 applications in the state and has paid out \$17,359,946 for individual assistance and housing.

That includes 1,340 applicants in Marion County who have received \$963,893 and 467 applicants in Linn County who have received \$391,966.

Those impacted by the wildfires have until Nov. 13 to register for assistance from FEMA.

FEMA individual assistance housing crew lead Anabel Quinones said most people who have sought assistance from the agency have insurance, but the agency may cover things insurance doesn’t.

“So we can provide rental assistance,” she said. “We can also cover lodging reimbursement if they were evacuated. They just need to bring in their receipts. We can cover that if the insurance doesn’t.”

The agency opened its external outreach center for

the Santiam Canyon area at the Stayton Community Center at 400 West Virginia Street in Stayton on Friday, and Tracey said it will be the central location for FEMA’s efforts throughout the wildfire recovery efforts.

The center will be open from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

“People often have lost all of their documentation, identity, everything,” Tracey said. “Here, they can not only help in regards to getting help with whatever documentation they need, it’s really a valuable resource to have people go to the external outreach center, rather than having them do it by phone or online.”

FEMA approves temporary housing, but limits exist

An estimated 4,100 homes in Oregon burned down in the wildfires and thousands more sustained damage.

FEMA has limits for how much money it can pay, however.

“The max is \$35,500. That’s for housing assistance, for house repairs,” Quinones said. “And then there’s another one for personal property, that’s another \$35,000.”

Last week, FEMA approved temporary housing for those displaced by wildfires for those who’s primary residence is in Marion, Linn and Jackson counties, and that housing will be available for up to 18 months.

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New maps show where wildfires destroyed forest

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Damage caused by the Labor Day wildfires on Oregon’s forests and mountains became clearer Thursday with the release of maps showing where the fires burned hottest, and where they had little impact.

The maps show the burn severity for seven of the largest wildfires in Oregon, including the Beachie Creek, Lionshead and Riverside fires, the trio of blazes that burned roughly 535,000 acres east of the Willamette Valley.

The maps confirm what the Statesman Journal re-

ported previously — the Opal Creek area and Little North Santiam Canyon were burned severely, at either high or moderate intensity, and many of the ancient rainforest’s trees were likely killed.

On a somewhat more positive note, Jefferson Park, the alpine meadow and lakes at the base of Mount Jefferson, does not appear to have burned much at all. In general, the Mount Jefferson Wilderness appears to have burned at mixed to low severity.

The Olallie Lake area, home to popular mountain lakes, appears to have burned at moderate intensity, meaning a decent number of trees were likely killed

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ELECTIONS
2020

Incumbent Schrader faces upstarts

Three candidates vie for District 5 seat

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Kurt Schrader has held Oregon’s Congressional District 5 seat since 2008, winning six terms by wide margins, usually without serious opposition.



Courser

Amy Ryan Courser and Matthew Rix identify as long shots.

Ryan Courser defeated two more highly funded candidates in the Republican primary and Rix, who has raised no money, has never run for any public office.



Rix

The three are candidates for the seat in the Nov. 3 general election.

Oregon’s fifth congressional district represents Salem, a swath north to parts of Portland, east to Stayton and Detroit and west to the central coast, including Lincoln City, Tillamook and Newport and includes parts of Marion, Clackamas, Yamhill, Lincoln and Tillamook counties.

Multiple analyzations including from The Cook Political Report rate the district as “Solid Democratic.”



Shrader

Schrader has a huge advantage in fundraising, with \$1.4 million raised as of June 30, the latest date reported by the Federal Elections Committee, and \$2.5 million cash on hand. Courser had under \$4,000 on hand as of June 30 and Rix said he hasn’t raised any money.

Democrat Kurt Schrader

Schrader, 68, was a state representative and senator before moving on to the United States House of Representatives and has won every election he has been in since 1996.

He handily defeated opponents Mark Gamba and Blair Reynolds in this year’s primary election.

The former veterinarian from Canby sits on the House Committee on Energy and Commerce as well as the Blue Dog Coalition for moderate Democrats.

The district includes wildfire-impacted areas like Santiam Canyon cities including Mill City, areas of Clackamas County and Otis.

Schrader said the government needs to use science and the knowledge of experts to better manage forests with methods like prescribed burns and thinning to prevent fuels from building up in vulnerable areas.

“Again, where a lot of folks like to paint this as all or none approach, there’s as usual a happy medium,” Schrader said. “I would enjoy having a rational discussion for a change.”

He was part of the push to get the major disaster declaration for the wildfires approved in the days after the fire, which allowed for federal help for victims of the fire.

Schrader said a key to wildfire recovery for many of the communities will be continued pressure on federal agencies to help those impacted.

“It’s going to be bird-dogging these things,” Schrader said. “It’s going to be making sure people get help as soon as they can. At the same time, it’s going to be moving people into permanent transitional housing.”

Schrader said Oregon needs to take further steps towards reopening from its COVID-19 restrictions.

He said the state did well in stemming the spread of the disease in the state, but it needs to get businesses and schools back operating as a vaccine and treatments may be a long way off.

“I’m afraid many people are acting way out of proportion on what the impact of this is,” Schrader said.

The House of Representatives on Thursday

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