

Cruise ships offer opportunities and lessons

There was something really awe-inspiring about having so many enormous oceangoing passenger cruise ships in Astoria all at once last month. Instead of manna from heaven, the gods delivered tourists from the sea.

Although I sometimes hear contradictory things said about how much they benefit a cross section of local businesses, overall there's no doubt that having thousands of potential paying customers delivered to our door is a remarkable boon. There are Astoria-size communities throughout the nation and world that struggle without success to achieve one-tenth as much visibility and visitation.

Possibly because ship arrivals aren't quite routine, it seems to me that some entrepreneurs still are quite a ways from fully

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grasping both the scale of opportunity and the nuances of how best to capitalize on it. Many have, or are starting to, but in other cases it hasn't sunk in that you have to — pick your cliché — make hay while the sun shines; strike while the iron is hot. In a cruise-ship context, this essentially comes down to being ready to provide Columbia River-specific goods and services in a time, place and manner most convenient to people who will

be here a few short hours.

The world is full of generic items that lack all sense of personality and place. Living where we do on this spectacularly historic, scenic and delicious estuary and coastline, we must always strive to sell things and experiences that are as uniquely local as possible. And not just "sell" — we ought to consistently enrich our visitors' lives and our own by being open to conversations, giving advice and showing the way.

When it comes to making money and creating a vibrant economy, a key economic concept is adding local value. In this context, this means taking raw materials and talent located here and turning them into higher-priced finished goods to sell to people who truly desire to leave part of their money here

WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING MONEY AND CREATING A VIBRANT ECONOMY, A KEY ECONOMIC CONCEPT IS ADDING LOCAL VALUE.

with us. We have to make it easy for them to do so. Blackberry pies, nature-watching trips, custom-canned salmon and albacore, art objects and homegrown folk objects — all these and a thousand other things I can't imagine can all provide a treasured memory to a grateful paying customer.

Beyond offering good, unique, local stuff, serving visitors — no matter how they arrive — requires sophistication in handling payments, or at least having ample change. Careful planning and things like matching opening hours with arrival/departure times can maximize

the potential for making money while people are here. It kills me to see visitors peering into the windows of closed stores.

All this applies to each of our communities, which may not have ship passengers but do have throngs of razor clam diggers, festival attendees and other short-term seasonal customers. It's up to each of us to make sure they find things they like, genuine friendliness and a consistent customer-service attitude.

In a generic world, we have such amazing endowments. We have to use them to our advantage every time we get the chance.

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