

From desert to rain

Story by Edward Stratton
Coast River Business Journal

A decade ago, Jenny “Q” Qaqundah started Grateful Desert, an herb shop and apothecary in Joshua Tree, California.

Qaqundah and her partner, Myshkin Warbler, recently opened a sister store, Grateful Rain, on Commercial Street in Astoria.

The offerings are ambitious but represent the background of Qaqundah, a registered nurse and herbalist for more than 25 years. The front showroom splits between an apothecary and aromatherapy bar.

“I’ve studied herbs, and I’m also an RN,” Qaqundah said. “I see clients one-on-one and then formulate (a plan) for them... As an herbalist and an RN, I can talk to people and educate people about health, about herbs and help guide them to what would be best for them.”

Qaqundah, a child of Palestinian immigrants, filled a back room with Middle Eastern specialties such as dates, olives, oils, falafel, tahini and Baba ganoush. She curates a small educational library on herbs and health.

Qaqundah said she has worked with and referred people to Vicki McAfee, an herbalist

who runs A Gypsy’s Whimsy Herbal Apothecary, just down the street.

“I come from Joshua Tree, where all the stores downtown, we often sell the same things, but we also support each other,” Qaqundah said. “It’s a really tight community... Up here, it really felt the same.”

Most of the store is Qaqundah’s brainchild, but Warbler, an eclectic blues, folk and global singer-songwriter, restores a small collection of vintage string instruments.

“I’m kind of focusing on vintage string instruments, because that’s what I know and what I have a passion for,” Warbler said. “... We’re going to be carrying strings, and cables and stands.”

Grateful Rain is one of few places in Astoria to carry instruments since the departure of Thiel’s Music in 2019. Qaqundah said the couple could offer some instruments on consignment.

“It’s very eclectic and fun,” Qaqundah said of the shop. “I mean, why not have a shop with all your favorite things?”

A journey of trust

Warbler first met Qaqundah, who lived in Joshua Tree with her daughter Yazzy, while on tour after releasing a new record, “That



EDWARD STRATTON/COAST RIVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Myshkin Warbler and Jenny “Q” Qaqundah recently opened Grateful Rain in Astoria.

Diamond Lust.” The new couple were soon tested in 2014 when Qaqundah suffered a small cut that plunged her into septic shock.

“I went into a coma and had to learn how to move a finger, and was in an ICU unit for six months, and then in and out of the hospital for another six months,” Qaqundah said. “I had 51 surgeries within that six months.”

Qaqundah would lose both legs below the knees and five fingers. She published a book about the experience and her recovery titled, “Held Together.” Warbler created “Trust and the Highway,” a collection of blues, folk, rock and jazz compositions from her perspective during the ordeal, and paired with a book

of lyrics, poems and collages.

Warbler and Qaqundah fused their works into a live performance piece, “Trust. Together,” and went on tour in 2018 with 15-year-old Yazzy. Warbler had by that point played several iterations of the Tenor Guitar Gathering in Astoria. The family stopped on tour by KALA, a gallery and performance space on Marine Drive.

“We were just in an RV taking a big family camping trip and doing the gigs all up and down the coast,” Qaqundah said. “And we stepped out of the RV here, and all three of us were stunned. All three of us said immediately that this is where we want to be.”

Business in Brief

Lum’s Toyota acquires Walla Walla dealership

WALLA WALLA—Lori Lum, dealer principal of Lum’s Auto Center in Warrenton, purchased the McCurley Integrity Toyota in Walla Walla, Washington on May 14 with general manager Justin Teubner. Lum also owns Lum’s Buick, GMC, Cadillac in McMinnville.

Dave and Shirley Lum started Lum’s Auto Center in 1969 and now their daughters, Lori, Julie and Pam, are all involved in the dealerships.

Walla Walla Toyota plans to offer new and used vehicles, parts and services. For more information, call the dealership at 509-525-1920.

Columbia Memorial Hospital greets new chief medical officer

ASTORIA — Board-certified emergency medicine physician Christopher Strear, MD,



Christopher Strear

FACEP, joined Columbia Memorial Hospital as the new chief medical officer on June 1.

Strear earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, and did his residency in emergency medicine at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center. He has been an emergency physician for almost 20 years at Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in Portland. He has also worked at a startup, AkēLex, Inc., and at Northwest Acute Care Specialists.

Strear will help direct clinical strategy, support providers in the Columbia Memorial Hospital

Medical Group, oversee quality metrics and be part of the executive leadership team.

Sen. Merkley recognizes CEDR

Sen. Jeff Merkley recognized Clatsop Economic Development Resources and Clatsop Community College Small Business Development Center for their work in supporting businesses through the pandemic at a recent town hall meeting.

The Oregon Democrat presented a flag and certificate that stated, “At the request of the Honorable Jeff A. Merkley, United States senator, this flag was flown to honor Clatsop Economic Development Resource for support of the community and Clatsop County’s most vulnerable residents throughout the coronavirus pandemic.”

Kevin Leahy, executive director of the economic resources group, thanked him for the recognition and introduced his team members, Jessica Newhall, Tammy Lambert, Meyer Freeman, Hermes Ochoa and Ryan Stanley.

GET TO THE POINT.

Expert Service. Guaranteed.

Trust your vehicle safety
to the professionals at

DEL’S O.K. TIRE

point S

TIRE and AUTO SERVICE

Same owners • Same tires
Same great service

**YOUR #1 SOURCE
FOR TIRES
CUSTOM WHEELS
AUTOMOTIVE SERVICES**

503-325-2861

For emergencies

503-325-0233

35359 Business Hwy 101

(Miles Crossing)

Astoria, OR

Hours: Mon-Fri 8-6 • Sat- 8-4