

Destination Astoria!



Daily Astorian file

Harvey Bartz, of White Bear Lake, Minn., snaps a photo of the grand stairway leading to the second floor of the Capt. George Flavel House Museum during a visit in 2013. The Flavel House had its best year in 2014 with a 20 percent increase in attendance, after increasing 12 percent in 2013.

Visitor numbers at museums, parks shoot through the roof

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

The oldest Anglo settlement west of the Rockies is being discovered again.

Astoria is experiencing a record number of visitors at various attractions, including the multiple museums and parks.

Locals say the obvious reasons for the uptick in tourism is due to the mild weather this past winter and even the large number of sea lions drawing visitors to the waterfront.

Columbia River Maritime Museum Executive Director Sam Johnson agrees the weather has played a role in bringing people to the North Coast. Poor snowfall in the Cascades this winter brought people, who ordinarily would have been skiing, he said.

"That is possible, but I also think Astoria is becoming a 'go to' place," Johnson said. "It is reasonably close to Portland and is just a nice place to be. With good restaurants, brew pubs, interesting shops, etc., and spectacular views, we are a good choice for a day or weekend trip."

The visitation trend in Astoria has been increasing over the past few years.

Since 2012, the Maritime Museum increased from about 88,000 visitors annually to more than 105,000 in 2014, which is one of the best years in the museum's history.

"For us, some of this is due to

a determined effort to market the museum on the coast and in the Portland metro area, along with new exhibits and the 3-D films that now draw many to the museum," Johnson said. "But obviously there is more going on outside the museum that is affecting the entire North Coast."

'Little known gem'

The Clatsop County Historical Society, which oversees the Flavel House Museum, Oregon Film Museum and Heritage Museum, is seeing a similar spike in attendance.

McAndrew Burns, executive director of the Historical Society, said it has been an extraordinary two years of growth for the non-profit.

In 2013, the Heritage Museum had 31 percent growth in visitation, followed by a 63 percent rise in 2014.

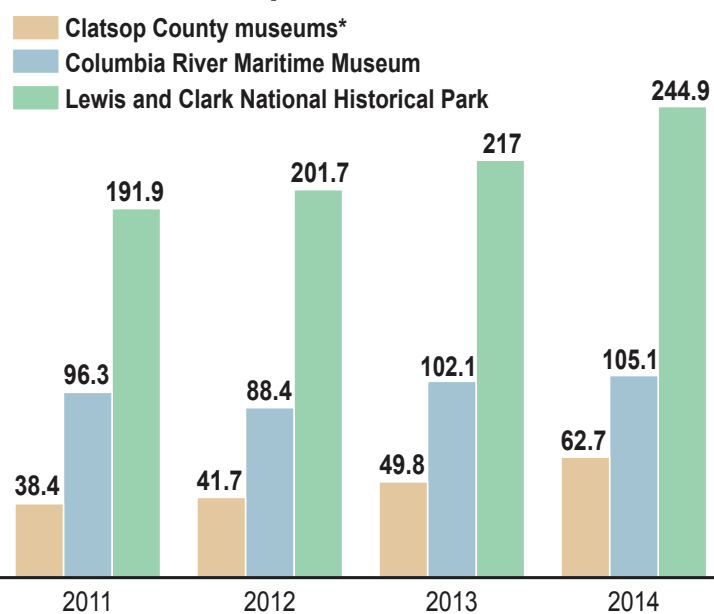
The Oregon Film Museum, which opened in 2010, steadily increased from about 9,000 visitors the first year to more than 25,000 in 2014.

"It's incredible when you look at the size of the building, and we have done very little advertising," Burns said of the film museum. "It's kind of amazing it's grown so quickly."

The Flavel House Museum had its best year ever in 2014 with a 20 percent increase in attendance, after increasing 12 percent in 2013.

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Annual turnout at select Clatsop County museums and parks (Thousands of visitors)



*Combined yearly attendance for Oregon Film, Flavel House, and Heritage museums
Sources: Clatsop Co. Historical Society; Columbia River Maritime Museum; Lewis and Clark National Historical Park

Kyle Spurr and Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group



JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Families involved in the Oregon Connections Academy, including Josef Teague, center, and Brenda Teague, right, walk past exhibits during a visit to the Columbia River Maritime Museum in January.

Bridge Vista blueprint gets OK

Plan restricts development, but some are disappointed

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

Balancing economic growth with the preservation of iconic views of the Astoria Bridge and Columbia River, the Astoria Planning Commission voted Tuesday night to advance the Bridge Vista phase of the city's Riverfront Vision Plan.

The commission recommended restricting development over the river close to the bridge, near the Maritime Memorial, and west of Second Street, where the old White Star Cannery boiler is a reminder of the city's historic past. New buildings in these regions could be no higher than the riverbank, which would essentially limit growth to docks or piers.

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Jessica Smith's lawyers protest DA's letter

Attorneys claim Josh Marquis is violating rules

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

The defense lawyers for Jessica Smith, the mother accused of killing one daughter and injuring another, filed a motion Monday asking the court to strike a letter from District Attorney Josh Marquis, claiming the letter harasses Smith and is a violation of state trial court rules.

Marquis' letter — sent March 19 to Smith's defense counsel and Clatsop County Circuit Court Judge Cindee Matyas — expressed frustration over the defense's failure to produce any discovery, or evidence, to the state. As a result, Marquis wrote, it is not possible for the state to respond to the defense's other "boilerplate" motions.

The discovery deadline for the defense was Tuesday. As of this morning, no discovery was submitted, according to the District Attorney's Office.

Meanwhile, the defense has had all the state's discovery for about six months, Marquis noted.

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AHS principal explores Chinese schools

Student life is high-pressure, and high-stakes

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Astoria High School Principal Lynn Jackson learned a lot during his recent trip to China as an emissary for U.S. high schools. Absenteeism is not an issue, he said, and neither is not turning in homework. But Jackson said he experienced a high school environment dominated by rote memorization and preparation for the gaokao, China's life-altering national college entrance exam.

"What's amazing is that these students are incredibly, incredibly dedicated," said Jackson, who observed

the students of Xi'an No. 85 Middle School as part of the China Exchange Initiative.

The program was founded by late philanthropist Houghton Freeman to increase exchanges and interest in Asian studies. Jackson traveled to China March 22 for two weeks, along with a principal from Creswell Middle School; superintendents from Rainier, Lebanon, Salem-Keizer and John Day school districts; and two charter school directors as part of an exchange between Oregon and Shaanxi, a province in northwestern China. Xi'an, where Jackson went, is the capital of the Shaanxi province, an ancient capital of China and a city of more than 8 million.

No. 85 was ranked 13th out of more than 200 middle schools in terms of performance on the gaokao, Jackson said, a relatively elite institution where

children's parents are mostly professionals.

The New York Times reported in December on a "cram school" of more than 20,000 students preparing around the clock for the gaokao. More than 9 million students a year take the test, the report said, for which many often start preparing in elementary school and see failing it as a ticket to manual, migrant labor.

Only nine years of education is compulsory in China, from elementary through junior middle school. Students take the zhongkao, the senior high school entrance exam, to get into senior middle school. Out of an average grade size of 450 students, Jackson said, he heard that maybe 50 to 60 percent make it to the high school level.

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coast weekend



THURSDAY
Spring into Gardening

