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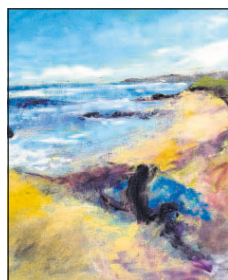
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on the cover

"Coastal Meditation" by Christopher Mathie, who will show 20 some new pieces at White Bird Gallery during Spring Unveiling.

Submitted photo

See story on Page 12

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Out & about

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Organic labels: fact or fiction?

"My first experience with organic was with my wallet," said Peter Laufer. "I watched my grocery bill double."

Laufer, the James Wallace Chair of Journalism – and my former professor – at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication, was visiting the Seaside Public Library to speak about his book, "Organic: A Journalist's Quest to Discover the Truth Behind Food Labeling."

In the U.S., organic food sales are at \$30 billion a year and growing. Price and profit, however, were only one aspect of Laufer's talk.

In his book, Laufer said, he sets out to trace the origin of two items in his kitchen that bear organic labels: Trader Joe's walnuts – a product of Kazakhstan – and Market of Choice black beans, a product of Bolivia. The countries of origin were Laufer's first red flag.

"We're in Eugene, Oregon, the capital of touchy-feely organic food, and there's walnuts from Kazakhstan and black beans from Bolivia being sold to me?" he said. When it comes to corruption, Kazakhstan takes the cake. "There is no organic sector in Kazakhstan. Zero. Zip."

Coast Weekend welcomes comments and contributions from readers. New items for publication consideration must be submitted by 10 a.m. Tuesday, one week and two days before publication.

To submit an item, contact Rebecca Sedlak

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Laufer said.

As a consumer, a journalist and a university researcher, he knocked on the doors of Trader Joe's, Market of Choice, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and third-party organic certifier Quality Assurance International, the goal being to connect with the actual farmers and learn whether those organic labels were telling the truth. The response he got: a lot of doors slammed in his face.

A Freedom of Information Act request eventually produced paperwork – but contained pages

of redacted info.

"The secrecy to me, is troubling," Laufer said. "If there's transparency, then we as consumers can make informed decisions."

Ultimately, when food is globally sourced, there are too many opportunities for error, he said. "To think that if it's got that sticker on it, it's got validity, that – I think the academic term – is hogwash."

Laufer's solution: Don't take all organic labels at face value. Get to know your grocer; ask questions. Buy local; visit farmers markets.

I won't spoil the ending of his adventure (or the book), but Laufer did make it to Bolivia, and he did meet a bean farmer.

Traveling to Bolivia for "Organic" wasn't new; Laufer is no stranger to foreign countries. He's taught and worked around the world. For his book "The



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Dangerous World of Butterflies," he traveled through Nicaragua. This summer he'll teach in Vienna. This week he and some UO journalism students are in Latvia for World Press Freedom Day, a worldwide celebration led by UNESCO.

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