

# Opry: More than 80,000 people have attended shows

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The office space at the theater acts as a ticket booth, storage and place for the lighting technician. Staff in the cramped office constantly bump into each other during shows.

“We can’t breathe in there,” Niland said.

The proposed addition would create a larger ticket window and rehearsal space the same size as the stage.

Niland said the group would rather make the investments in its building, instead of searching for another spot around town.

“There is not another empty commercial space that can hold seating for 200 people that would be in our price range,” Niland said.

**Preserving heritage**

Over the past three decades, the Opry Co. has grown to the point where 500 to 600 people participate each year by acting on stage or helping behind the scenes.

For “Shanghaied in Astoria,” dubbed a celebration of Astoria’s Scandinavian heritage, 26 parts are open for actors. Each part is triple cast, so about 70 actors are needed.

Performances, including “Shanghaied in Astoria,” attract actors of all ages and backgrounds.

Chuck Meyer, Astor Street’s fundraising chairman, said participants have included veterinarians, school teachers and three generations of actors. Meyer’s son performed with the troupe for 12 years.

“This is a unique asset to the community. Anybody can walk through the door and do something,” Meyer said. “You don’t get turned away.”

The Astor Street Opry Co. — named after the street in Astoria historically located in a red-light district decades ago — is completely volunteer-based. A small stipend is paid to some involved, including the directors, pianists and costume designers.

Overall, the group relies on the community’s support. About 250 local businesses and individual donors have backed the group over the years. More than 80,000



Bill Carr, building manager at the Astor Street Opry Co., walks through the curtains onstage in the theater.

JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian



The Astor Street Opry Co. theater has three portable toilets that have to be shared between cast, crew and audience members during performances.

JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

people have attended shows.

“(People think) it’s always been there. Well, it costs a lot of money to always be there,” he said.



Submitted Photo

A 2012 concept drawing of the improved Astor Street Opry Co. theater.

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# Spray: Pesticide stirred enormous controversy

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Most Willapa oyster growers pinned major hopes on the spray, which they saw as essential for their survival as an industry. It is unclear how they will proceed.

The now-withdrawn pesticide has stirred enormous controversy in recent months after being implicated as a possible factor in bee colony collapse disorder, a poorly understood problem that is hammering domesticated and wild bee species around North America and Europe. European regulators banned the chemical as of Dec. 1, 2013.

Plans to use imidacloprid in Willapa Bay were developed over the course of several years. Bee impacts were regarded as unlikely because sprays would occur far from shore. The spray-permit application went through with little controversy and was announced in a news story in the Chinook Observer last week.

**Seattle pressure**

But immediately following the granting of the permit, there was a loud reaction stemming from stories in Huffington Post and the Seattle Times. Some Seattle-area restaurant owners said they would not serve Willapa-grown shellfish.

Several groups announced their intention to protest outside Ecology’s offices in Olympia this Monday and a dozen or so people from a different group did show up on the sidewalk even after the department announced it had agreed with the oyster growers association to cancel the permit.

Taylor Shellfish, the state’s largest oyster grower, bowed to this pressure late Friday, and other growers followed suit.



Courtesy of Lewis and Clark College

Burrowing shrimp in Willapa Bay like the one shown here are a major problem for commercial oyster growers. A permit for a type of spray growers hoped would control the shrimp has now been withdrawn.

“While we continue to support the responsible decision by the Department of Ecology to issue this permit, recent actions by the media, other groups, and on social media have mis-characterized the impacts and use of our permit and led to an incredible amount of misinformation based on misunderstanding,” stated a letter submitted to Bellon by the Willapa-Grays Harbor Oyster Grower’s Association, signed by Don Gillies, the association’s president. The letter “regretfully” requested the withdrawal of the permit.

“These actions have caused a significant threat to the economic stability of our family farms,” the letter continued, “and we believe we have no choice but to withdraw our permit and address these issues to the satisfaction of our customer base, and the public.”

**Carbaryl replacement**

The WGHOGA requested the permit as an alternative to carbaryl, a pesticide used since the 1960s that was discontinued in Washington water following a lengthy court fight. The permit placed strict usage rules on a new U.S. EPA approved registration of imidacloprid, a common household pesticide, to con-

trol the population of burrowing shrimp in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor. The shrimp burrow into shellfish beds, making the ground too soft for oysters, which suffocate in the muck churned up by the shrimp. Carbaryl can no longer be used, on account of a settlement that ended a long legal fight between shellfish growers and environmental groups.

“Our customers spoke loud and clear today, and that speaks volumes to us,” Bill Dewey, spokesman for Taylor Shellfish, said Friday. “It is disappointing — this really was the industry’s last hope.”

Many growers in the WGHOGA say they are not sure what the year will hold for them now — a feeling Gillies summed up in his letter to Ecology.

“Most of our members are multi-generational family shellfish farmers who only have beds in this area,” he wrote. “Without control in 2015, our members’ farms, and the entire ecosystem of Willapa Harbor, will continue to experience significant damage due to increasing shrimp populations. Accordingly, we will continue to work with Ecology to develop a path forward for a responsibly shrimp control program in the future.”

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