



EDWARD STRATTON — The Daily Astorian

From left, Ganesh Sonpatki of the Param Hotel Group, accompanied to the Port of Astoria Commission meeting Tuesday by his general anager, Franky Dsilva, will assume the remaining lease on the Astoria Riverwalk Inn from Brad Smithart of Hospitality Masters, accompanied by his general manager, Lenny Cheyney.

## Hotel: ‘If we don’t move forward here, I’m going to have to close the hotel’

Continued from Page 1A

eventually joined by Hunsinger, John Raichl, Stephen Fulton and James Campbell in voting “yes” to the assignment of the lease.

Smithart’s lease calls for him to pay the Port \$10,000 a month in rent May through October; \$5,000 in monthly rent November through April; and 10 percent of his gross revenues. For paying off Smithart’s debts and investing about \$300,000 up front in the hotel, the Port will cut the rent to \$5,000 a month year-round. It will also agree to collect 7 percent of gross revenues.

Smithart’s lease on the Riverwalk Inn runs through September 2017, with an option to extend another five years. As part of the lease assignment, the Port will enter negotiations on a new lease

with Sonpatki, who said he seeks at least 17 years.

“We’re planning on putting over \$500,000 into this property,” Sonpatki said, adding he will look to structurally and aesthetically improve the Riverwalk Inn while keeping it a budget hotel.

### Desperate situation

“If we don’t move forward here, I’m going to have to close the hotel,” Smithart said at the meeting Tuesday.

Hospitality Masters, a partnership between Smithart and Seth Davis, took over operation of the former Red Lion in March 2012. Smithart has since become the sole owner of the company and has had continual financial trouble with the Riverwalk Inn.

He and Davis originally agreed to pay the Port \$10,000

a month, while sharing 10 percent of gross revenues. But by August 2013, Smithart had received an eviction notice from the Port, falling behind on rent and revenue-sharing, in addition to being behind on transient room taxes with the city.

He avoided eviction, and in November 2013, the Port Commission voted 3-2 to give Smithart a \$30,000-a-year break on rent, lowering it to \$5,000 a month in the winter months, provided he invest the saved rent into the Port’s building and provide an accounting of the improvements.

The Port’s counsel mailed Smithart a letter Feb. 9 giving notice of default, since he had once again fallen behind with the Port, the city and had about \$16,000 in federal tax liens against him.

### Focus on arcade

“I found someone who can make the hotel what I want it to be,” Smithart said in an earlier interview Tuesday, adding that Sonpatki plans to keep the existing staff.

As a sole operator, he said, it was difficult to get financial backing from banks. But Smithart added he doesn’t feel as if he failed on the hotel, having opened it up and providing more than \$500,000 in payroll, with 18 to 27 employees.

As soon as Friday, Smithart will open an expansion of the Arc Arcade, which he opened at the corner of 11th and Commercial streets in July 2014. “Being debt free with the city and county is going to be nice to work on my other projects.”

## Drownings: Money for brochures would need to come from community fundraising or grants

Continued from Page 1A

the group has been working on a plan ever since. After the town hall meeting, “The committee triaged all of the ideas. We brainstormed,” Malin said. The group eventually settled on the three priorities that seemed the most practical.

“Number one is a brochure to go to tourists, hotels,” Malin said.

The Surf Rescue team does have a brochure that is packed with helpful information about how to avoid various local hazards. However, the information is a bit outdated and supplies are running low. Additionally, Malin said the group would like to give the brochure more visual appeal and make the language more accessible for younger readers. It also needs to be helpful to those with limited English.

“We’re looking to either completely revamp that brochure, or put it in the form of a handout,” Malin said.

### In-person contacts

The group’s next priority is a beach-safety outreach program. Malin envisions a group of volunteers in easily-identifiable hats and T-shirts, who would be trained to talk with tourists about common safety issues, such as not allowing children to swim in dangerous places.

Finally, the group would eventually like to create a flag system that would help alert beachgoers when hazardous con-

ditions exist.

“In the past, we’ve used signs, but they get stolen,” Malin said, explaining that flags are less vulnerable to theft and vandalism, since they can be taken down at night. According to Malin, some Florida communities have used flag systems with great success.

For now, the group is working on revising the brochure. Malin said it has taken some time to find a way to get all the crucial safety information into something that is pocket-sized and easy to read.

### Knutzen endorsement

Knutzen, who is trying to turn over some of his extensive volunteer duties over to others, said he is confident Hanson and Malin will come up with a good design.

“They’re doing a great job and I support anything they’re doing,” Knutzen said.

Malin said once the designed is settled, the next step is fund-raising.

For 50,000 brochures would cost about \$7,000. The money would need to come from community fundraising or grants.

She hopes to raise the money and get it to the printers within the next couple of months, so that they can move on to the next part of the plan — getting volunteers, merchants and hotels to distribute the safety brochure as widely as possible.

“Summer is coming and we’ve got to get this ready for it to go,” Malin said.

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