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North Coast savors the phenomenon

The appeal of 'The Goonies' is not really a mystery

What makes something in popular culture a fad, a trend or a phenomenon is unpredictable. It is not what the public will embrace at any given moment — but how long that embrace lasts.

Film critic Roger Ebert wrote at the time of its 1985 release, “*Goonies*, walks a thin line between the cheerful and the gruesome, and the very scenes the adults might object to are the ones the kids will like the best.”

Whatever the psychology of this phenomenon, we frankly don’t care. Thousands of people love *The Goonies*, and it was filmed right here in Astoria and Cannon Beach.

That’s enough for us — and it was delightful that the community could host a four-day party to celebrate the 30-year anniversary of its release.

The lovable adventure-comedy is about a ragtag bunch of youngsters who save their Uppertown homes from being razed for a country club golf course. On a deeper level, is it a metaphor for today’s America, where unfeeling, greedy carpetbaggers are gobbling up what small towns once held dear?

And is it significant that in a country where some feel its adult leadership may be losing its way, kids are the ones who remind us what’s important?

Perhaps those ideas are too high falutin’ for now, but suffice to say we are grateful the genius of Steven Spielberg created something memorable that helps put our community on the map.

Of course, thanks to the vision of McAndrew Burns and the Clatsop County Historical Society, Astoria is home to the Oregon Film Museum. And it’s totally fitting that it is housed in the old county jail used in the open-

ing jailbreak scene from *The Goonies*. Poignant notes written in its guest book indicate it is a place of pilgrimage for fans from around the world.

Kindergarten Cop, *Free Willy* and *The Ring* were among other movies filmed here, but none has that Goonie cachet. Mikey, Mouth, Chunk, Data, the Fratellis, Sloth and One-Eyed Willy have a special place in our consciousness. In a maritime town, who can resist the appeal of finding pirate treasure and a 1632 doubloon?

The 1980s-themed anniversary events were led by the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce. The beach bonfire in Cannon Beach, the hilarious Truffle Shuffle dance at John Warren Field and other fun events have helped boost the visibility of our community — *The New York Times* and the BBC are among those who have covered the festivities. And the 12,000 fans who visited this past weekend injected thousands of dollars into the North Coast’s early summer economy.

The oldest U.S. settlement west of the Rockies was made famous by Washington Irving’s book about John Jacob Astor. The retelling of the Lewis and Clark story, and the 2005 bicentennial, have contributed to that fame. Astoria’s downtown rebirth, centered on the Liberty Theater, plus its communitywide commitment to historic preservation, and the splendid Astoria Music Festival, all add to our appeal.

But a small movie with a big heart is right up there, too.

Research will help ag survive droughts

California water regulators last Friday accepted an offer from farmers with the state’s most senior water rights to reduce their water use.

Those farmers, who hold riparian water rights in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, told state officials they would voluntarily reduce their consumption by 25 percent.

By doing that, the farmers demonstrated to their fellow Californians that the burden created by four years of drought needs to be shared.

It is an attitude that others around the West would do well to emulate.

It’s dry in California — and much of the West. Parts of Oregon and Idaho are parched, and drought has been declared across all of Washington state. Making matters worse — much worse — is the fact that most of the scant mountain snowpacks melted during abnormally warm winter and spring weather. Some reservoirs are starting the irrigation season well below their normal levels, and forecasters are reminding irrigators that they will not be replenished by snow melt, as they normally are.

Irrigation districts are making the difficult choices between shutting down for part of the season to conserve water, pumping groundwater, following land or carrying on and hoping for the best.

In Washington state, some irrigators have offered other farmers \$500 an acre to use their water just to get through the growing season.

More than anything, the Big Dry of 2015 points out the desperate need for more water storage around the West. A glance at the USDA Drought Monitor shows that only a few areas west of the Rocky Mountains have escaped the

drought. Storing the water that does fall would go a long way toward getting farmers through the driest parts of the year.

But construction of new reservoirs, dams, lake taps and other storage projects will take years, if not decades. Californians have already approved borrowing billions of dollars to build two more reservoirs, but the start of construction is nowhere in sight.

Other projects will rely on federal and state backing. Considering that the federal treasury has been running in the red since the 1990s and most states are tapped out, financial help for these projects may not be forthcoming.

In the meantime, farmers and others in agriculture need to ponder their future. Innovation, efficiency and re-thinking cropping systems need to be a part of the overall conversation.

In Idaho, for example, University of Idaho Extension irrigation specialist Howard Neibling is helping farmers avoid a water call by reducing their consumption. He said in some irrigation systems 16 percent of water losses are due to leaks. In others, worn nozzles, evaporation and uneven distribution waste water.

Researchers are developing low-water techniques for irrigation, breeding drought-resistant crops and building high-tech monitors to determine which plants need moisture. Some in California have developed ways to save as much as 50 percent of water use.

Before, such research was interesting. Now, it’s vital.

This drought will eventually give way to a more normal precipitation pattern. But there will be other droughts. They are an unfortunate part of Western agriculture.

GUEST COLUMN

Death penalty high in voter approval

By JOSH MARQUIS

Some commentators are using the actions of the traditionally conservative Nebraska Legislature to abolish the death penalty as a call for a “long-overdue debate” on capital punishment.

They also suggested that Neb. Gov. Pete Rickett’s unsuccessful veto showed he was “out of touch with Nebraskans.” Yet in Nebraska, as most of America, the majority of voters — if given the chance — would have voted for the death penalty.

In fact the centuries-long debate over capital punishment does not follow either party lines or traditional liberal/conservative goalposts. Oregon is constantly talking about capital punishment. As recently as 2002 the University of Oregon Law School hosted a conference heavily weighted toward those opposed. Speakers included Sister Helen Prejean of *Dead Man Walking* fame and soon to be federal felon (then Illinois Gov.) George Ryan, who had been trying to avoid discussion of his own corruption by commuting all 164 murderers on Illinois’ death row.

In the face of consistent public support for the ultimate penalties in limited cases, opponents claim it’s nothing but atavistic hunger for revenge. There is a distinct difference between revenge and retribution. As Pope John Paul II said, “Protecting society is not the primary purpose of punishment. The primary purpose of punishment is retribution, by which we don’t mean revenge, but by the society expressing its moral outrage,

its outrage at the heinous gravity of a particular crime.”

What kind of people are on death row?

In Nebraska, before the 1990s, the last person executed was Charles Starkweather, who murdered 11 people in two states. Currently on death row in Nebraska is John Lotter, killer of three, known to many because the case made well known by the Academy Award-winning film *Boys Don’t Cry*. In Oregon, death row includes Conan Wayne Hale, who murdered three kids near Eugene in 1995, Jesse Caleb Compton, who tortured a 3-year-old child to death in 1997, and Randy Lee Guzek, who was a true Big Man on Campus at Redmond High School in 1987 when he slaughtered Rod and Lois Houser.

Guzek has been sentenced to death four times. The last three trials — in 1991, 1997 and 2010 — I was the prosecutor. The retrials were not because police or prosecutors withheld evidence or someone came forth with new evidence. They happened because, as one Supreme Court justice put it, we accord these murderers “super due process.”

There are many reasons to have the ultimate penalty. Most states have chosen to offer it and some have chosen not to. There is no particular correlation between death penalty states having low murder rates (as Oregon does) and nondeath penalty states having high murder rates (as does Michigan). Those claiming the “death of death” cannot explain why, in the first decade of the 21st century, more than 25 percent more



Josh Marquis

in the last decade of the 20th century. Yet the murder rate dropped by more than 20 percent in the second 10-year period.

What has happened to slow down executions is that the one drug most commonly used, sodium thiopental, is now controlled by a European Pharma giant that has decreed they will not allow the barbarian Americans to use the drug thus. This is the exact same drug available in virtually every veterinarian’s office in America to euthanize beloved pets. The ban has also created a crisis in the Death with Dignity movement in Oregon and Washington where sodium thiopental was the most favored drug to be prescribed for physician-assisted suicide.

The hard, cold truth is that opposition to the death penalty is championed by the wealthier elites in American society, while those most victimized by the most vicious murderers are often the most vulnerable citizens.

But when actual voters in America are allowed to decide the death penalty, they have, without exception, voted to retain, and in one case to restore the ultimate penalty. Oregon was the last state to vote to abolish the death penalty by popular vote in 1964. Then first in 1977, then again in 1984, Oregon voters voted to return it. In 2006, voters in Wisconsin, which hasn’t had capital punishment since the Civil War, voted to return it. The Legislature ignored them. Most recently in California in 2012, massive campaign contributions for abolition dwarfed efforts of retentionists, but voters in very blue California voted to keep the death penalty.

In a nation that values democracy the elites need to allow the voters to decide this issue, and then be willing to take “Yes” for an answer.

Josh Marquis is the Clatsop County district attorney.

There are many reasons to have the ultimate penalty.

Advice on how to beat the bots

By THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

New York Times News Service

Here’s an interesting statistic from a 2014 labor survey by burning-glass.com: 65 percent of new job postings for executive secretaries and executive assistants now call for a bachelor’s degree, but “only 19 percent of those currently employed in these roles have a B.A.”

So four-fifths of secretaries today would not be considered for two-thirds of the job postings in their own field because they do not have a four-year degree to do the job they are already doing!

The study noted that an “increasing number of job seekers face being shut out of middle-skill, middle-class occupations by employers’ rising demand for a bachelor’s degree” as a job-qualifying badge — even though it may be irrelevant, or in no way capture someone’s true capabilities, or where perhaps two quick online courses would be sufficient.

This is just one of the problems contributing to unemployment and underemployment today. It was the subject of a seminar last week jointly convened by New America, McKinsey, LinkedIn and Opportunity@Work, a new civic group led by Byron Auguste, who headed President Barack Obama’s recent efforts to reform the education-to-work pathway in America. The meeting’s focus was a new McKinsey study on how we can use big data and online talent platforms to better nurture talent in the workforce, find it where it already exists but may not be “badged” by a college degree and connect it both with the real demands of businesses and with colleges looking to make their curriculum more relevant to changing workforce needs. As Sen. Mark Warner, who delivered a smart

keynote address, noted, “Almost 25 people are running for president — and it is remarkable to me that not one of them is talking about these issues.”

The McKinsey study begins: “Labor markets around the world have not kept pace with rapid shifts in the global economy, and their inefficiencies take a heavy toll.” Millions of people can’t find work, “yet sectors from technology to health care cannot find people to fill open positions. Many who do work feel overqualified or underutilized.”

“The skills gap is real,” explained Auguste, “but it is a symptom — not the cause — of a dysfunctional labor market, along with stagnant wages and declining job mobility.” While it’s true that more people need to master digital skills today, there are, he noted, a lot of people with skills employers are seeking — like coding skills — but who may lack the traditional credentials to be considered for the jobs. There are people who would be happy and able to master these skills but don’t have the information on what they are, where best to learn them, or access to new learning platforms that are not covered by traditional government loans or grants; companies have employees in their warehouses, call centers and retail floors with the motivation and aptitude to learn the skills for new jobs, but too few employers

identify them or offer them online training opportunities; and there are rural and urban areas where tapping into the potential of less-credentialed workers could bring IT jobs back to U.S. shores.

Check out linkedin.com/edu. LinkedIn has a giant database of millions of workers, which it analyzed to see which schools are launching the most graduates into the top firms in a variety of fields. They’re not always what you’d expect. Accounting? Villanova and Notre Dame. Media? NYU and Hofstra. Software



Thomas L. Friedman

developers? Carnegie Mellon, Caltech and Cornell. Whether you want to be a plumber or surgeon, it is useful to know which schools’ alumni keep rising at the leading firms.

Technology is redefining work and commerce, and if we’re smart it can also redefine education for employment and advancement so everyone can monetize, or improve, any skill and connect with any employer in need of it. “Up to 540 million people could benefit from online talent platforms by 2025,” McKinsey said. It is not that hard. We need to be making much better use of the federal government’s labor market data and that of websites like Monster.com, HireArt.com and LinkedIn, and even consider creating skill equivalents of the Obamacare health exchanges. Online talent platforms — that can link everyone’s CV with every job opening, with the skills needed for that job, with the online and campus-based schools offering those skills with data showing which schools do it best — create more employment, more relevant skills and the right education for them.

Congress needs to create the legal, privacy and financial incentives to nurture this new social contract, Warner argued: “The biggest challenge for this labor force, and for federal policymakers, is the change in the traditional employer-employee relationship.” If we used all our technology resources, said Aneesh Chopra, former chief technology officer of the United States, we could actually give people “personalized recommendations for every step of your life — at every step of your life.” Adds Auguste: “We can use technology to do more than automate tasks. We can use it to accelerate learning, optimize talent, and guide people into better jobs and careers.”

The robots will only take all the jobs if we let them — so let’s use technology to keep the middle skilled in the middle class.

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