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Port of Astoria gets a do-over

Mooring basin footprint is one of the best hotel sites in the Northwest

Facing the demise of the Red Lion in 2012, the Port Commission made a fateful choice. Instead of turning to an experienced hotelier — Escape Lodging of Cannon Beach — it picked a relatively inexperienced operator, Brad Smithart. Now the Port — and its stakeholders, the taxpayers — are paying the price in a set of financial liabilities Smithart leaves behind.

It is true that Escape Lodging's 2012 proposal assigned the cost of demolishing the Red Lion structure to the Port. But the larger point is that the Port went for a short-term solution. It didn't think long term.

Now the Port Commission has returned to the starting line. It once again faces the question of which way to turn. Derrick DePledge's report on the commission's Tuesday night meeting illustrates the nuances among the bidders for the hotel property — their relative experience and vision.

The essential mistake at the heart of the 2012 choice was to devalue the basic asset. The

West End Mooring Basin footprint is one of the best hotel waterfront sites in the entire Pacific Northwest. If the Red Lion chain had not become dysfunctional, it would have grasped the value of its Astoria asset. It would have maintained the property and been prepared to leap into the current era — in which the reborn Astoria has been discovered.

The flip side of the ruins left by Red Lion is a big opportunity for another hotelier.

In a nutshell, the Port Commission needs a proven hotelier with long-term vision.

U.S.-Canada treaty gains new meaning

Goal should be overall watershed functionality during rapid climate change

A crucial but seldom acknowledged aspect of the Pacific Northwest's laborious and expensive salmon-recovery work is that it is partly intended to create a cushion for years like the one we've now having.

It was reported earlier this week that more than a quarter million returning Columbia-Snake sockeye are swimming upriver only to prematurely die in tributaries in which temperatures are climbing above 70 degrees. A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration biologist worries up to eight out of 10 fish in this year's sockeye run will be wasted.

Sockeye are particularly vulnerable to high temps so their struggles are not necessarily indicative of immediate problems for other species. Nor are Columbia Basin sockeye currently considered to be an important commercial species, having only in recent years having partially recovered from serious depletion in the early to mid-20th century. They and other species have all benefited from work to restore interconnected habitat, improve fish passage through the hydroelectric systems, limit water temperatures, control predators and other steps.

Thanks to all this, one hot and dry year won't be the last nail in the coffin for Columbia sockeye. Some resiliency has been restored to the system — still not enough, but sufficient to get through a bad year. If precipitation returns to normal — especially mountain snow — this year will be only a bump in the road for long-term sockeye recovery.

Unfortunately, that is a big "if." For all the success of salmon recovery in recent years, all runs are still only a small fraction of what they once were. Climate science overwhelmingly indicates that years like this — pleasant for picnics but

not for native fish and wildlife — will become the norm. Snowpacks that keep waterways cool and replenished well into summer will become less and less dependable.

This makes it vital to continue managing the entire Columbia watershed in the U.S. and Canada as the interconnected and interdependent system it is. This summer, "Canadian storage reservoirs have provided the lion's share of water releases for the Columbia River Basin, and in a timely fashion, during one of the driest years in decades throughout the region," the *Columbia Basin Bulletin* reported July 24.

Of the 8.7 million acre feet of stored Columbia water scheduled for release through September, 5.7 million acre feet — nearly two-thirds of the total — will come from Canada. This water is specifically intended for power generation rather than fish passage and temperature control, but nevertheless keeps more water flowing through the system than would otherwise be the case. "Flow augmentation" water released to help fisheries is separately counted. It amounts to 4.7 million acre feet this year, of which nearly a third is from Canadian reservoirs.

All this argues for a continuing need for U.S.-Canada cooperation embodied by the Columbia River Treaty. The nations have been maneuvering for advantages with an eye to 2024, when current treaty terms become unfrozen. The U.S. wants more hydropower benefits, which it views as currently over-weighted to Canada. This is a valid negotiating goal.

But our foremost goal must be maintaining overall watershed functionality in this time of rapid climate change. Survival for sockeye and all other salmon species hangs in the balance.

Killing leaves mark on Cannon Beach

One year ago, on Friday morning, Aug. 1, Cannon Beach Police received a call seeking assistance for a "disoriented female" at the Surfsand Resort.

Police Chief Jason Schermerhom, who had been on the Cannon Beach force for only 18 months after a 26-year career in Seaside, was not prepared for what he was to find. When he and Cannon Beach Fire Capt. Matt Gardner broke their way into the hotel room, they found a dead toddler, 2-year-old Isabella Smith, and beside her, in shock, her older sister Alana Smith, 13. Alana was lying in her own blood, severe cuts on her body, blood spread throughout the room.

Their mother, Jessica Smith, 40, from Goldendale, Wash., was implicated in the attack and apprehended after a two-and-a-half-day search. She was arrested and taken into custody by the Cannon Beach Police Department and the Clatsop County Major Crime Team. She is currently in Tillamook County Jail awaiting trial in summer 2016.

It was an incident no cop ever wants to experience, but few are spared.

Schermerhom took time out Tuesday to share his thoughts at the approach of the one-year anniversary.

The early morning of Aug. 1, 2014, Schermerhom was filling in at the overnight desk for an officer on vacation. He'd been covering since 3 a.m. when at 9:40 a.m. the emergency call came in from a housekeeper at the Surfsand Resort, who was unable to gain entry to the room.

Schermerhom arrived at the scene with Gardner.

"We didn't know what we were going into," Schermerhom said. "We ended up cutting the dead bolt to get in."

Schermerhom entered the room first. The "disoriented female" who had been reported, Schermerhom realized, was 13-year-old Alana Smith. Medix responded and she received treatment at Providence Seaside Hospital. Meanwhile, Jessica Smith was at large.

Cannon Beach City Council chambers on Gower Avenue were turned into a war room, with local, state and federal agencies coordinating the search.

"The FBI came down and introduced themselves and said, 'We're here to help you. If you want us here, we'll accept that, and if you want us to leave, we'll respect that.' There was no issue, they were great.

"Each day I would come in at 6 a.m. and work until midnight, popping back and forth to see where they were and see what they needed," Schermerhom said.

"The first day they didn't find anything. The second, they didn't."

The third day, Jessica Smith's car was found on the logging road off Highway 26.

"Interesting thing — Alana had said she thought her mom would go to

CANNON SHOTS

By
R.J.
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a park or logging road," Schermerhom recalled.

Jessica Smith was apprehended without incident, taken for medical evaluation and transported to the county jail.

After her arrest, Schermerhom remained at police headquarters in Cannon Beach.

Meanwhile, the press from Portland and beyond descended on Cannon Beach.

Schermerhom found himself before the microphones.

"You really can't say 'no comment,'" he said. "Having a prepared statement is important, but having knowledge of what's going on is important as well."

Schermerhom said despite efforts to keep his two children away from the news, the steady stream of headlines made that impossible.

"My son saw his dad on the front cover of the newspaper and asked what was going on," Schermerhom recalled.

"He was 10 at the time. That's just a hard thing to explain. Why would a little girl's mom hurt her? It's very hard to explain to anyone, much less your own child."

Community support made a big difference during the healing process.

"The fact that our community was so supportive shows we can live through things like this," Schermerhom said. "They're scary at the time, but those things make our community stronger, and our relationships with the community and the police department stronger. When they understand and are working with us asking what they can do, that develops a good camaraderie and partnership."

"Cannon Beach is a great town," he said. "There was a lot of support afterward, people who brought thank-you cards. People who said they were thinking of us. That's important. Law enforcement is such a thankless job most of the time. When you do get thank-yous and kudos for doing your job, it's appreciated."

For Schermerhom, the process is far from over. A year later the attacks are something he "constantly thinks about."

In trying to understand the motives for the killing, Schermerhom said he believes this was Jessica Smith's "last hurrah" before she was supposed to give her

children over to her divorced husband.

"We adults become controlling during a divorce," he said. "There's got to be a better way of handling it. There needs to be better counseling, and family checkups."

Schermerhom praised the work of District Attorney Josh Marquis, Assistant District Attorney Dawn Buzzard, and Victims Assistant Unit Coordinator Marilyn Reilly.

"The great thing about it — if there was any good about it — was the community partnerships we developed," Schermerhom said. "Every one of the agencies we worked with stepped up."

Can future tragedies like this be prevented in Cannon Beach?

"You can do your best to do prevention and be visible, but there are things you can't stop from happening because you can't see them coming," he said. "That's something you see with a tourist population, transient population, people coming back and forth on weekends. You do deal with a certain criminal element. It may be somebody who's never committed a crime before in their life. For some reason they make a poor decision, or a poor choice."

One year later, young Isabella remains a haunting figure in his mind. "I know Isabella's birthday was a couple of weeks ago," he said. "That's just sad. Her family will never get over it. Alana can get counseling, and all the love you can give her, but it will still be in the back of her mind, having lived through that."

"The hard part is we'll be going through the whole thing a year from now when it goes to trial," he said. "It's difficult for me to understand how they can make Alana go through it then. Why not get it done as soon as possible? That is the most horrific thing for me to see, because she just needs to get past it."

Schermerhom admits he, too, may never fully get "past it."

"It's something that never leaves our minds," he said. "I still have a picture of Alana in the hospital, when she was released, in my office. That picture reminds me of why I'm doing law enforcement. The reason we go into this thing is to help people. The medics and crew who were on scene that day saved her life. That's something that explains why we do the things we do."

"We didn't have anybody say, 'How could this happen in our town?' You wonder that, but everybody knows as small as we are, everything can still happen here."

"It's something you'll never get used to," he said. "When you do get used to it, it's time to get out of law enforcement, because you've just kind of lost your heart."

R.J. Marx is *The Daily Astorian's* South County reporter and editor of the *Seaside Signal* and *Cannon Beach Gazette*.

Today's exhausted superkids

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

There are several passages in the new book "Overloaded and Underprepared" that fill me with sadness for American high school students, the most driven of whom are forever in search of a competitive edge. Some use stimulants like Adderall. Some cheat.

But the part of the book that somehow got to me most was about sleep.

It's a prerequisite for healthy growth. It's a linchpin of sanity. Before adulthood, a baseline amount is fundamental and nonnegotiable, or should be.

But many teenagers today are so hyped up and stressed out that they're getting only a fraction of the rest they need. The book mentions a high school in Silicon Valley that brought in outside sleep experts, created a kind of sleep curriculum and trained students as "sleep ambassadors," all to promote shut-eye.

The school even held a contest that asked students for sleep slogans. The winner: "Life is lousy when you're drowsy."

Sleep ambassadors? Sleep rhymes? Back when I was in high school in the 1980s, in a setting considered intense in its day, the most common sleep problem among my peers was getting too much of it and not waking up in time for class.

Now the concern isn't how to rouse teens but how to lull them. And that says everything about the way childhood has been transformed — at least among an ambitious, privileged subset of Americans — into an insanely programmed, status-obsessed and sometimes spirit-sapping race.

Take one more Advanced Placement class. Add another extracurricular. Apply to all eight Ivies.

Lose a few winks but never a few steps.

"Overloaded and Underprepared," published on Tuesday, was written by Denise Pope, Maureen Brown and Sarah Miles, all affiliated with a Stanford University-based group called Challenge Success, which urges more balanced learning environments. The book

looks at homework loads, school-day structures and much more.

And it joins an urgently needed body of literature that pushes back at helicopter parenting, exorbitant private tutoring, exhaustive preparation for standardized tests and the rest of it. This genre goes back at least a decade and includes, notably, Madeline Levine's "The Price of Privilege" and Paul Tough's "How Children Succeed."

But it has expanded with particular velocity of late. "How to Raise an Adult," by Julie Lythcott-Haims, came out last month. "The Gift of Failure," by Jessica Lahey, will be released in two weeks.

But what about giving a kid the wiggle room to find genuine passions, the freedom to discover true independence, the space to screw up and bounce back?

There's a unifying theme: Enough is enough.

"At some point, you have to say, 'Whoa! This is too crazy,'" Pope, a senior lecturer at Stanford, told me.

Sleep deprivation is just a part of the craziness, but it's a perfect shorthand for childhoods bereft of spontaneity, stripped of real play and haunted by the "pressure of a story," to quote the headline on a perception by Julie Scelfo in *The New York Times* this week.

Scelfo wrote about six suicides in a 13-month period at the University



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of Pennsylvania; about the prevalence of anxiety and depression on college campuses; about many star students' inability to cope with even minor setbacks, which are foreign and impermissible.

Those students almost certainly need more sleep. In a study in the medical journal *Pediatrics* this year, about 55 percent of American teenagers from the ages of 14 to 17 reported that they were getting less than seven hours a night, though the National Sleep Foundation counsels eight to 10.

"I've got kids on a regular basis telling me that they're getting five hours," Pope said. That endangers their mental and physical health.

Smartphones and tablets aggravate the problem, keeping kids connected and distracted long after lights out. But in communities where academic expectations run highest, the real culprit is panic: about acing the exam, burrowing the transcript, keeping up with high-achieving peers.

I've talked with many parents in these places. They say that they'd love to pull their children off such a fast track, but won't the other children wind up ahead?

They might — if "ahead" is measured only by a spot in U-Penn's freshman class and if securing that is all that matters.

But what about giving a kid the wiggle room to find genuine passions, the freedom to discover true independence, the space to screw up and bounce back? Shouldn't that matter as much?

"No one is arguing for a generation of mediocre or underachieving kids — but plenty of people have begun arguing for a redefinition of what it means to achieve at all," wrote Jeffrey Kluger in *Time* magazine last week. He noted, rightly, that "somewhere between the self-esteem building of going for the gold and the self-esteem crushing of the Ivy-or-die ethos, there has to be a place where kids can breathe."

And where they can tumble gently into sleep, which is a gateway, not an impediment, to dreams.