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ONE DOLLAR



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

Pat Schmidt, an attendant at the Astoria Texaco station, pumps gas for a customer Thursday. A new state law will allow gas stations in counties with populations of 40,000 or less to permit customers to pump their own gas when an attendant isn't present from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Bridge to reopen by Labor Day

Span of Lewis and Clark River Bridge has been closed since December for repairs

By KYLE SPURR
The Daily Astorian

The Lewis and Clark River Bridge, closed since December for major rehabilitation work, will reopen in time for Labor Day weekend.

The bridge provides an alternative route to Astoria and Warrenton and the closure, along with other road repairs, has contributed to traffic congestion in a year when tourism appears to have increased.

The work included replacing the west approach and repairing the corroded steel structure. The bridge, built in 1924, is the last remaining single leaf bascule drawspan in Oregon.

"The approach on the west side is deteriorating so much it was causing the asphalt surface to fail," said Lou

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A CHANGE AT THE PUMP

New state law allows self-service at gas stations, but within strict limits

By ERICK BENGEL
The Daily Astorian

Breaking with a long-standing — and long-contested — Oregon tradition, a new state law will allow drivers in small rural counties, including Clatsop County, to pump their own gas.

But don't get too excited. The law simply gives gas stations the option to permit non-commercial motorists to fill their own tanks when an attendant isn't present between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., and only in counties with populations of 40,000 or less.

Signed into law in June, the change goes into effect in January and impacts 18 of Oregon's 36 counties.

The bill's chief sponsor, state Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, said the law will help drivers in remote regions of Oregon, where traffic flow is often too modest to warrant a 24-hour employee presence at many gas stations.

"We needed this bill to make sure we had fuel at night in places like John Day and Lakeview and other small towns that close their stations," Bentz said. "We want to make sure there's fuel available no matter where you are."

There are long stretches of state highway, especially in Eastern Oregon, where drivers are likely to encounter closed gas stations after normal business hours.

'We needed this bill to make sure we had fuel at night in places like John Day and Lakeview and other small towns that close their stations. We want to make sure there's fuel available no matter where you are.'

— state Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario
the bill's chief sponsor

For example, a driver traveling the 101 miles on U.S. Highway 95 between Malheur County's Jordan Valley and McDermitt, an unincorporated community on the Oregon-Nevada border, is well-placed for an after-hours fuel shortage.

"This is not an issue of convenience, it's an issue of access," Bentz said. "Can I get some gas and get the hell out of town?"

The North Coast isn't nearly as sparsely populated as the areas the law is designed to serve. But since Clatsop County's population hovers at about 37,000, the law may change how some local gas stations do business.

'Things change'

Though the law doesn't kick in for another four-and-a-half months, it isn't too soon for area

gas station owners to start imagining possible outcomes.

From the customer's standpoint, the benefits of self-serve pumps are obvious: more available fuel and — in situations where few gas attendants are on hand to service long lines of cars — less wait time. If the labor costs involved in keeping gas attendants on the clock translates to higher gas prices, self-serve might mean a slight reduction in those prices.

From the business owner's standpoint, however, the law's effects are less clear, and much may depend on whether the gas station is part of a convenience store operation.

Non-24-hour gas stations — like the Texaco Food Mart on Marine Drive that closes at midnight Monday through Friday

and 11 p.m. Saturday and Sunday — may see an opportunity to increase revenue just by keeping the pumps running.

But for 24-hour stations, there's more to consider.

Don Patterson, owner of one 24-hour Mini Mart gas station in Astoria and one in Warrenton, said the law may give an unfair advantage to stations that operate 24/7. By not having to open up their stores, only the pumps, the law may hinder stations that employ round-the-clock gas attendants.

"We're going to continue business as usual. I'm not going to lay off employees or anything like that," he said. "Things change. If someone's getting an unfair advantage, we have to change business accordingly."

Of the opposite opinion is Dave Singh, the owner of the 24-hour Stop & Go Shell in Seaside, who said, "Definitely it's going to be better for the business owners."

Though he likes the idea of not having to pay a gas attendant for doing something motorists can do themselves, Singh prefers to keep at least two employees working at night for safety reasons. He will just have two people logging hours in the convenience store rather than one behind the register and one at the pumps.

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Neighborhood Greenway gets closer look

Next phase of city's vision plan

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

Dozens of Alderbrook residents told city planners Thursday night they want to keep or expand development restrictions along the Columbia River.

Many in the quirky, close-knit east side neighborhood have already pushed back against the Astoria Riverwalk and a potential dog park. The message at a town hall meeting on the Neighborhood Greenway leg of the city's Riverfront Vision Plan at the Hampton Inn and Suites was unambiguous.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it," said Michael Zametkin, a teacher who lives in Alderbrook, warning of the possibility of unintended consequences from any land-use change.

Neighborhood Greenway — from 41st Street to 54th Street — is the third phase of the Riverfront Vision Plan, the city's initiative to create better land use and development guidelines along the river.

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Coast Guard commander permanently relieved of post

Bitterman had been temporarily removed from the Steadfast in April

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

The U.S. Coast Guard has permanently relieved the former commander of the cutter Steadfast, citing a loss of confidence in his ability to maintain the efficiency, morale and well-being of the unit and his crew.

Cmdr. John Bitterman had been temporarily relieved of duty from the Astoria-based cutter in April.

"The Coast Guard holds those in command to the highest levels of professionalism, proficiency and dedication," Lt. Donnie Brzuska, the pub-

lic affairs officer of the Coast Guard Pacific Area Command in Alameda, Calif., said in a statement.

"The Coast Guard conducted a thorough and comprehensive administrative investigation prior to relieving Cmdr. Bitterman. The Coast Guard lost confidence in Cmdr. Bitterman's ability to serve as a commanding officer and maintain the efficiency, morale and well-being of the unit and his crew.

"Because the relief and the investigation were administrative in nature, I cannot release any more details. However, the Coast Guard acted in the best interest of the crew of Steadfast

to ensure a positive working environment."

Bitterman, according to Brzuska, has been reassigned to Coast Guard Sector Columbia River in Astoria.

Cmdr. Mark Walsh from Coast Guard Leadership Development Center in New London, Conn., is acting as the temporary commanding officer of the Steadfast.

Bitterman, who took command of the Steadfast in July 2014, had been the commanding officer of the cutter Edisto in San Diego and was the Coast Guard's Police Attaché in Bogota, Colombia.

The Steadfast, a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter based at the 17th Street Dock in Astoria, patrols from the Pacific Northwest to South America.



Capt. John Bitterman, left, former commander of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Steadfast, is shown here during a tour of the ship. He has been permanently relieved of command due to a loss of confidence in his leadership.

Submitted Photo

After Bitterman was temporarily relieved from the Steadfast in April, his attorney at the time described the commander as a whistleblower who was retaliated against for drawing at-

ention to the poor condition of the 47-year-old vessel.

Bitterman could not be reached for comment Thursday through Sector Columbia River.

