

Port: Preferred choice, Hollander, backs away

Continued from Page 1A

Orr said his group could take over the hotel today, using local staff and a new general manager from Ocean Shores, Wash. He and Smithart had already worked out a smooth transition, Orr said, including transfer of a reservation service and a key lock system.

Orr said his group is willing to absorb the cost of prepaid Groupons, and expects to open with 97 rooms for rent. “We think that we’ll be able to come in and actually be a caretaker for that property,” he said.

Many suitors

Orr and Trabucco’s proposal was one of four options on the table.

Since last summer, Portland hotelier Ganesh Sonpatki has been trying to get the remainder of Smithart’s lease, in exchange for curing Smithart’s debts. Sonpatki operates several budget hotels in and around Portland through Param Hotel Group.

The Port voted in June to transfer the Smithart’s remaining lease to Sonpatki. But the transfer was never finalized, with both sides accusing the other of holding up the process. Meanwhile, new suitors

like Orr, Trabucco and Mark Hollander, of Hollander Hospitality, surfaced to compete for the hotel.

The Port terminated Smithart’s lease in July but kept him in charge, trying to evict him but not close the hotel. In an executive session discussion that later spilled out at a public meeting, Port commissioners and Executive Director Jim Knight talked about their consensus to go with Hollander. But as staff developed an agreement, the Port Commission voted to open the process back up to more suitors.

Sonpatki’s lawyer, Colin

Hunter, has repeatedly stated Sonpatki’s offer to pay Smithart’s debts, a deal also extended by Orr and Trabucco. Koury said he spoke Tuesday with Hunter, who said he would recommend Sonpatki file suit against the Port if the agreed-upon transfer did not occur.

James Mulloy, owner of the Comfort Suites Columbia River in Astoria through Malbeco Holdings LLC, presented a similar short-term proposal from Hospitality Associates, a hotel management and development company with lodgings across the West. The group had several representa-

tives at the meeting Tuesday.

“I am certain, based on my experience, that our group can turn around the Riverwalk Inn, just like we did with the Comfort Suites,” said Mulloy, who bought the Comfort Suites in bankruptcy court in 2013 and fixed it up.

Preferred choice backs away

Hollander, a well-connected hotelier from Bellingham, Wash., presented last week on his vision to develop the hotel, bring a Marriott franchise to Astoria and develop the surrounding neighborhood, including a lease on vacant land

near the Maritime Memorial. Executive Director Jim Knight has said Hollander wants multiple hotels in Astoria.

Hollander said he was not willing to compete in the open bidding process the Port staff is developing, although Koury mentioned Tuesday Hollander might still be interested in a long-term agreement.

The Port Commission voted 4-0 to proceed with a short-term agreement with Orr and Trabucco. Commissioner Stephen Fulton, whose sister is married to Orr, recused himself from the discussion and the vote.

Fire: ‘I think everyone knew what was coming’

Continued from Page 1A

to protect homes, allowing other resources to respond to the wildfire in the grassland.

4:45 a.m.: Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer scouts the fire.

“Visibility dropped from several hundred yards to about zero real quick,” he said. “I’ve never seen fire behavior like this before.”

5:12 a.m.: Rynearson receives notice from firefighters near the northern part of the blaze that embers are hitting grassland areas south of Prairie City. He decides to wake city residents and alert them to what’s happening.

An ember storm has ignited grassland south of town, and the fire is advancing quickly toward Prairie City.



Smoke blanketed Prairie City Saturday as fire approached. Firefighters were able to stop it 1.5 miles from town.

5:20 a.m.: Rynearson calls dispatch from his home and orders the city’s siren to begin ringing. The siren goes off immediately, and Rynearson orders the alarm to cycle several more times.

“I wanted everyone to be

wide awake,” he said.

Within five minutes, mutual aid sirens in nearby cities, including John Day and Canyon City, are also going off, alerting local volunteer firefighters to what’s happening. They begin to rush toward Prairie City.

“We started waking up state, volunteer and our own resources to try to get them out there quickly,” said Jeff Surber, a Great Basin Incident Management Team operations section chief.

Prairie City resident Tammy Winton heard the siren.

“As soon as I heard the fire alarm, I jumped out of bed, shaking, and grabbed up the kids,” she said. “I left my money, wallet and everything else in the house and just got the kids and ran.”

“You could feel the heat of the fire and smell the smoke,” said Pat Shull, whose home is at the very southern edge of Prairie City. “You could feel it closing in.”

5: 30 a.m.: Palmer has already begun ordering parts of Prairie City to be evacuated, and the rest of town is on a Level 2

“be ready to leave at a moment’s notice” order.

Palmer said the evacuation was orderly.

“Neighbors helped neighbors. I think everyone knew what was coming.”

5: 45 a.m.: Local firefighters begin assisting Great Basin night shift resources that are battling the fire.

5:50 to 6 a.m.: The firefighters’ morning shift-change briefing starts early, and additional crew members from base camp in John Day skip breakfast and head toward Prairie City.

A convoy of evacuated Prairie City residents makes its way west, as firefighters stream east into the city.

7 a.m.: By this time, a large amount of resources, including volunteer firefighters from nearby cities, are on the front lines,

battling hard to save the town.

Nervous residents on a Level 2 evacuation order prepare for the signal to leave immediately.

“I have one foot out the door. I’m ready to go if they tell me to,” said local resident Steve Smith.

10 a.m.: Rynearson is confident firefighters have blunted the fire’s advance on Prairie City. He pulls local resources in for lunch and a briefing at 11:30 a.m. and then sends four units back out to assist in creating a safety zone for the town.

4 p.m.: Rynearson and Palmer begin notifying residents they can return to their homes, and the entire city is placed on a Level 2 evacuation order.

Evacuation Level 2 is expected to remain in Prairie City until the fire is out, possibly until the first snow falls.

LNG: Army Corps has held easement to deposit since 1957

Continued from Page 1A

The energy company sued the Army Corps in federal court last year, alleging the Army Corps had no right to the land beneath the water on the Skipanon Peninsula. The company also wanted the court to find that the company had the right to access the

property for the terminal.

Judge Acosta, the magistrate judge, ruled in July that Oregon LNG’s lawsuit came outside the 12-year statute of limitations to bring such a claim under federal law.

In property title disputes, the federal statute of limitations starts to run when a complainant knew or should

have known that the United States claimed an interest.

The Army Corps has held the easement to deposit dredge spoils since 1957 but has not deposited spoils since 1992. The judge found that the state and the Port of Astoria — which has leased the property to Oregon LNG since 2004 — knew or should

have known of the easement.

But Oregon LNG told the court that the company had not been aware of the Army Corps interest in the property until a 2009 interagency meeting.

In the energy company’s motion to amend the complaint, filed in August, the company alleges the Army Corps either abandoned or

apparently abandoned a claim on the property until 2009, restarting the 12-year statute of limitations to bring a legal claim.

Other arguments

Opponents will also likely contend that Clatsop County’s refusal in 2013 to grant a permit for a portion of the pipe-

line is also fatal to the project. The state Land Use Board of Appeals upheld the county’s decision earlier this year.

Oregon LNG has countered that it does not need the local approval, since the federal government — and the state — has primary oversight responsibility over liquefied natural gas projects.

Conversation

Good food

Inspiration



From dirt to delicious:

Farms, produce, markets

Teresa Retzlaff

September 15



When the media becomes the story

Nigel Duara

October 15



Outlook for the Oregon Economy in 2016

Joe Cortright

November 3



Understanding the value of sacred stories or mythologies

Tricia Gates Brown

February 18



Recent shrinking of Washington park glaciers:

What does it mean?

Jon Riedel

March 15



The art of being a working artist

Two local artists talk about their painting and the business of art

Eric Weigardt and Darren Orange

April 28th

2015-2016

OUR 26th SEASON

ColumbiaForum

FOR RESERVATION OR TO JOIN COLUMBIA FORUM, RECEIVE OUR SCHEDULE OR SPEAKER INFORMATION VIA EMAIL, OR FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Holly Larkins at 503.325.3211 ext. 227 or forum@dailyastorian.com

• Events are held at CMH Community Center, in Astoria

• Become a member and receive priority for the 2015 -2016 season

• Dinner charge for members \$25, for non-members \$35

Columbia Forum is sponsored by:

• The Daily Astorian • Cannery Pier Hotel • OSU Seafood Laboratory

clatsop community college presents its 2nd annual

Conference on

extraordinary living



Lunch provided.

Live Life to the Fullest

Saturday, Sept. 12, 2015, 8:30am-4pm

Clatsop Community College, Columbia Hall, Rm 219

Keynote address by Mac Burns of the Oregon Film Museum

“Hey Doc—What’s Up?” Q&A with Drs. Cosmina Popa and Robert Wayne

13 Informative Breakout Sessions:

• Travel – tips & information

• Genealogy

• Hiking and an introduction to National Parks

• Art, music and theater

• Transitioning to retirement

• Healthy mind/healthy body

• Know your foods/food for nutrition

• What is timebanking?

• Opportunities for education & community service

• Emergency/disaster preparedness

• Alternative medicine

• Starting your own business or a second career

• Facebook – to friend or not to friend

Register by Sept. 7

Call 503-894-0187 or email Robert McClelland at rmcclelland@clatsopcc.edu











Clatsop Community College is an affirmative action, equal opportunity institution. ADA Accessible.