

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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Bringing the dead to life

Talking Tombstones does it again

McAndrew Burns brought Talking Tombstones to the Clatsop County Historical Society from Caldwell, Kansas, where he saw it in 1995.

The idea is that actors play an incarnation of the deceased, in area cemeteries. The concept is perfectly suited to the long and storied history of this place. If you have read *Astorians: Eccentric and Extraordinary*, which our company published in 2010, you know that our graveyards are a font of great literature. Or theater in this case.

Sunday marked the 12th Talking Tombstones event. At Clatsop Plains Pioneer Cemetery, actors David Reid, Matt Hensley and others played characters ranging from a poet known as “the Bard of Clatsop” to an Astoria mayor who was removed from office and fought his way back into office to a woman whose son, a judge, was gunned down on Commercial Street.

This is great entertainment. It also is a healthy link to bi-

ography, as well as the way Americans once regarded cemeteries and the dead.

In speaking about biography, the late Elizabeth Crownhart Vaughan, an Oregon historian, said that to speak of the dead is to bring them back to life. That was an element in the rural cemetery movement, which was infused with the transcendental movement of the 19th century and its metaphysical meaning. As Burns told Erick Bengel, cemeteries in decades long past were places of picnicking and reminiscing.

That is exactly the great thing about Talking Tombstones. In an era driven by technology — when too often we carry the delusion that we live beyond the reach of history, this event reminds us of the great humanity that walked the streets of our towns long before we arrived.

Is this a game changer for salmon?

Iconic Northwest species enters our waters

There was fascinating news last week about southern resident killer whales that have an extensive connection to the Columbia River. These scientific findings could have a major impact on salmon management and the hydroelectric system.

For many years there were occasional reports of orcas being seen by fishermen working offshore in the Columbia River plume. Starting in 2013, a satellite-tracking program showed how they also range up and down the outer coast. They appear to bide their time, waiting for returning Chinook salmon to begin congregating near the Columbia’s mouth.

Last week’s most attention-grabbing orca news involved a different new technology — use of a camera drone this fall to conduct a thorough survey of the J, K and L pods in Washington’s Puget Sound. Photos reveal the orcas’ everyday behavior, without the drone appearing to disturb them in any way. The 82 famous killer whales are doing very well, with new 2015 calves fattening and additional females showing signs of pregnancy. This is extraordinarily promising news for animals that are counted among the eight most endangered species in the U.S.

This comes in a year of healthy Chinook salmon runs, especially to the Columbia-Snake system. The annual count is now above 1.3 million returnees to Bonneville Dam. Unlike transient killer whales that range around the North Pacific hunting

smaller marine mammals, the Puget Sound orcas are strictly fish-eaters, strongly preferring Chinook. This abundant year has clearly set off an enthusiastic round of baby-making.

An unfortunate fact of life for orcas — and everything else that relies on salmon — is that runs fluctuate. This year’s extreme Pacific Northwest drought and the warm El Niño waters now dominating the Pacific may mean a sharp decline in salmon two to four years from now.

A thorough report by *The Seattle Times* (www.tinyurl.com/TimesOrcaStory) explores the Puget Sound orcas’ strong Columbia River connection. This news is bringing a renewed interest in returning the Snake River to a natural-flow regime, something that would require bypassing four hydroelectric dams. This has been a nonstarter for regional politicians for years. But the amazing popularity of orcas and stringent federal legal protections conferred on them could be a game-changer.

While dam removal could eventually enhance salmon runs, the orca-Columbia connection could also bring additional fishing restrictions, notably in years when salmon are in short supply.

It is anybody’s guess how all this orca news will balance out for local fishermen. But it’s still fun knowing our local waters play such a key part in the lives of this iconic Northwest species. We look forward to many more sightings this winter and next spring.

Who will save us when the big one hits?

How scared are you? If “The Next Really Big One” in *The New Yorker* and “Unprepared” on Oregon Public Broadcasting, haven’t worked your nerves, please check your pulse.

An overdue natural disaster could devastate our region — if the quake doesn’t get you, the tsunami will.

While we’ve been trying to decide whether we’re living with Chicken Little or *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, it really doesn’t matter. We need the answer to, “If the worst happens, where do we turn?”

That’s where, state officials say, the Cascadia Playbook comes in.

While it’s not exactly easy reading — the operational plan “doesn’t have any narrative, any context, a plan or format,” said Laurie Holein, deputy director of the Oregon Office of Emergency Management — the playbook is touted as the state and federal government’s go-to document should the earth begin to move.

But how valuable is it really? State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, says it won’t make much of a difference if we’re not prepared at the local level.

“I think there’s more to meeting this threat than putting up little signs saying, ‘We’re tsunami ready,’” she said. “It’s OK in a high-level document to say we take care of our disabled, but what’s the practical reality for getting some person who weighs 300 pounds down from five stories?”

The Playbook

In 2014, state’s Adjutant Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson of the Oregon Office of Emergency Management had a very good idea: a tool to demystify “the very large mountain of things: that needed to be coordinated,” as described by Holein. “Break it down with all the different players.”

The document would detail how state officials should respond in the first 14 days following a magnitude 9.0 Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake and tsunami off the West Coast.

The playbook is “a quick reference guide to what things need to be done,” Holein said. “It’s kind of like an aviator’s checklist before he fires up the engine: what things need to make sure they’re getting done, check the fuel, check, have you done that with that gauge, check.”

Hokanson proposed the playbook to former Gov. Jon Kitzhaber and the first Cascadia Playbook was born in 2014.

Gov. Kate Brown liked the plan, too, and this summer the Office of Emergency Management hailed the release of the updated document. The new Playbook, released with some fanfare for an agency usually in the shadows,

INITIAL RESPONSE IN THE EVENT OF DISASTERS

Play 1: Notification, activation and authorities
Play 2: Life safety
Play 3: Damage assessment
Play 4: Mass Care and Sheltering
Play 5: Logistics and Resource

Management
Play 6: Planning and Prioritization
Play 7: Emergency Repairs
Play 8: Outside Assistance
Play 9: Begin Recovery

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

By
 R.J.
 MARX



provides a checklist for state officials based on federal, state and local emergency response plans, which will also be carried out during the earthquake and tsunami.

This is not for the faint of heart.

The Playbook considers the “worst disasters we would ever face in the state of Oregon,” she said.

A Cascadia Subduction earthquake — a full eruption of the 700-mile subduction zone — would be “absolutely the worst event we would face here,” Holein said. “We wrote it with that disaster in mind and tried to do a very comprehensive inventory of what kind of things are going to be

The only thing everyone seems to recognize now is the risk.

required.”

There could be 25,000 fatalities, more than 10,000 buildings destroyed and damaged; 10,000 or more people in need of shelter and \$50 billion in economic losses.

Actions list how and when to trigger a federal disaster declaration, collect bodies, transport supplies, or provide help in areas destroyed by the quake. Shelter, feeding, medical care, animal care — all are critical elements.

All that and a bag of chips?

But Johnson said this week she doesn’t quite see it as the be all and end all of emergency preparedness.

“No, I’m not happy with the measures the state has taken,” she said. “We have too many agencies acting unilaterally. There is not a consistent coordination. It appears that the planning is episodic.”

Johnson added the Legislature tried to rectify this in the last session, with a resilience person in Gov. Kate Brown’s office, responsible directly to the governor.

Many cities along the coast “have incredibly engaged constituents that have done a lot of forward-looking

work,” Johnson said. “There are others that have done less so. While we have these siloed plans, we don’t have, in my view, a consistent expectation for what makes communities resilient.”

She said she’s seen the Cascadia Playbook. “I was up at Camp Rilea when Gov. Kitzhaber rolled it out,” Johnson said. “I don’t want to criticize somebody else’s work product, but I don’t know how a high-level planning document translates into on-the-ground action.”

“I think there’s a lot more to be done on the ground,” she added.

State money is available for state retrofits for public buildings she said, but in some cases these retrofits make no sense — for example, when a school or firehouse is in a tsunami zone. That’s going to be more complicated,” Johnson said. “If you take Seaside as an example, they didn’t have site control when they went out for their school bond.”

In order to get site control, Seaside needs to go outside the city’s urban-growth boundary. “Expanding any urban-growth boundary is incredibly complicated,” Johnson said, evidenced by the long, well-attended and voluminously documented meetings held in Seaside over past months.

Get your go-bag

All these tsunami pieces seem to have a common thread, sort of like the finales of *The Titanic* or *The Towering Inferno*.

Full disclosure: I don’t even own a go-bag. But I am purchasing flashlights, putting meds and tools in one place, and reviewing routes should the ground shake.

“We’re really glad the public is paying attention to the topic right now,” Holein said. “We want them to know we are working very diligently in our field to make sure we are recognizing and addressing the needs of these type of event, and there’s a call to action for citizens, as well. They need to realize this threat exists and they need to be prepared on their own to be resilient for at least two weeks.”

The only thing everyone seems to recognize now is the risk.

“If residents live close to the coastal area, they need to be very aware, and if they happen to be someone near the shoreline, if and when there is that quaking, they need to get to higher ground as soon as possible,” Holein said “They may have 10 to 15 minutes to get to higher ground. Everything else can be replaced — but lives can’t.”

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

Open forum

Lost in translation

Thanks for the editorial “Do a more rigorous job” (*The Daily Astorian*, Oct. 20) calling for legislators to do a more rigorous job of holding state agencies accountable.

If something was lost in translation in my Oct. 9 radio broadcast of “This Week With Oregon State Sen. Betsy Johnson,” please be assured I am not suggesting that citizens be called upon to act as watchdogs. The citizens do enough already. As it is, it seems that everybody in the state of Oregon is already on a task force. We don’t need any more task forces or citizen committees.

My proposal is for a Legislative Committee on Accountability, established by statute, and dedicated to watch-dogging how agencies are performing. This committee would be comprised of equal numbers of Democratic and Republican legislators. Most importantly, it would decide which state programs to audit.

This is meant as no criticism against the Secretary of State, a partisan office that currently handles audits. It’s more appropriate that the bipartisan legislature — the people’s branch of the government — should make the policy decisions about where audits are directed.

Only a couple of years ago, our citizens suffered the costly failure of Cover Oregon. Several of my legislative colleagues felt we had been deceived about where the money was spent and how the project was going.

After this past 2015 legislative session, when similar questions were raised about other programs, Oregonians are right to question whether law-

makers have learned anything. We can’t keep making the same mistakes.

As the editorial points out, we legislators need to exercise our power to ensure state agencies are providing services they are paid to. We cannot sit helplessly in hearing rooms, trying to read between the lines of testimony that may not be truthful.

SEN. BETSY JOHNSON
 Salem

Why the strikes?

In response to the article “Proposal seeks to try and keep port open during labor disputes” (*The Daily Astorian*, Oct. 16): This article was excellent in laying out all the problems and costs related to the strike for businesses.

What I find strange whenever this subject is discussed — whether it be on TV, the newspapers or the web — is that they always seem to fail to mention why the workers are striking. Balanced reporting, in my view, would require that.

We are left with no explanation about whether the workers could support their families on their salaries, if they have adequate medical coverage for on the job injuries, or whatever their side of the problem is.

JEAN HOOGE
 Astoria

Turn into Seaside?

Open letter to the Gearhart City Council: I am not in Gearhart resident, but have lived in Gearhart for 27 years, and fought the original use of vacation rentals in residential zoning here. I would like to make a few observations as you set out on this journey.

Residential zoning was virtually eliminated by this ordinance. Every neighborhood is now a motel zone. Those of us who live here year-round no longer know who our neighbors will be from week to week. Some are not very nice.

The people who were at the forefront of this venture were primarily realtors or vacation home owners. Realtors saw that they could price a home about on third higher if it was promoted as a “potential vacation rental.” The asking price (and their commissions) grew exponentially. Almost all homes that had previously been long-term rentals disappeared. There are over 200 vacation rentals on the books in Seaside now. This contributed heavily to the crisis in available housing that we now face.

The only part of the so-called ordinance that Seaside adopted that can be enforced is the noise ordinance. No one at city hall is available to come out during any weekend to enforce it. The police, who are all residents have, and it is hard to ask them to leave their regular duties to come have a car moved out of your driveway, or cool the jets on the party next door.

Residents here actually became afraid to approach some vacation rental “guests” because of their volatility when confronted. Even the requirement of an off-site manager, who is no more than 15 minutes away, is not enough in some cases.

Look at who is asking you to make this change to your town. Follow the money. Should you enact an ordinance, do you have the staff to enforce it? What liability is the city accepting for the safety of visitors to vacation rentals? The time and expense involved in inspecting and approving applications for licensing are high. Is Gearhart willing to accept this cost, to placate a fraction of its population?

Please look carefully at what you would be getting yourselves into. All it did here in Seaside was make a bundle for those who originally promoted it. Residents suffered the consequences. We still do. You have a wonderful town, known for its liveability. Do you really want to turn it into Seaside?

SANDY REA
 Seaside