

Game: 20,000 pounds of fish, game are processed each year

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The aggressive elk in Hammond that Warwick shot and killed in October also made its way to the food bank. Warwick has to decide if the meat is fit for human consumption. The food bank only accepts meat from wildlife officials. Hunters can not directly bring in their kills.

No roadkill accepted

In addition, no roadkill is accepted by the food bank. Martin said the food bank does not want to risk serving roadkill that may be damaged or sitting out for too long. For safety and liability reasons, the donated meat is processed as soon as possible. To stretch the meat further, it is ground rather than turned into steaks. Oregon State Police used to donate confiscated meat to the Tillamook County Jail. Once the local food bank opened its distribution center in 2010, it became possible to keep the meat within the county. The partnership started in 2011.

Over the past few years, a variety of fish and game has come through the food bank. Fish species have included salmon, tuna, steelhead, halibut, rockfish, cod, shellfish and shark. Animals have included elk, deer, venison and bear. An average of 20,000 pounds of fish and game are processed each year. “My preference is for it to



Food Bank Director Marlin Martin cuts up elk meat provided through a partnership with Oregon State Police.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

go back to the community,” Warwick said.

Cycle of life

Warwick calls the part-

nership mutually beneficial. Wildlife officials need a place to take the confiscated meat, and the food bank is able to provide fresh meat to

local food pantries and meal sites.

Having volunteers who are willing to butcher the game, and open the distribution cen-

ter at all hours for the wildlife officials, is a key to the success of the program, Martin said.

Providing fresh game

would otherwise be too expensive for the food bank.

“If we had to pay to process it, we couldn’t afford it,” Martin said.

Smithart: He says he fully intends to pay the city back

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Marquis said his office needs to prove Smithart never intended to pay the city back to determine whether criminal charges are warranted. Simply falling behind on taxes, he said, is not a criminal offense. “I hope within another week to 10 days we can decide whether there’s enough to go forward,” Marquis said Tuesday. Smithart, who still runs the Arc Arcade in downtown Astoria, said he fully intends to pay the city back every cent he owes. He said he has proposed repayment plans within his limited means after losing

everything invested in the hotel and having to take a second job. In September, after the Port installed Hospitality Ventures, Smithart signed an agreement with the company that provided him \$20,000 to ensure a smooth transition. The agreement also stipulates that if Hospitality Ventures gets a lease of at least seven years on the hotel, it will pay the city up to \$100,000. Trabucco said Tuesday the deal still stands.

Port debt murkier

Smithart contends the Port did not allow him to pay off his debt through a lease

transfer. He said he left everything he invested in the business when the Port signed the hotel over to Hospitality Ventures. He contends his loss is bigger than the Port’s, adding he is contemplating litigation. The Port Commission voted in June to allow him to transfer his lease to the Param Hotel Group, which operates about 10 budget hotels in and around the Portland metro area and had been trying to buy Smithart out of the hotel for more



Brad Smithart

than a year. But the transfer never happened, and the Port instead terminated Smithart’s lease in July and kept him on as an interim operator until the Port Commission voted to install Hospitality Ventures in September while it creates a request for proposals for a long-term operator. Param, whose representatives Ganesh Sonpaki and lawyer Colin Hunter had repeatedly offered to pay off Smithart’s debts in exchange for the remaining two years

and a five-year extension on his lease, filed suit against the Port, Executive Director Jim Knight, Trabucco and Orr earlier this month. The company alleges the Port broke the agreement to transfer the lease without any explanation and showed bias toward Hospitality Ventures and Orr, whose brother-in-law is Port Commissioner Stephen Fulton. Fulton offhandedly mentioned the Port’s intent to sue Smithart during a budget meeting last week. Knight said after the meeting he does not know where Fulton got that notion. Knight said the Port is exploring what time-

line and costs may be entailed in suing Smithart. “I’m hesitant to move forward with that until we get some resolution about the current operator of the Riverwalk Inn,” Knight said, adding Param’s suit also throws a wrench into any potential action against Smithart. The Port Commission was scheduled last week to finalize and send out a request for proposals for the long-term operation of the hotel, but took the item off the agenda. Knight said the Port wants to consult with its attorneys regarding Param’s lawsuit before trying to find a long-term hotel operator.

Center: So far, the shelter hasn’t had to reject or eject anyone

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United Methodist Church, the new location of the Astoria Warming Center. For the sixth straight night this season, the warming center welcomed the homeless: veterans, addicts, the mentally ill, young couples, older disabled folks, unemployed seasonal workers, the chronically homeless and the newly unhoused. Last year — the warming center’s first year — the shelter operated out of the Astoria Senior Center, opening Christmas week and closing in March. But with the senior center under renovation, the warming center has moved into the church — and just in time for a November cold snap. The free shelter opens at night when the temperature is expected to dip below 40, or the weather to turn severe. The tentative closure date is March 15. “There are a number of homeless people that could die of hypothermia,” Karin Temple, a warming shelter founder and volunteer, said. Most guests are not merely transients, she said, but long-term residents without a residence. A few are trying to hold down a job or actively searching for one. “These are people that our society has dropped. They are mostly traumatized. They are not the romantic hobo that loves it,” she said. “This is bottom-line survival stuff. And many of them — all of them — need counseling. Many of them need meds; there are mental issues here with almost every one of them.”

Overnight stay

At 8 p.m., the guests shuffled in from the cold — hun-



Astoria City Councilor Drew Herzig serves up soup in the kitchen of the warming center.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

gry, weary and wrapped in layers of winter clothing. Several carried backpacks and checked their weapons (mostly knives) at the reception desk. Minutes later, they had gathered around a table, slurping tomato bisque and reaching for dinner rolls piled in a large bowl, near cartons of apple juice and containers of cupcakes. Their bellies filling and body heat returning, they talked and laughed and bonded, helping themselves to seconds and thirds of the only substantial meal many of them had eaten that day. The rows of lights went

off, one by one, as each guest claimed a vinyl-covered camper pad and arranged his or her bedding. Most men slept in the main room, while women and couples slept in the adjacent annex. Three guests, who arrived solely for the late dinner, quietly left. A lamp remained turned on through the night, a dim orange glow near the restrooms. Meanwhile, volunteers, working in shifts, kept watch over the guests — and over the double doors, lest someone else turn up needing safety and warmth. If not for the warming center, many of the guests would be sleeping in tents or under

tarps, in the woods or in the city, at risk of being beaten or robbed. “Some of them have said they never sleep soundly out there because they’re always afraid. I mean, it’s a feral community out there. We all prey on each other,” said Astoria City Councilor Drew Herzig, who co-founded the warming center. “This may be their only sound sleep.” In the morning, the guests ate instant oatmeal and pastries. At 8 a.m., they left with snacks in hand. Judy Hollingsworth, a volunteer and the church office manager, said, “I don’t know what people say a ‘calling’ is,

but it just felt like a heart pull, to be associated with this.” **Cozy quarters** The warming center recently signed a three-year memorandum of understanding with the church, which offers less space than the senior center — though no one has complained about the cozier quarters, Herzig said. Already, the number of overnight guests is approaching capacity, which Herzig pegs between 24 and 26. “We can probably cram a few more in,” he said. At the senior center, volunteers never saw more than 18 visitors per night. The warming center is

a “low-barrier” shelter — meaning, they keep admission requirements to a minimum: If a person can walk in, agree to the house rules and not cause disruptions, he or she can stay. So far, the shelter hasn’t had cause to reject or eject anyone, and has only called 911 once, for a medical emergency. Soon, the center will install a washer and dryer. The building inspector has approved designs for a shower in the church; what’s needed, however, is the money to build it. From the food to the space, the warming center runs on donations. **“Just a Band-Aid”** Though housed in a church, the shelter is an entirely secular operation, Herzig said. Stephen Thiel — a homeless traveler with AIDS and waiting for housing to open up in Clatsop County — said he liked the warming center, in part, because it’s clean, and because “they’re not pushing religion down your throat.” He added that — though it’s nice to wind down with food and wake up to food — he wishes the shelter opened a tad earlier, if only so his 3-year-old service dog, Dallas, can escape the chill sooner. Noting the massive gaps in social services throughout the county, Herzig said the warming center is an example of “the community taking care of the community.” “To me, it’s just a moral imperative,” Temple added. However, “it’s only a Band-Aid. We need more. We need a drop-in center for daytime. When we send them out at 8 in the morning, I feel awful. It’s still cold out there.”