

AN APPRECIATION

Wendy was the bright star in many hearts

IMPRESSIONS

By
NANCY MCCARTHY



It seems so right that the first time I met Wendy Richardson it was to talk to her about a community event that she was organizing.

I was a freelance writer in 2008, assigned to write a story for the Coast River Business Journal about "Where the Stars Play," a concert series held in the summer at Quatat Park in Seaside. Wendy had organized it for several years on behalf of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District. It was designed to draw people downtown and into local businesses.

Wendy generously gave her time to share with me her enthusiasm for the event, which, she felt, benefited the community and gave mostly unknown bands some recognition and a little pocket money. We met in her small office next to Seaside Health Foods on Roosevelt Drive. She worked there as the sales representative for The Daily Astorian.

Little did we know that about three months later, I would start working in that same office as the South County reporter for The Daily Astorian and we would become fast and close friends.

Wendy's generosity, love for her community and desire to help others — even when it meant impinging on her own time or resources — are the qualities all of her friends are writing about this week on her Facebook page in her memory. Wendy died of a massive stroke Monday.

"Your friendship, generosity, kindness and wicked sense of humor have kept me afloat through sad times. You always knew the right thing to say, or when a hug was just what I needed," wrote Gretchen Fulop Darnell. "I fear Seaside will never be the same."

"The many lives you have touched, the many people who have been healed by your words! Thank you for your gift of love throughout the community," wrote Linda Smith.

"Thank you for all that you taught me, helped me through and shared with me! I am forever grateful for your love and wisdom," added Angela Fairless.

Every weekday morning for nearly seven years, until I retired last March, Wendy would come into my office for a quick chat. It would be our way of starting the day. We shared our personal trials and triumphs in those conversations and usually ended up laughing. She had many tribulations that dogged



The Daily Astorian advertising team in 2014. From left, Brandy Stewart, Wendy Richardson, Kimberly A. Flaigg, Laura Kaim, Lisa Cadonau, Betty Smith and Holly Larkins.



Wendy Richardson's last Facebook post to her page Dec. 19: "Beautiful rainbow over the house this morning. Thanks mom."

her throughout the time we worked together, problems that I'm pretty sure few people knew about because her smile and vivacity masked her stress.

In some ways, Wendy seemed naive about people, but her faith in them usually worked out. Like the time a stranger came into our office with some hard luck story. Wendy loaned the woman \$25 — money she couldn't spare at the time. The woman promised to pay her back, even though she was on her way out of town. A few months went by. But to my great surprise, the woman repaid the loan.

Wendy was always sheltering people under her wing, especially young people. Whenever we went to lunch together, there inevitably would be a person at the restaurant — a waitress or someone we would run into — who had either lived temporarily with Wendy's family or who had gone to school with one of Wendy's three children and who Wendy had somewhat "adopted."

Family was the dominant theme that ran through Wendy's life. She dearly loved her husband, Al, and her three chil-

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dren, Alix, Andie and Nick. But what impressed me so much was how she raised the kids to be thoughtful, creative, caring, educated adults. Two years ago, Wendy celebrated three graduations in the same month: Alix and Andie graduated from college and Nick graduated from Seaside High School. Nick is now attending Lane Community College in Eugene.

In this day, when there's so much talk about high school dropouts and the high cost of a college education, to have all three children graduating in the same month is quite a feat!

But her motherly instincts didn't end with her children. Wendy was the office "mother," too. When Seaside reporter Katherine Lacaze needed furniture for her baby, Wendy dug out her leftover furniture from her garage.

"You showed me how to sew a button onto my jacket," wrote Erick Bengel, former Cannon Beach reporter, on Wendy's Facebook page. "You shared your home-cooked meals with me. ... You counseled and consoled me during some of my darker days at the Gazette. And I always looked forward to our talks. I can't believe I don't have those to look forward to anymore."

"I just realized I still have the jumper cables she loaned me in my back seat," former Seaside reporter Louie Opatz wrote on Facebook. "Wendy was always so generous, gregarious and loving — and all those things so selflessly. She never did — and never would have — asked for those jumper cables back."

Wendy was the true spirit of the Seaside community, a tireless volunteer for the high school, the Seaside Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations. She would work full days at the office, then spend evenings and

weekends (and, during beach volleyball tournaments, early mornings) helping out in the community.

She taught me the true meaning of the phrase, "It takes a village. ..." She introduced me to this village of South County, to her friends and her family, and she made me feel comfortable here. There wasn't a Thanksgiving or Christmas that went by that she didn't invite me to share it with her and her family.

Maybe it is right, too, that we honor Wendy at Christmas. She and her mother ran the Christmas shop, 'Tis the Season in Cannon Beach for more than 20 years. Christmas was Wendy's favorite holiday.

She often talked about her mother, who died several years ago; Wendy missed her very much.

In a final Facebook post last weekend, Wendy showed a picture she had taken of a rainbow over the house that she and Al had moved into a few months ago. She adorned the house and its location near West Lake.

The rainbow seemed to symbolize that all was well, finally, in Wendy's life, and, as always, she wanted to share the happy moment.

"Beautiful rainbow over the house this morning," Wendy wrote. "Thanks, mom."

Nancy McCarthy is the retired Daily Astorian South County reporter and former editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.



Mark Lennihan/AP Photo

A jogger and bicyclist cross the Brooklyn Bridge in a heavy fog, Wednesday, in New York. A weather pattern partly linked with El Niño has turned winter upside-down across the U.S. during a week of heavy holiday travel, bringing spring-like warmth to the Northeast, a risk of tornadoes in the South and so much snow across the West that even skiing slopes have been overwhelmed.

Upside-down weather pattern across US linked to El Niño

The Associated Press

SEATTLE — Astrid Rau just baked 16 kinds of Christmas cookies, including a batch in the shape of snowflakes. But she's nevertheless having trouble getting in the holiday spirit, thanks to forecasts that have the temperature in her hometown of Paskasie, Pennsylvania, hitting 72 degrees on Thursday.

"I associate cold with Christmas," the 55-year-old says. "And if it's warm it just doesn't feel quite right to me."

A weather pattern partly linked with El Niño has turned winter upside-down across the U.S. during a week of heavy holiday travel, bringing spring-like warmth to the Northeast, a risk of tornadoes in the South and so much snow across the West that even skiing slopes have been overwhelmed.

In a reversal of a typical Christmas, forecasters expect New York to be in the mid-60s on the holiday — several degrees higher than Los Angeles.

The mild conditions have helped golf courses in New England do brisk business, but the pattern comes at a steep cost for ski resorts that have closed and for back-country skiers who confront avalanche risks. And like Rau, many Americans complain that it just doesn't feel like the holidays without a chill in the air.

"It's been a great snow season so far from the Rockies to the higher elevations in the Cascades and the northern Sierras, and it's been the total opposite on the East Coast," said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service.

Big parts of the county are basking in above-average temperatures, especially east of the Mississippi and across the Northern Plains. Record warmth was expected on Christmas Eve along the East Coast, Oravec said.

He laid the credit — or blame — with a strong El Niño pattern, the warming of surface waters in the Pacific Ocean near the equator. That's helped drive warm air west to east across the Lower 48 and kept colder air from the Arctic at bay, he said.

In the Pacific Northwest and California, the effects of El Niño haven't really hit yet. They're typically seen in January through March, and the heavy rains and snows in the region are probably not linked to the phenomenon, said Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond.

The winter in the Pacific Northwest is still predicted to be drier than normal, so the series of storms that dumped feet of snow in the Cascades this month and piled the snowpack back above normal, were helpful, he said.

Come summer, farmers and salmon alike will rely on that melting snow.

In Washington, authorities have closed the state's main east-west route, Interstate 90, over the Cascade Mountains repeatedly this week due to heavy snows and avalanche danger. Officials closed a sledding hill near Snoqualmie Pass on Tuesday because the storm kept the state Transportation Department from plowing the parking lot. On Sunday, a heavy storm closed Oregon's Mount Ashland Ski Area when it knocked out power.

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