

Veterans: Many of them rely on the van for transport

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issues as we get older, so it can be difficult,” Dick Lang, the Astoria DAV van coordinator, said. “Our turnover is higher than you might normally have.”

Lately, the Astoria service is down to six active drivers, many of whom make the journey more often than they would prefer, sometimes twice a week, Lang said. Ideally, he would keep a roster of 11 active drivers, each available one to four days a month.

“We have difficulty maintaining enough drivers so we can adequately cover the schedule without burning people out,” Jerry Alderman, a van driver, said in an email.

Wounds

From one-shot riders to frequent flyers, most of the veterans in the Astoria DAV van travel to the Portland VA Medical Center, the main veteran health hub in the region.

And the Astoria van isn't alone: In the morning, vans coming from Albany; Bend; Eugene; Florence; Salem; The Dalles; Tillamook; Yamhill; and Longview, Washington, also converge on the center, dropping off veterans making use of their medical benefits.

“I'd just ask you to sit in the lobby for a few minutes and just watch all the veterans going by, and you can tell that some of them have been wounded,” Lang said.

Not every wound is visible. Canes, crutches and walkers abound, but many conditions simply don't attract notice, like deafness and chronic heart problems — and, of course, mental illness.

“I've always felt that the people who are responsible for sending our young people off to war should watch that flow



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Michael Murphy, a veteran who served in the U.S. Army, leaves the Disabled American Veterans van at his dropoff point in St. Helens on Wednesday.

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Dwight Faylor

retired U.S. Marine who lives in Chinook, Wash.

of humanity from so many conflicts pass through that VA lobby for a day,” Alderman said.

Michael Murphy — a veteran of the U.S. Army who began his service in the 1970s and was “medically retired” from active duty in 2009 — has relied on DAV transportation to Portland and Vancouver for more than three years.

“It’s (for) a variety of things — everything from vision care to cardio,” said Murphy, of St. Helens. “The things I’m cared for happened when I was in the military.”

Though many riders receive treatment for service-related injuries and disabilities, some use their medical benefits for serious conditions like diabetes.

“We don’t know what they’re being treated for, and we don’t need to know,” Lang said.

As long as the veteran has a VA medical appointment and can climb aboard the van unassisted, he or she may hitch a ride.

Dwight Faylor — who retired from the U.S. Marine Corps, served in the Korean and Vietnam wars and was part of a detachment unit that protected President Dwight Eisenhower at Camp David — takes the Astoria DAV van into Portland about every three months. His appointments are mainly for eye and dental checkups, but he also gets examined because he took a bullet and was exposed to Agent Orange in

Vietnam, he said.

“The van is a great thing. It’s probably the greatest thing that we have around here,” said Faylor, who lives in Chinook, Washington. “We don’t have a bus that can get us there, and a lot of us are getting old. Hell, I’m 86 years old; I don’t want to be driving that (distance).”

‘Doing my duty’

So far, the Astoria DAV van driver shortage hasn’t created interruptions in rides, but such a scenario is not inconceivable.

“These guys are just so great, they’ll fill in,” Lang said. “But I can’t let that go on for very long. I’m going to start losing drivers from fatigue, and they’ll get sick from doing it too much.”



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Kenneth Lehman, right, a driver of the Disabled Veterans of American van, waits in the parking lot across from Burger King for passengers Wednesday morning.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
The Disabled American Veterans van sits outside the Veterans Affairs Medical Center.

Another issue is that many veterans have trouble getting to the pickup points for the Astoria DAV van, he said. “Or — even more difficult to swallow — is if we have a veteran in Svensen (on Highway 30) that wants to ride the van, and we have a veteran in Elsie (on Highway 26) that needs to ride the van on the same day; we can’t do both.”

Drivers volunteering for the Sunset Empire Transportation District can pick up veterans in outlying areas and bring them to the Astoria DAV van, to Camp Rilea or to meet with

their veteran service officer.

“If you don’t take care of your veterans you’re not going to get good volunteers. That simple,” Lang said.

Ken Lehman, the Astoria DAV’s most senior driver, has been shuttling veterans to and from the Portland area for eight years. During the Korean War, Lehman was found “physically unfit” for duty.

“So I’m doing my duty now,” he said.

For information on becoming a driver, contact Lang at AstoriaDAVvan@charter.net or at 503-298-8757.

LNG: Riverkeeper’s conservation director called the company’s behavior ‘bizarre’

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The government agency has held the easement since 1957 but hasn’t used the site to deposit dredging spoils since 1992.

New filing

Oregon LNG states that the new filing is “responsive to the findings and recommendations” by Magistrate Judge John V. Acosta, who ruled against Oregon LNG last month in a lawsuit the company filed against the Army Corps. The company sought to prove that the Corps had effectively abandoned the easement property, which covers land Oregon LNG has leased from the Port of Astoria since 2004.

Acosta wrote that Oregon LNG “did not clearly manifest its intent to abandon its interest in the subject property,” and that the supporting documentation did not come from a person of appropriate authority, a criteria that the company now claims it has satisfied.

Before Acosta’s decision could be signed by a federal district court judge, Oregon LNG nixed the case, which Acosta dismissed “without prejudice” — a judgment that allowed Oregon LNG to take another shot at the “abandonment” approach.

In August, Acosta dismissed the company’s first complaint against the Corps — a complaint based on the claim that the Corps had no

right to the land beneath the water where the proposed terminal would be built. But the statute of limitations to bring that claim under federal law had long expired, so the company shifted emphasis to the new claim that the Corps abandoned interest in the easement property.

‘Bizarre’

The Army Corps could not immediately be reached for comment, but Columbia Riverkeeper — a Hood River-based environmental group opposing Oregon LNG’s \$6 billion terminal and pipeline project — was taken aback by the company’s decision to relitigate the case.

Miles Johnson, a clean water attorney for the environmental group, said the company’s arguments in the new filing are “almost exactly the arguments that Oregon LNG tried to make in the previous case which Judge Acosta dismissed as ‘substantively futile.’”

“I don’t know quite what Oregon LNG is driving at,” he said.

Dan Serres, the group’s conservation director, called the company’s behavior “bizarre.”

“I mean, they’ve received two negative opinions from a magistrate judge, and one from (a federal district court) judge, and they’re still pushing this dead-end issue,” Serres said. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

Trial: ‘It is not a quick turnaround’



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Jessica Smith, left, appears for a hearing alongside her attorneys Lynne Morgan, center, and William Falls, right, at the Clatsop County Courthouse on Thursday. Smith is charged with aggravated murder and attempted aggravated murder in the death of her 2-year-old and cutting the throat of her teenage daughter in Cannon Beach.



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian
Prosecuting attorney Josh Marquis speaks during a hearing for Jessica Smith on Thursday.

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Morgan claims Smith does not appear to have a rational understanding of the proceedings against her. Her mental disability prevents her from rationally comprehending the evidence against her and impairs her ability to make a reasoned choice among the possible alternatives presented in the case.

“In our view, Ms. Smith is not competent to proceed,” Morgan said. Smith, an inmate in Tillamook County Jail, has met with the defense’s psychiatrist on multiple occasions.

In her meeting with the state’s psychologist last month, District Attorney Josh Marquis said, the psychologist saw nothing during the interaction that would indicate Smith is unable to either understand the proceedings or unable to assist her attorneys.

“The only real mental deficit she discussed was her claim that she had little or no memory of the events of July 31, 2014,” Marquis wrote.

Smith is charged with aggravated murder and attempted aggravated murder for allegedly drugging and murdering her daughter, Isabella Smith, 2, and attempting to kill her older daughter, Alana Smith, then 13, in a Cannon Beach hotel July 31, 2014.

Alana Smith is living her with father in Washington state.

If the court agrees that Smith needs to be evaluated, Matyas said, sending her to the Oregon State Hospital could take 60 days, delaying the criminal case.

“It is not a quick turnaround,” she said.

Matyas would prefer to have Smith evaluated by a psychiatrist or psychologist already involved in the case, or agreed upon by both parties. She also mentioned having Smith evaluated locally, if resources are available in the county.

Apartments: School district, Krueger would together on walking paths

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“If it’s affordable housing for people to live here, I think it’s great,” said Astoria Superintendent Craig Hoppes, noting the district’s falling enrollment over the years.

The school district and

Krueger would work collaboratively on walking paths between the apartments and the school, which is located to the south of the proposed complex.

Krueger said he started looking this winter into the property, which was the site of

a proposed 36-lot subdivision preliminarily approved in July by the Planning Commission.

Jennifer Bunch, a senior planner with Clatsop County, said she couldn’t talk specifically about Krueger’s current project, as she has not yet received an application. She said

the property is currently zoned single-family residential and in need of a zoning change.

“I like to present the general public with an affordable, clean place to stay,” said Krueger, who also built the Edgewater at Mill Pond apartments in Uppertown and

the Yacht Club Apartments at the northern end of the Old Youngs Bay Bridge.

Krueger ran into opposition from neighbors while looking into apartments on the two city blocks of the former Central School in Astoria, but said there is still the possibility he

could build something there.

City planners in Astoria have identified a shortage of both affordable rentals and homes for sale. Rents and sales prices for units that are on the market are often out of reach for low and middle-income families.