

KOA hosts color run for autism

HAMMOND — Volunteers are needed to throw bags of colored powder at the runners from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday during the third annual Color the Coast for Autism 5K Color Run/Fun Walk at the Astoria/Warrenton/Seaside KOA, 1100 N.W. Ridge Road. The event is a benefit for the Clatsop County Autism Chapter.

Volunteers can be of any age. Individuals, families and Scouting packs, crews and troops are encouraged to participate in this service project.

To volunteer, call Karen Gill at 503-325-2990 or email kargrandma@gmail.com

Sneak a peek at Opry show

The Astor Street Opry Company presents a free, sneak peek performance of "The Real Lewis And Clark Story: Or How The Finns Discovered Astoria," at 7 p.m. Thursday at the ASOC Playhouse, 129 W. Bond St. The doors open at 6:30 p.m.

No reservations are needed, and seating is first come, first served. No outside drinks or food or food are allowed, but the Miss Vivian Saloon will be open.

The show officially opens Friday, and runs through April 30. For tickets, call 503-325-6104.

Birds, staff return to Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

By HAL BERNTON
Seattle Times

MALHEUR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE — Linda Beck is a fish biologist in charge of a Sisyphus-like struggle against millions of invasive carp that have uprooted aquatic plants, severely diminishing the food supplies here for waterfowl.

During the winter occupation of the Malheur refuge, as threats to federal employees escalated, Beck evacuated to Vancouver, Washington, leaving behind her rancher husband to take care of their cattle.

Meanwhile, the extremists who sought to transfer the refuge to local control claimed Beck's desk, rifling through her files and mocking her work. Someone also removed her personal items that included a pelican's beak, a carp's skeleton and a stuffed crow that had been passed on to Beck from her grandmother.

Beck is back on the job, working out of a temporary trailer office where she prepares to resume catching carp in fish traps and planning a commercial net harvest in May. Undaunted, the refuge takeover appears to have reinforced her sense of mission.

"It pretty much cemented in me that I was going to come back and conquer the carp," Beck said. "It was a 41-day occupation, but it was a real small part of Malheur's history."

The occupation ended Feb. 11, and the return of 16 full-time refuge staff has enabled the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reopen the 187,757-acre refuge's road system just as bird populations are increasing with the onset of spring.

The long-legged Sandhill cranes are easy to spot as they strut about in fields in search of insects to eat. Snow geese by the thousands have arrived, bunching together in and around the refuge, and many more are on their way in the run-up to the three-day Harney County Migratory Bird Festival that begins April 8.

The county Chamber of



Hal Bernton/The Seattle Times

With the spring season, geese make a stopover on farm lands north of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in March.

Commerce and others are hoping for a big turnout as weeks of headlines generated by the takeover have spurred renewed interest in the 108-year-old refuge, a major stopover on the Pacific flyway that is frequented by more than 320 bird species. There will be tours, an art show and other events to showcase the migration that unfolds both on the refuge and surrounding private lands.

Unlike festivals in years' past, the refuge headquarters complex, which includes a visitor's center and museum, will be off-limits to the public and is expected to remain closed until later in the year as it undergoes repairs.

The damage resulted from the turbulent series of events touched off by the decision by extremist leader Ammon Bundy and a core group of supporters to take over the refuge on Jan. 2. Bundy is the son of Cliven Bundy, a Nevada rancher who led an armed standoff with federal agents in 2014 over his failure to pay grazing fees to use federal lands.

Buildings damaged

The occupation was spurred by the fate of two Harney County ranchers — Dwight and Steve Hammond — who were sent back to prison in January after a federal appeals-court ruling that they should serve more time on arson charges. It morphed into a broader rebellion against federal management of public lands in the West.

Dozens of people cycled through the headquarters area. Some just visited during the day, while others stayed for weeks, spending their nights in a bunkhouse or sleeping on cots set up inside a firehouse and other buildings.

Most made a hurried departure in the aftermath of a Jan. 26 law-enforcement action that, on a highway north of the refuge, resulted in the arrests of Bundy and four others, and the shooting death of Arizona rancher LaVoy Finicum. Another four people opted to remain at the headquarters, hanging on for an additional 16 days before surrendering.

During the occupation, ref-

uge officials say some buildings were damaged, carpets were soiled and a septic system plugged up from overuse that was further damaged as contractors tried to make repairs.

Occupiers dug trenches for garbage and sewage, but the headquarters area also was littered with trash and piles of human waste. And all of this unfolded in a sensitive archaeological zone that contains Paiute tribal artifacts.

Now, the cleanup is under way.

During a visit to the refuge in late March, Dan Ashe, the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, said the restoration costs, so far, tally \$1.7 million.

He said the agency also racked up \$2 million in additional costs during the occupation as refuge employees were moved to other places, and \$2.5 million has been spent beefing

up security at other refuges.

"West-wide, we have seen a rise in threats and intimidation and we are having to staff up to meet those concerns," Ashe said.

More security

The beefed-up security was visible in late March at the entrance to the Malheur headquarters. There, an armed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service agent, clad in a bulletproof vest, stood watch over the entry road that earlier this year was guarded by extremists.

The continued concern about extremists is part of an uneasy return for refuge employees to a county still roiled by the emotions generated by the takeover.

During the takeover, militias converged on Harney County, creating an environment deemed so threatening to federal employees that they all either left the area or stayed away from their offices.

"Six of the sixteen staff have children," Beck said. "It's been very hard. There has been a lot of heartache in the community."

Some businesses also had problems in the aftermath of the occupation.

The Narrows RV Park and cafe garnered media coverage during the takeover as they delivered food to the occupiers at the refuge. The cafe employees say the food was not a gift — but paid in full — and they also served plenty of other people, including law-enforcement officials.

"We even had a Super Bowl party for the FBI in here, and we stayed open late for them," said Anna Surber, an employee at The Narrows.

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