



A 'FAVORITE FESTIVAL'

The Astoria Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival offers food, drink, live music and good company April 22, 23 & 24

Story by JON BRODERICK

By the end of April on the North Coast, if the weather isn't yet reliably beautiful, the days, at least, are reliably long. Now, with spring's incontrovertible and welcome arrival, people from across the Pacific Northwest and beyond are coming to celebrate with the locals at the 34th annual Astoria Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival, taking place at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, April 22, 23 and 24.

Is there a better way to celebrate the return of longer days with friends? It's hard to name one. Portland glass artist Joe Bennett, one of 80 distinctive craft and art vendors at the festival, is returning for the sixth consecutive year. "It's a masterfully run festival," he says. "It's a joy to be here."

The festival consistently wins Coast Weekend's Readers' Choice Award for Best Local Festival. Ask any of its nearly 200 vendors or its 15,000 attendees what they like best about it. Answers are always optimistic and enthusiastic. "The people," they say.

Each of the nearly 200 total vendors is juried into the festival by a discerning committee led by Kelsey Bilansifer, event coordinator for the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, that considers each potential vendor's artisan Pacific Northwest cred and appeal. "The jury works hard to include unique vendors who don't sell similar products," says chamber Marketing Director Regina Wilkie.

One of those unique Northwest vendors is Hood Crest Winery. Winemakers (and blues recording artists) Patrik and Tess Barr are returning to the Crab Festival from Hood River



Submitted photo
Tess and Patrik Barr, owners of Hood Crest Winery, are returning to the Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival for their second consecutive year as vendors. Their 2013 grenache and petite syrah won bronze medals in the 2016 festival's wine competition.

for their second consecutive year. "It's not that easy to get accepted into the festival," says Patrik. "We were fortunate last year to participate. We're trying to grow our brand.

Last year we sold a lot of wine, and we had a lot of fun." He's also looking forward to enjoying grilled clown bread, that festival favorite by the Astoria Clowns: a toasted crab

sandwich he describes as "gooey, cheesy, mayonnaisey and incredible."

Besides the Astoria Clowns, 15 or so distinctive local caterers and benefit organizations will offer Northwest fare, typical and unusual, none alike. Get your crab, whole or half, from the Astoria Rotary Club there.

You'll find scores of excellent Northwest brewers and winemakers to sample at the festival but only one distiller: Astoria's own Pilot House Distilling. "The Crab Festival is our favorite festival. The organizers have been very good to us," says co-owner Christina Cary. In addition to handcrafted distilled spirits, Pilot House offers its own drinking vinegars, known as shrubs, with flavors like tomatillo jalapeño and strawberry balsamic to mix with distilled spirits or with seltzer. "It changes the whole dynamic of a cocktail," Cary assures.

As if the pleasure of good company, food and drink weren't enough, the Crab Festival also features a remarkable variety of hard-working Northwest bands at its two stages all weekend long performing music that fans, no matter their tastes, will find both agreeably familiar and refreshingly eccentric.

Kathy Boyd is bringing her band Phoenix Rising to the festival for their first time. Though bluegrass was born in Kentucky, Phoenix Rising gives it a distinctive Northwest flavor with original songs like "Scappoose Ridge" and "Twelve More Miles to Clatskanie." Boyd and the band enjoy playing outside the bluegrass circuit where audiences who may not be familiar with the music find themselves tapping their feet to the bass beat, smiling at the fiddle, guitar and dobro licks and the tight vocal harmonies. "It's fun



Submitted photo
Kathy Boyd and Phoenix Rising will perform Northwest bluegrass music for the first time at the Crab Festival; hear the group 3:15 to 5 p.m. Saturday on the Exhibit Hall Stage.

music, up-beat and up-lifting even though," she happily concedes, "it's sometimes about murder and mayhem." Stop by the Exhibit Hall stage to hear them Saturday afternoon.

Three for Silver is returning to Astoria, where the band has become a favorite, to play its high-energy, gypsy-flavored retro-folk roots music at the Crab Festival for the first time. "We play full time all over the West Coast, and we always look forward to coming to Astoria," says bassist Lucas Warford. The group's unusual music has made enthusiastic fans up and down the West Coast. "There's a vibe to our music that people in seaside communities respond to. And we pretty much have the market cornered for whatever it is that you call what we do." Catch them Friday afternoon at the Food Tent stage.

"The American songbook is not dead," declares Moses Barrett, lead vocalist and guitar player with The Junebugs, a tight trio that takes particular pride in creatively interpreting a wide variety of favorite American songs. With 80 or 90 tunes in its bank and skills developed from 185 performances last year, the band excels at playing music the audience wants to hear. "We start with a couple of tunes from different eras and look around to see whose head's bobbing," says Barrett. "We write our own songs, too, and we're really proud of them, but we also believe that interpreting the American songbook has artistic validity." Find them reviving and continuing the long American house-band tradition Saturday afternoon at the Food Tent stage.

There's nothing not to like in the Crab Festival's musical line-up. Steve Hale calls his music "blue-eyed-soul-Americana." The indie rock band Mbrascatu sings in Italian. Tyler Stenson performs original elegant, rustic, poetic folk. Castletown plays energetic Celtic folk rock. The duet Sugar Still, blues and gypsy jazz. The Carried Away Trio, classic jazz standards and blues. Carrie Cunningham blends Nashville and the Northwest. The Ellen Whyte Trio rocks R&B. Rocket 3 shreds female indie-pop. FOG Band rocks classic. The Astoria High School Jazz Band bends standards. Kenny Heinz interprets country hits.



Photo by Alex Pajunas
Ryan Stembridge, the tasting room manager at TeSóAria Vineyard & Winery in Roseburg, sells a bottle of wine at the 2014 festival. The winery will be attending as a vendor again this year and won four gold medals, two silver medals and one bronze medal in the 2016 wine competition.



Photo by Don Anderson
Rosemary Siipola of the Willapa Harbor Chamber of Commerce fries fresh Willapa Bay oysters at last year's Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival.



Submitted photo
The Junebugs, a tight trio that creatively interprets a variety of favorite American songs, will perform Saturday at the Food Tent stage.

Festivities begin Friday afternoon and continue through Sunday afternoon at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds. Parking at the festival is scarce during peak hours, so consider taking the \$3 shuttle from any of several off-site parking areas and pick-up sites scattered from Fort Stevens to Knappa.

Astoria Warrenton Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival

Clatsop County Fairgrounds
92937 Walluski Loop Road, Astoria
April 22, 23 & 24
Friday: 4 to 9 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Sunday: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
astoriacrabfest.com
\$10 adult admission
\$5 children (ages 5 to 12)
Sunday admission is half-off for adults and free for children and active military



Photo by Don Anderson
Many arts and craft vendors sell their wares at the Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival.