

Looking for — *and finding* — community

Astoria couple Bill and Deborah Armington thrive on giving back

By DWIGHT CASWELL

Dr. William Armington was a neuroradiologist with one of the oldest radiology firms in the country, reading scans for four hospitals in the New Orleans area. “We had been living in New Orleans for a long time,” Armington says, “and we were established. We were doing things that we really enjoyed, medicine and our cultural pursuits.”

Hurricane Katrina put an end to that. Hospitals closed, and New Orleans was evacuated. “We were forced to become more reflective about our lives,” Bill says.

“We looked for a place we liked,” says his wife, Deborah, “a community that was welcoming, and small enough that we could see that we were making a difference.”

The couple had lived in the French Quarter, a close-knit community. “We really treasured the relationships we had there,” Bill says.

They began looking all over the country for the kind of community they wanted. It had to be on a coast, and it had to be a place with a thriving art scene, both visual and performing. That is what they had experienced in the French Quarter, which, despite being surrounded by a large city, is like a town of 4,000. Says Deborah, “I’m not really a city girl; I’m a country girl.”

Eventually, they narrowed the possibilities down to two choices: Key West, Florida, and — 3,056 miles away — Astoria, Oregon. Key West was remote, at the end of a long island chain, and they judged that it might be difficult to

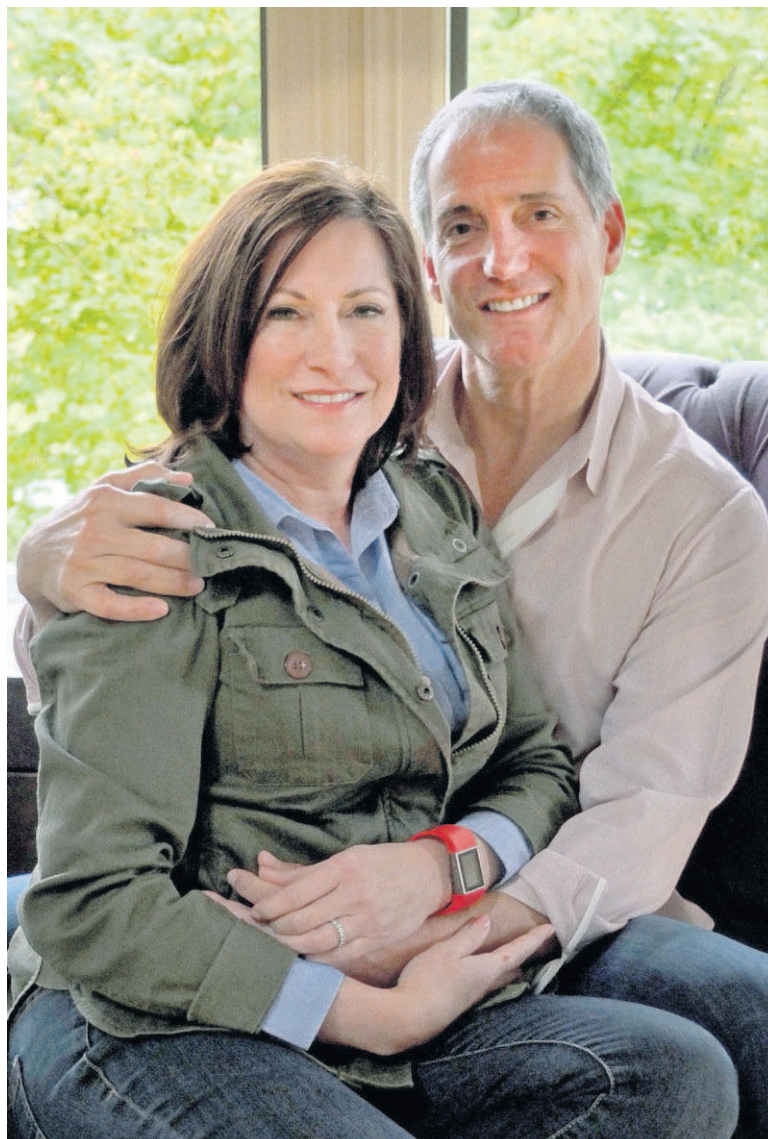


PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

Deborah and Bill Armington moved to Astoria in 2007, looking for a new community to call home after Hurricane Katrina left its mark on New Orleans.

become a part of the community. Astoria was not quite so remote, and the arts community was vibrant and growing. More importantly, Bill says, “People accepted us.” Deborah echoes the sentiment, “We were thrilled that people wanted us to be a part of things.”

Upon arrival in 2007, the couple immediately began volunteering. Deborah became a Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer to help ensure that

abused and neglected children have a better start in life. She now serves on the boards of Clatsop CASA and Astoria Visual Arts, and, although she is no longer on the Columbia Memorial Hospital Foundation Board, she is active in fundraising for the hospital’s new cancer center.

An accomplished pianist, Bill had been on the advisory board of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation. In Astoria, he joined



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Bill Armington is an accomplished pianist and is on the board of the Astoria Music Festival.

the Liberty Theater Board of Directors and was president for two years. He now serves on the board of the Astoria Music Festival. The Armingtons often play host to artists and musicians and, he says, “It’s fun to see what’s happening to music here. The music festival has some of the best classical music on the West Coast, and there is the growing indie scene with Blind Pilot.”

Bill’s greatest contribution to the community, though, has been as a doctor. “My goal in coming here,” he says, “was to make available in a rural setting all the medical care available in a large city.” He was immediately aware of, he says, “how hard it was for patients with serious conditions like cancer to get care without major inconvenience.” Patients needing chemotherapy or radiation might have to make daily trips to Portland. “I was able to be a part of reaching out to OHSU (Oregon Health & Science University) to bring services to the coast.”

Bill points to expanded options in general surgery, orthopedics

and emergency medicine, and to the new cancer center, which will break ground in August of this year. “It’s really exciting for me to be a part of this,” he says, “as a doctor and as someone who has had a part in bringing this about.”

“We love it here in Astoria,” says Bill, “and we love exploring the world.” When not working or volunteering, the Armingtons travel. Thanks to the internet, Bill can read scans from almost anywhere in the world.

Says Deborah, “We love adventure travel, and we love to hike.” That might mean hiking in the Alps, kayak-

ing in Patagonia, or traveling in South Africa with their two adult children. On his 60th birthday, Bill went swimming in 28-degree water at the North Pole.

Perhaps the greatest discovery the Armingtons have made has little to do with travel. “When the bottom fell out and our world turned upside down,” says Bill, “we could continue with our lives.”

In a small town on the Oregon Coast.

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