

Brownson will run for City Council

Seeks seat being vacated by Herzig

By **DERRICK DEPLEDGE**
The Daily Astorian

Tom Brownson, a retired contractor, is running for Astoria City Council.

He is seeking the south side seat being vacated by City Councilor Drew Herzig, who is moving to Massachusetts and will not run for re-election. "I think that who I am — and what tools I have — I can be an asset to the council in the decision-making process as we move along," Brownson said.

Brownson is active with the Astoria Yacht Club and

the campaign to return the old Tourist No. 2 ferry to Astoria. He ran unsuccessfully for the Port of Astoria Commission in 2005.

He has served on the John Day Water District and with the Democratic Party at the precinct level.

In the other open seat for City Council, Bruce Jones, a former commander of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Columbia River, is running for the east side ward.

City Councilor Russ Warr has announced he will not seek a fourth term.

The filing deadline for candidates is Aug. 30.



Tom Brownson

Outdoor school fund initiative qualifies for November ballot

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — An initiative petition to fund a statewide outdoor education program with Oregon Lottery revenue has qualified for the November ballot.

The Secretary of State's Office confirmed that the campaign for IP 67 gathered 93,102 valid signatures, about 5 percent more than the 88,114 requirement. The campaign turned in 135,538 signatures, but not all of those could be verified.

Campaign leaders said earlier this month they were confident the proposed measure would qualify.

"We are very excited Oregonians are going to get a chance to support statewide funding for outdoor school," said Paige Richardson, campaign director of the Outdoor School initiative.

The ballot measure would dedicate 4 percent of lottery revenue — as much as \$22 million per year — to pay for a week of outdoor school for 50,000 students and 3,000 high school counselors.

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, has criticized the measure because it would siphon money from other lottery-supported programs. The measure also would reduce the flexibility of the lottery fund, which has allowed lawmakers to use lottery money during the recession to sustain services, Johnson said.

"IP 67 sounds great on the surface, but it is fraught with unintended consequences," Johnson said. "The bottom line is there is only so much money, and lottery money is the most

flexible money we have, and if we are repurposing the money for specific financial obligations, we are taking it away from something else."

The Secretary of State's Office has until Aug. 7 to verify signatures for initiative petitions. The only initiative petition still awaiting verification is a proposed measure to prohibit the sale of products made from 12 endangered species.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Coast Guard cutter busts drugs, rescues fishers

The Daily Astorian

While on patrol in the eastern Pacific Ocean, the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Alert intercepted more than 3 tons of narcotics, according to the agency. The cutter returned to homeport in Astoria July 17.

During a 53-day patrol, the Alert caught four "go-fast" boats carrying 3.3 tons of cocaine, valued at \$100 million, and detained 11 suspected smugglers. Results of that magnitude have not been recorded since 2009, according to the agency.

"I couldn't be more proud of the crew's accomplishments and the professionalism during the best patrol of my career," Cmdr. Patrick Culver of the Alert said in a release. "They earned a well-deserved respite from the rigors of sea. Reuniting with their loved ones at homecoming makes the mission truly worthwhile."

The Alert also rescued four crew members from the fish-

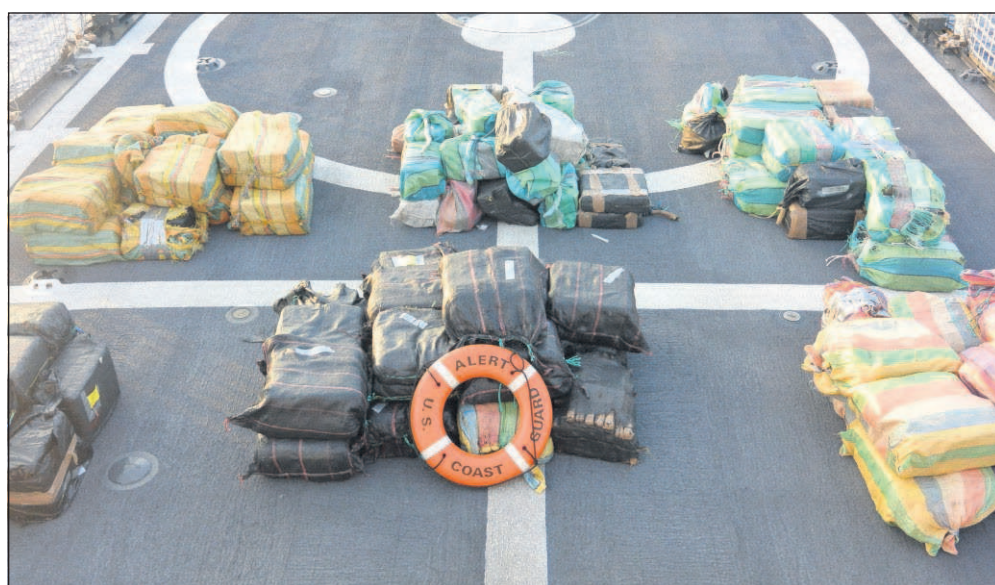


Photo courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard

The U.S. Coast Guard cutter Alert seized 3.3 tons of cocaine during a 53-day drug patrol spanning 12,500 miles in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

ing vessel Alexa, which was found sinking in a rain squall at night. The rescued crew were medically examined and eventually transferred to a Costa Rican Coast Guard vessel.

The Alert's drug patrols off the West Coast of Central and South America were part of Operation Martillo, an international operation sharing information and bringing

together air, land, and maritime assets from the U.S. Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security and partner nations to counter illicit trafficking.

Seaside gives dog park a thumbs up

By **DAVE FISHER**
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — A new dog park is coming to Seaside.

The Seaside Parks and Recreation Committee's request for the conditional approval of the city's first dog park was granted Monday evening at the City Council meeting. The park will be located in an "underutilized area" at the north end of the Broadway Middle School parking lot.

"It will dress up that part of town," said Public Works Director Dale McDowell in his summary of the project to council members.

The Planning Commission conditionally approved the plans at a meeting earlier this month. The park would be in a fenced-off area where the public can exercise their dogs on and off leash.

Utilizing mostly recycled materials, such as chain-link fencing and even a nonfunctional fire hydrant as a decorative addition, the cost to the city was kept to a minimum; \$780, according to McDowell.

"It's amazing that you can do this for \$780," said Councilor Randy Frank. "Once again, Seaside has set the standard."

Loan relief lures mental health workers to southern Oregon

Student loans forgiven through incentive program

By **VICKIE ALDOUS**
Mail Tribune

MEDFORD — Saddled with \$75,000 in student loans, Chy Porter looked for an employer that offered a loan-forgiveness program when she hunted for a job in the mental health field.

She chose to go to work as a mental health therapist for Jackson County Health and Human Services — which is competing for mental health workers amid a nationwide shortage.

In exchange for a two-year commitment to Jackson County, \$60,000 of her student loans were forgiven through a loan forgiveness program. By working hard and scrimping, she was able to pay off the remaining \$15,000 herself during those same two years.

"I can't say enough glowing things about this program," said Porter, who has since been promoted to quality assurance reviewer. "It can be life-changing not to have to worry about student loans."

Shortage of workers

A countrywide rush to hire mental health professionals was triggered by the 2010 passage of the federal Affordable Care Act, which put mental health care coverage on par with physical health care coverage. The nation does not yet have enough mental health workers to meet the demand for care, leading to intense competition for new graduates and established professionals.

Coordinated care organizations are paying Jackson County to provide mental health care to the 65,000 county residents now on the Oregon Health Plan. The

number of residents on the plan skyrocketed from 30,000 four years ago.

Jackson County Health and Human Services hired more than 60 workers in the fiscal year that ended in June and hopes to hire another 100 to 150 for this fiscal year, according to county budget documents.

Current job openings include a clinical therapist, a children's services mental health professional and a mental health employee to work with a law enforcement crisis team for \$46,987 to \$61,921 annually. The highest paid mental health job is for a psychiatric medical director with a salary of more than \$200,000.

One of the first

Porter came to Jackson County in 2011 and was one of the county's first mental health workers to use a loan-forgiveness program. She continues to work for the county, even though she has completed her service commitment.

"I do it out of a sense of pride and really wanting to be a part of the community," she said.

Porter cautioned that workers must be committed to the field and their employer to take

part in a loan-forgiveness program. If they don't complete their term of service, they have to pay back the money — with interest.

"You have to have a sense of duty and responsibility, and have a passion for this type of work. You have to have that drive, determination and passion. It's totally doable," she said.

'I thought it would be a great opportunity to keep working for the county and get the benefits.'

Lisa Ortiz

Jackson County mental health clinical supervisor

Jackson County uses a variety of state and federally funded loan-forgiveness programs to lure mental health workers. The incentives range from \$20,000 for a one-year commitment by a person with a master's degree who is working to attain a license, to \$105,000 for a three-year commitment by a psychiatrist who has finished medical school.

"The intent of the programs is to recruit people to

high-need areas in rural parts of the country. We've tried to promote the fact that we use the programs because we've had such a need," said Mental Health Division Manager Stacy Brubaker.

Prospective mental health employees often ask whether Jackson County participates in loan-forgiveness programs.

"They cite that as one of the reasons they're interested in working for Jackson County," Brubaker said.

Hang on to seasoned workers

Loan-forgiveness programs are also helping Jackson County hang on to its seasoned mental health workers.

Jackson County Mental Health Clinical Supervisor Lisa

Ortiz, a 10-year veteran, has been recruited by other employers, but said she enjoys working in various positions for the county and appreciates its participation in loan-forgiveness programs.

"I find it really satisfying. I've been able to move to different positions and gain experience to help the community," she said.

Ortiz estimated she spent more than \$100,000 earning a bachelor's degree and then a master's degree in psychology, with most of that financed through student loans.

At one point after she'd gone through a divorce, she was working almost full-time, going to school full-time and caring for her three children.

Ortiz is eligible for up to \$50,000 in student loan forgiveness for a two-year commitment, and can apply for additional loan forgiveness for a future commitment.

"I thought it would be a great opportunity to keep working for the county and get the benefits," she said.

Jackson County mental health workers noted it takes years of education and training to become a licensed mental health professional — four years of college for a bachelor's degree and two years for a master's degree, plus two to three years of work to accumulate the hours needed to become licensed.

The process takes longer for psychiatrists and other professionals who attend medical school.

But those who make it through find there is high demand for their skills.

"Because of the Affordable Care Act, more people can access mental health services," Ortiz said. "That has broadened the type of client we see. It's a challenge to find enough staff to serve that huge population."

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