



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Matt Brown takes the oath of office as mayor of Gearhart Wednesday from City Administrator Chad Sweet.

Brown takes oath to be mayor in Gearhart

New mayor succeeds Widdop

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

GEARHART — The Bible was unavailable, but Matt Brown had some handy reading material on which to take his oath as Gearhart mayor — the 1971 classic novel, “*Golf in the Kingdom*” by Michael Murphy.

The choice was appropriate for the man who recently received the Merchandiser of the Year award from the PGA of America in New York City. Brown, a former Gearhart planning commissioner, is the general manager and PGA golf pro at Highlands Golf Course.

Two returning council members, Dan Jesse and Sue Lorain, also took oaths of office at a City Council meeting Wednesday.

Brown then convened his first meeting with a light tap of the gavel.

Former Mayor Dianne Widdop was a member of the audience for the first time in four years for an agenda which yielded the reappointment of planning commissioners Carl Anderson and David Smith and a preview of the city’s January dune-grass workshop at the firehouse featuring a panel of scientists and government officials.

Organizers, led by Gearhart’s Margaret Marino, hope the workshop will yield a plan to restore dunes, address tree growth in the dunes and limit invasive species like Scotch broom while protecting snowy plover habitat.

City Administrator Chad Sweet will moderate the forum.

At the meeting’s conclusion, Brown’s gavel was less tentative.

“I was a little nervous, but I thought it went well,” he said afterward. “It was really good to be working with some of the councilors I worked with on the Planning Commission.”

Coast Guard seeks help catching mayday hoaxster

The Daily Astorian

The U.S. Coast Guard is asking for the public’s help in finding a person making false mayday calls over the past seven months near the mouth of the Columbia River.

Personnel at Sector Columbia River’s command center in Warrenton have received 22 false mayday calls since April, likely from the same person.

“False maydays waste valuable time and resources, but most importantly it potentially puts responding personnel in danger and can interfere with legitimate search and rescue cases,” Capt. Bill Timmons, commander of Sector Columbia River, said. “These false reports have to stop, so I ask anyone with a legitimate tip in locating this person or persons to step forward immediately.”

All 22 calls have come from Chinook, Washington, or between Warrenton and Seaside.

Through a voice analysis conducted at Carnegie Mellon University, the suspect making the calls is believed to be a white male, 35 to 40 years old, with an accent from the East Coast to Southeast Coast. The analysis also puts the person at 5 feet, 10 inches to 6 feet tall, and 190 pounds.

Information pertaining to these false maydays should be reported to the Sector Columbia River command center at 503-338-9021.

Making a hoax call to the Coast Guard is a crime punishable by up to six years in prison, a \$250,000 criminal fine, a \$5,000 civil fine and reimbursement to the Coast Guard for operating costs incurred. If a mayday call — actual or potentially false — is heard, boaters are encouraged to contact their local Coast Guard unit and relay what they heard.

• **Listen:** Audio of the hoax mayday calls can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/j699ucz>

County commissioners invite comments

Class action suit against state over timber harvests

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
For The Daily Astorian

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners are inviting public comment on a controversial \$1.4 billion timber lawsuit at their next meeting.

The board announced that it will accept testimony beginning at 6 p.m. Wednesday on the suit filed by Linn County earlier this year against the Oregon Department of Forestry.

In this lawsuit, Linn County alleges a breach of contract over the state’s timber harvest practices on more than

640,000 acres of state-managed forest lands. Clatsop County is just one of 15 counties and 130 other taxing districts named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

Currently, Clatsop County and the taxing districts in the county are automatically included in the lawsuit. Unless the commissioners send notice that the county and the taxing districts it represents want to opt out, they will continue to be a part of the lawsuit. The county has until Jan. 25 to decide.

Other taxing districts located in Clatsop County but not included under county management will have to make their own decision about whether to remain involved or not.

Clatsop County contains approximately 147,000 acres of state forest land, worth millions of dollars. On average, timber harvests here gener-

ate \$15 million a year to the county and other local taxing entities. Compared to the other timber counties listed in the Linn County lawsuit, Clatsop County is a particularly big player.

County Manager Cameron Moore says it is an interesting lawsuit and the commissioners will need to carefully weigh any decision to opt out or let things continue as they are. Money gained from harvests on the state forest land represent an important piece of the county’s annual budget and a successful suit could mean close to \$300 million, at most, coming the county’s way.

This is money that shouldn’t be dismissed lightly, Moore said. He and the commissioners have a duty to taxpayers to look at all the options and potential outcomes.

At this point, if the county does opt out, there are no

immediate plans to pursue a separate lawsuit against the state, he said.

Court documents show the lawsuit is being largely paid for by the private timber industry and opponents to the lawsuit worry that a successful suit could open up the counties’ timber lands to increased harvest. Such harvests could have far-reaching effects on forest health, they argue. In Clatsop County, community members who have spoken up during public comment periods have urged the commissioners to opt out.

The commissioners will accept verbal and written testimony Wednesday, and will continue to accept written comments on this issue through Jan. 6. These can be e-mailed to commissioners@co.clatsop.or.us or sent to: 800 Exchange St., Suite 410, Astoria, OR 97103

Washington state suing agrochemical giant

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Washington has become the first U.S. state to sue the agrochemical giant Monsanto over pervasive pollution from PCBs, the toxic industrial chemicals that have accumulated in plants, fish and people around the globe for decades. The company said the case “lacks merit.”

Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee and Attorney General Bob Ferguson announced the lawsuit at a news conference in downtown Seattle Thursday, saying they expect to win hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars from the company.

“It is time to hold the sole U.S. manufacturer of PCBs accountable for the significant harm they have caused to our state,” Ferguson said, noting

that the chemicals continue to imperil the health of protected salmon and orcas despite the tens of millions of dollars Washington has spent to clean up the pollution. “Monsanto produced PCBs for decades while hiding what they knew about the toxic chemicals’ harm to human health and the environment.”

The suit arrives just days before Monsanto shareholders vote whether to accept a \$57 billion buyout offer from Germany’s Bayer. The extraordinary meeting of shareholders takes place just outside of St. Louis on Tuesday.

PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, were used in many industrial and commercial applications, including in paint, coolants, sealants and hydraulic fluids. Monsanto, based in St. Louis, produced them from 1935 until Con-

gress banned them in 1979.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, PCBs have been shown to cause a variety of health problems, including cancer in animals as well as effects on the immune, nervous and reproductive systems.

In a company release, Monsanto spokesman Scott S. Partridge said that the “case is experimental because it seeks to target a product manufacturer for selling a lawful and useful chemical four to eight decades ago that was applied by the U.S. government, Washington State, local cities, and industries into many products to make them safer. PCBs have not been produced in the U.S. for four decades, and Washington is now pursuing a case on a contingency fee basis that departs from settled law both in Washington

and across the country. Most of the prior cases filed by the same contingency fee lawyers have been dismissed, and Monsanto believes this case similarly lacks merit.”

In response to a similar lawsuit filed last year by the city of Spokane, Washington, Monsanto said a previous incarnation of the company produced the PCBs, which it said “served an important fire protection and safety purpose.”

“PCBs sold at the time were a lawful and useful product that was then incorporated by third parties into other useful products,” Charla Lord, a company spokeswoman, wrote. “If improper disposal or other improper uses created the necessity for clean-up costs, then these other third parties would bear responsibility for these costs.”

McMorris Rodgers could be Trump’s Interior pick

Associated Press

U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington state has emerged as President-elect Donald Trump’s top contender to lead the Interior Department.

That’s according to a person involved in the transition. Trump’s been weighing others for the post, including Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin, but is said to be interested in finding a place for McMorris Rodgers in the administration.

McMorris Rodgers, the chairwoman of the House Republican Conference, is the only Republican woman with a leadership role on Capitol Hill. As interior secretary, she would oversee the nation’s public lands.

The person involved in the transition was not authorized to discuss the internal deliberations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

McMorris Rodgers endorsed Trump for president

but criticized the real estate magnate’s degrading remarks toward women.

Elected to the House in 2004, McMorris Rodgers, 47, represents eastern Washington. She was born in Salem, graduated with a bachelor’s degree

from Pensacola Christian College and a master’s in business from the University of Washington, and worked in her family’s orchard business in Kettle Falls, Washington. She is married to a retired Navy commander and has three children.

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