

# Foster: 'Mr. Astoria' left imprint on city

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Astoria High School Scholarships Inc., a nonprofit that provides financial aid to graduating high school students looking to continue their education. The once-modest fund now awards more than \$200,000 each year.

"He always wanted the best for everyone," said Marilyn Birkel, Foster's longtime friend and neighbor.

People close to Foster remember him as gentle and generous, quirky and kind, respected and well-liked, a socialite with an offbeat flair, a history buff and world-traveler.

Foster was a good friend of Hal Snow, a prominent local lawyer who died last week in Portland at 75. Snow co-founded the high school scholarship fund. Both men grew up in Astoria, cherished their hometown and, with their time and talents, supported it throughout their lives.

## 'Fun spirit'

A University of Oregon graduate, Foster began teaching at Astoria High School in the early 1960s. A few years later, in Kabul, Afghanistan, he was teaching through the U.S. Agency for International Development at the American School, where employees from different embassies sent their children.

He eventually returned to Astoria High School, where his subjects ranged from history to yearbook. In the mid-1970s, Foster became the school librarian, a position he held for about 20 years.

"When he was teaching, he was always a real advocate for students," said friend and colleague Bob Landwehr, the president of the scholarship fund who taught in the Astoria School District.

John Goodenberger, a local historian who took some of Foster's classes in high school, said Foster loved his students and stoked their sense of adventure.

When Goodenberger was a senior, Foster proposed a senior trip, "and the senior trip was that we would pile into a bus after graduation, we wouldn't know where we were going, and we'd wake up somewhere, and he would only give clues as to where we might go." (John later learned the plan was to



Michael Foster sits in his Astoria home in 2010. Foster died Tuesday at age 76.



The Daily Astorian/File Photo  
Michael Foster served on the Liberty Restoration Inc., board of directors continuously from its founding in 1994 through December 2013. His nearly 20 years of support and volunteerism on the Liberty board included applying by hand, gold paint with 18-karat gold powder added, to the ornamentation in the inside of the theater space.

major events, and he occasionally donated art as well — for example, to Astoria City Hall.

Birkel, who helped care for Foster, said she doesn't yet know what will become of his vast art trove.

Foster, who never married or had children, is survived by a sister who lives in Italy and some extended family.

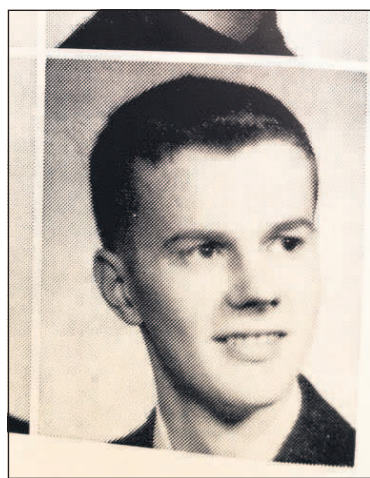
## 'Broad vision'

"One of the things that strikes me the most about Michael was his vision," Goodenberger wrote in an email.

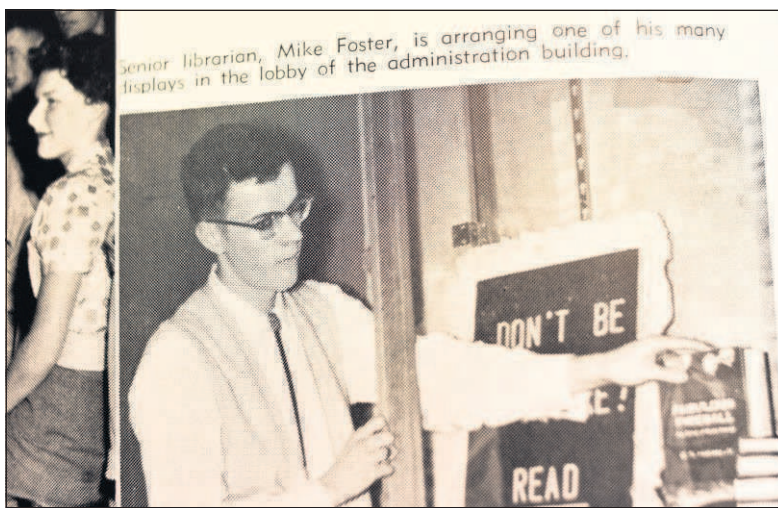
"He was born and raised in Astoria. He never allowed life in a small town to be a limiting factor. When he set his sights on something, anything could be bigger or better than its status quo. The Flavel Museum could be a wonderfully restored structure. The Heritage Museum could tell a wider story. The Liberty Theater could become a focal point for music and culture. And, the Astoria High School Scholarship Fund could offer a scholarship to any Astoria high school senior who wanted to attend college.

"His broad vision will be his legacy."

Steve Forrester, *The Daily Astorian's* former editor and publisher, contributed to this report.



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian  
Michael Foster in the 1958 Astoria High School yearbook.



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian  
Michael Foster in the 1958 Astoria High School yearbook.

## Art smart

Foster was a renowned collector of original art. Walking into his 6,500-square-foot Victorian home in Astoria was like entering an international art museum.

In "Astorians: Eccentric and Extraordinary," Foster spoke with M.J. Cody about collecting. "Asked in 2009 how many pieces of art he owns, he said, '3,600 have been catalogued.' There are more, but he

doesn't know how many."

And, "About his obsession with collecting, Foster said, 'It's like a disease. It's similar to alcoholism, except you feel better.'"

For a time, he owned a downtown antique store.

Foster's taste was broad and deep, taking in famous and local artists.

He often opened his house for artist receptions, fundraisers and

head into southeast Oregon toward Steens Mountain.)

"It was unfortunate that my classmates didn't latch onto that, so it didn't happen," Goodenberger said, "but I always remember that fun spirit that he had, and at least offering that to the students."

Many years, Foster took a group of students on a field trip to Europe.

"He just opened up the world to a whole lot of kids," Penner said.

Merry Christmas

Always in our hearts...  
Wendy Richardson  
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from The Daily Astorian Advertising Team

