

GUEST COLUMN

Oregon Coast loses a pioneering journalist

By **SAMANTHA SWINDLER**
The Oregonian

LeeAnn Neal, a longtime local journalist and pioneering daughter of Tillamook County, died on Saturday, less than two months after she was diagnosed with stage 4 liver cancer.

As was her way, LeeAnn, 46, didn't want folks to make a fuss. She spent nearly a month in the hospital, much of it in intensive care, but was always upbeat when describing her health issues.

The cancer had been discovered during emergency surgery. After post-op complications, it became clear it was quite advanced. She was waiting to tell friends about her diagnosis, but never got the chance.

It was left to LeeAnn's family to share the news of her rapid decline in health.

LeeAnn arrived at Nehalem Bay House on Friday, where she was meant to receive end-of-life care.

By Saturday night, she was gone.

Oregon stock

LeeAnn came from true Oregon stock. She was a sixth-generation Tillamook resident whose great-great-great grandfather, Elbridge Trask, was among the area's first white settlers in the 1850s.

She started covering local news as a teenager, and over the years served as a tireless amplifier of her community's triumphs — and a tactful recorder of its tragedies. Her work appeared locally in the *The Daily Astorian*, *North Coast Citizen*, *Tillamook Headlight Herald* and *Coast River Business Journal*, and sometimes statewide in *The Oregonian*.

Most recently — and most personally — LeeAnn helped start the *Tillamook County Pioneer*, a hyperlocal online news source, in July 2013.

She was one of the first people I met when I moved to Tillamook in 2010 to work for the *Headlight Herald*. LeeAnn called it a "grand old dame" of a newspaper.

She wore oversized, untucked men's button shirts and had a wild mane of curly dark hair. You could hear her coming, that loud voice, that booming laugh, that joyous bounce in her step.

All Tillamook, through and through.

Connections

Later, after I moved to Forest Grove, the demands of deadlines and the distance between us meant we most often communicated online. We left a digital trail of more than 5,000 Facebook messages, preserving our conversations about coastal



Neal Family/Submitted Photo

LeeAnn Neal, shown with brother Dan Neal, died Saturday. She was one of the founders of the Tillamook County Pioneer online news site.

gossip and encouragement in an often stressful profession.

After my first column at *The Oregonian*, she told me, "I hate writing, too, but, as the saying goes, I love having written."

I know that's a Dorothy Parker quote. But to me, it will always be LeeAnn Neal's.

We often daydreamed about starting or buying a community paper, making it work within what LeeAnn jokingly called her "maverick-no-resources lifestyle." We'd share ideas on revenue models and paywalls. And we'd consult with one another while writing sensitive stories.

"The Tillamook County Pioneer staff is small, as is our community," she wrote once as a disclaimer. "If I were to avoid writing about everything that touches my personal life,

I would have to skip a lot of worthwhile articles."

Journalism of attachment

LeeAnn was a first-name-only celebrity in Tillamook County. She understood the journalism of attachment — of caring about the people and places you report on — which is the only journalism of value you can provide for a rural town. She cared because she was connected, directly or indirectly, by blood or by heart, to everyone she wrote about.

During festivals and floods, major events, people looked to LeeAnn to tell it straight and accurate.

David Dillon, who worked with LeeAnn as editor of *Manzanita's North Coast Citizen* from 1996 to 2003, said she

chased news and feature stories "with equal ferocity."

"She would invariably come back with great work," he said, "complete with more details, quotes and insights on the topic than I ever imagined would be there."

"Her office was clear across the building from mine, but I always knew when she was in her office because I could hear that wonderful laugh," said Carol Hungerford, co-owner of the *Tillamook Headlight Herald*. "I miss her for the joy and integrity she brought to her craft."

Not 'a lot of time'

I visited LeeAnn the day she died. I had been told only that she "didn't have a lot of time," which I interpreted to mean days, weeks or maybe months.

But when we arrived Saturday afternoon, the nurse said she had only a few hours left. She was in a coma, but could still hear us, we were told.

We took turns sitting near her bedside, telling her how much she meant to us, how thankful we were for her friendship. Hundreds of well-wishes came in over social media and they were read to her in her final hours. "Thank you, LeeAnn, for your life, for your brilliant, heartfelt journalism that knit the community together in love, humor and honesty," wrote Helen Hill.

"You gave and gave and gave to us."

This is, sadly, the second death to hit the *Pioneer's* small staff in a little more than a year. Another friend and co-founder, Will Seymour, died of cancer on Sept. 26, 2015, his 29th birthday.

It's unclear what will happen to the *Pioneer* without LeeAnn, but her family hopes to keep it going in some form.

A memorial service will be held at 2 pm Jan. 7, at Tillamook Church of the Nazarene.

Cannon Beach Arts Association, director abruptly part ways

Brumfield leaves arts association

By **LYRA FONTAINE and R.J. Marx**
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Two weeks ago, Jane Brumfield was accepting a grant from the Clatsop County Cultural Coalition at a ceremony at the Clatsop County Community College's South Campus.

This week, Brumfield left the post. In a text statement, she said she would prefer not to talk about her former organization and she "only wishes them well."

Brumfield accepted \$600 from the coalition on behalf of the Cannon Beach Arts Association's "Artists Talk," a series aimed at sharing information



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Jane Brumfield accepts a grant on behalf of the Cannon Beach Arts Association at the cultural awards ceremony in December.

and experiences between artists and arts professionals.

Cannon Beach Arts Association Board President Lila Wickham said the organization's board will begin posting for a replacement in January.

"The Cannon Beach Arts Association wishes the best of luck to Jane Brumfield, who has served as the program art

director for the last year and a half," Wickham said in a statement to members. "Jane

is stepping away, allowing herself to focus on her master's degree program in arts administration." Wickham said Brumfield and her husband, Mike, "have generously contributed passion, talent, and time to our association. ... We are grateful for Jane's service and wish her and Mike health, happiness, and great art in the future."

The Cannon Beach Arts Association supports, funds and enhances the arts and artists in the city and the region through education, events and exhibits. In the past, the arts association was known for multidisciplinary events,

adding concerts and special events to their showings. Those aspects are less emphasized today, with the gallery and scholarships the primary focus of the association.

Brumfield, who moved to the region with her husband Michael in June 2015, had run a gallery in the Hyde

Park section of Boise, Idaho, since 2009.

In an interview prior to the 2015 Stormy Weather Arts Festival, Brumfield said she sought to bring "as many voices in as possible to get so we get a good range of work to look at, and to select from."

WANTED
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber
Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA
Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

Merry Christmas
Courtney Ann
My Angel in Heaven
August 21, 1982 - December 22, 2001
"My soul finds rest in God alone;
my salvation comes from him."
Psalm 62:1-2
Love always, forever and ever.
Dad

THE DAILY ASTORIAN'S CUTEST BABY CONTEST is Back!

If your baby was born between **January 1st & December 31st, 2016**, you can submit your newborn's picture either via email at: CLASSIFIEDS@DAILYASTORIAN.COM or drop by one of our offices in Astoria or Seaside and we can scan in the photo for you.

Deadline to enter is **Wednesday, January 25th at 5pm**
Entries will be printed in *The Daily Astorian* on January 31st.

Human babies only please!

Merry Christmas
to the Lower Columbia area
from
Astoria Church of Christ
692 12th Street • 503-325-7398

Clatsop Post 12
Friday, December 23rd
MEATLOAF DINNER
\$8 4PM until gone
5-7PM Post Commander's Tom 'n' Jerry Party
6PM Karaoke Dave

Saturday December 24th
Christmas Eve
Post 12 Closes at 4PM

Sunday December 25th
Merry Christmas
Post 12 Closed!!!!!!

ASTORIA AMERICAN LEGION
1132 Exchange Street | 503-325-5771

NEW

Full color, scenic montage postcards of Astoria now available at the Daily Astorian office!

3 for 1

Tourists, visitors, family & friends will love sending these!

949 Exchange Street, Astoria • 503-325-3211

Tom Grimm & Daily Astorian Printing Co.

would like to take this special time of the year to thank all of our loyal customers and wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year!

949 EXCHANGE ST • 325-3211, EXT. 256 • FAX 325-6573
Hours: Tues • Weds • Thurs | 8am-12pm