

## Port chooses to remain in timber lawsuit

Commissioners did not explain their reasons

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Daily Astorian

The Port of Astoria Commission voted unanimously Tuesday to stay in a class-action timber lawsuit brought by Linn County against the state.

Commissioners did not comment on why they made the decision, which comes a week after the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners voted 3-2 to opt out.

Linn County filed the \$1.4 billion suit last year against the state Department of Forestry, claiming it breached a contract to maximize timber revenue on more than 700,000 acres deeded to the state in the mid-20th century. The suit was classified by a Linn County Circuit Court judge as a class

action covering 15 counties and about 130 taxing districts statewide.

Clatsop County is the highest-profile defection so far. Counties and taxing districts have until Jan. 25 to decide whether to participate.

County Manager Cameron Moore previously said that of the 30 taxing districts identified in the county, five under county control were automatically opted out by the board's vote. Of the remaining 25, he

said, Clatsop Community College, Seaside School District, Jewell School District, the college and the Port were among the major players.

The college will decide whether to remain in the lawsuit at a special meeting Tuesday. Seaside Superintendent Sheila Roley said in an email Monday that the school district will not opt out. Jewell

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## New York. Chicago. Los Angeles. ... Astoria.

Artistic director of Liberty Theater to help shape venue's identity

By ERICK BENGEL  
The Daily Astorian

**B**ereniece Jones-Centeno, who was recently hired as the Liberty Theater's artistic director, has a striking resume: a professional singer, teacher and arts administrator with a background steeped in fine arts and education. She's lived in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and Europe.

So why did someone with her interests and credentials choose to settle down in Astoria, a small community with aspirations in the arts but is mostly known for fishing, logging and Goonies?

"First of all, it is rugged, gritty — but I love that about this town," she said.

Many folks who brave the coastal elements also share those experiences in poetry and song — as seen, for example, at the annual FisherPoets Gathering. Cultured and working-class sensibilities coexist in neighborhoods, households and individual hearts.

"You've got the (Columbia River) Bar Pilots who have these incredible jobs, and there's all of this respect for what they do ... and I love the fact that some of these same people love going to watch an opera," she said.

As artistic director — the Liberty's first — Jones-Centeno plans to organize concerts series, film festivals and other programs at the historic vaudevilian theater, as well as develop educational programs and engage with local schools. Her charge is to focus on "lifelong learners, as well as the little bitty ones," she said.

Jones-Centeno — along with the new executive director, Jennifer Crockett — will shaping the Liberty's identity in the coming years; their choices will define, in large measure, what the venue becomes famous for.

"The world is our oyster because the Liberty hasn't had an artistic director," Jones-Centeno said, adding: "Whatever we can create, that's all open to us right now."

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Dwight Caswell/For The Daily Astorian

Bereniece Jones-Centeno is the artistic director of the Liberty Theater. "... I love being in a place that really needs someone to help them grow," she says.

**'The world is our oyster because the Liberty hasn't had an artistic director. Whatever we can create, that's all open to us right now.'**

Bereniece Jones-Centeno  
Liberty Theater's new artistic director

## Serial robber gets 10 years

Held up Cannon Beach hotel at gunpoint in 2014

By JACK HEFFERNAN  
The Daily Astorian

A serial robber who held up a Cannon Beach hotel at gunpoint was sentenced Tuesday to 10 years in prison.

Ernest Lee Dean, 44, pointed a handgun at hotel clerk Orlo Baldwin at the Stephanie Inn in January 2014 and forced him to hand over almost \$7,000 in cash.

After ordering Baldwin to lay on his stomach, Dean zip-tied Baldwin's hands behind his back and left him on the floor. Baldwin, an elderly man, testified Tuesday in Clatsop County Circuit Court that he was scared for his life, but that Dean gave him a reassuring pat on the back before leaving.

"The defendant, with great humanity, patted me on the back as if to say, 'It'll be OK old man,'" Baldwin said. "I hold no animosity toward him."

Baldwin left the courtroom soon after testifying, but Dean said later — while not fully admitting to the crime — that he had "unconditional empathy" for Baldwin.

Dean, who was arrested in Portland in February 2014 after an investigation that involved police in Cannon Beach, was responsible for an armed robbery spree at several hotels and is serving a 25-year prison sentence handed down in Multnomah County.

Judge Paula Brownhill ruled that Dean's 10-year sentence for the Cannon Beach robbery will be added to the Multnomah County penalty. Dean was convicted of first-degree robbery, second-degree kidnapping and felon in possession of a firearm.

"Based on the facts of the case, it is clear the defendant's intent was to commit more than one offense, and the defendant created a risk of qualitatively different harm or injury to the victim," Deputy District Attorney Steve Chamberlin wrote in a sentencing memorandum.

## Razor clam closure cripples coast tourism

No new toxin since September, but clams slow to clear problem

By LUKE WHITTAKER  
EO Media Group

LONG BEACH, Wash. — The financial fallout from the razor clam closure has racked restaurants, retailers and small businesses around the Long Beach Peninsula.

"This is my slowest winter since 2008," Full Circle Café owner Colleen Smith said. "Usually I drop 33 percent in a normal year, this year I dropped 50 percent."

Smith believes the combination of clamming closures, delays in the Dungeness crab season and unusually cold weather have deterred visitors.

"Between no clamming, the crabbing season and the weather — this is one of the best ski seasons they've had in four or five years, so that's what we're competing against to draw any families or day trippers," Smith said.

"Do I go skiing or do I go down and have a family weekend and go clamming? Well if clamming was their draw, we aren't getting them. That's it in a nutshell."

### Financial fallout

The economic impact of the razor clam season is profound, particularly for the peninsula, which offers some of the most desirable clamming destinations in the state.

An economic impact report by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife estimated that diggers bring \$22 million during an average season. On a single day, razor clam digs can



Luke Whittaker/EO Media Group

Sportsmen's Cannery in Seaview has seen a drastic drop in revenue resulting from the razor clam closure. "The difference between having clams and not having clams is an 85 percent difference in our income from month to month," Sportsmen's Cannery owner Tina Ward said.

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