



Photos by Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

David Snower, an Oregon Ghost Conference attendee, tells a ghost story illuminated by a campfire during the Ghost Stories Bonfire event on Friday in Seaside. This is the sixth annual conference and the second time it has called Seaside home.

## Beaches undergo a spring spruce up

5,000 volunteers clear 56,000 pounds of trash

The Daily Astorian

The annual SOLVE Spring Oregon Beach Cleanup celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Oregon Beach Bill by removing 56,000 pounds of litter and marine debris from the Oregon Coast on Saturday, event organizers said. The Oregon Beach Bill was a landmark piece of legislation granting the public recreational access to all Oregon beaches.

Nearly 5,000 volunteers scoured the coastline at 45 locations from Fort Stevens State Park south to Brookings.

"Marine debris is one of the biggest issues facing our oceans and beaches," said SOLVE CEO Maureen Fisher. "Every piece of trash picked up today has a tremendous impact on the health of Oregon's wildlife and coastal communities."

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# PARANORMAL IS NORMAL AT GHOST FEST

## Tour explores Seaside's own haunted history

By BRENNA VISSER  
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — When it comes to studying paranormal activity, one of the most important elements to understand is quite normal.

It's history, according to Rocky Smith, the organizer of the sixth annual Oregon Ghost Conference.

"It's the interest in this history that connected me to this place. It's asking the question, 'Why do (paranormal) things happen here?'" he said.

He explained this to about 100 paranormal enthusiasts huddled together on a crisp Friday night around the postcard mural on the corner of Edgewood and Oceanway streets.

Friday was the first day of the three-day conference, where about 800 people from around the country came to listen to paranormal lectures, share ghost stories and even do a ghost investigation in the Bridge Tender on Broadway.

In this moment, participants gathered to experience the different haunted nooks and crannies along the Promenade and downtown streets.

Nancy Thompkins traveled from Anacortes, Washington, to the conference intrigued for that reason. Her interest in ghosts began when she saw one when she was a child, she said.

"I like history and knowing what happened where," Thompkins said. "You can feel a residual energy in a place like this. You can feel it, but you don't know why."

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Oregon Ghost Conference Director Rocky Smith points to a historic building while giving a ghost tour to conference attendees on Friday in Seaside.



Rocky Smith, Oregon Ghost Conference director, gives a ghost tour filled with historic information on Friday at the Seaside Turnaround.



Daily Astorian/File Photo

The state will resume hazing cormorants on the Oregon Coast to protect salmon.

## Another rude awakening for cormorants

Campaign to protect salmon starts again

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
For The Daily Astorian

Cormorants facing possible death by shotgun blast at their colony near the mouth of the Columbia River don't seem to have started house-hunting in less dangerous neighborhoods farther down the coast.

But as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife once again prepares to coordinate nonlethal hazing projects at various Oregon estuaries this spring, biologists will watch for changes in cormorant colonies south of the river.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the massive double-crested cormorant colony on East Sand Island, began a culling program in 2015 in an effort to manage the growing colony and reduce the number of young salmon the birds were estimated to consume annually. That year, the Army Corps' contractors killed a total of 2,346 adult

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## Park gift shop manager has natural love of history

### Neal takes over shop duties at Fort Stevens

Jefferson, Iowa; Ames, Iowa; and Fort Stevens were all settled or built in a span of 10 years beginning in the mid-1850s. The three places with ties to the Civil War era helped Laura Neal — who was raised in Jefferson, went to college in Ames and now works at Fort Stevens — develop a natural love of history.

Neal, 24, became the Friends of Old Fort Stevens' gift shop manager in January. She replaced Jim Forst, who



retired after holding down the fort's store for 15 years.

She certainly is no stranger to seeing historical areas from a visitor's point of view.

Neal's father is a high school history teacher in Iowa. As a child, Neal spent many vacations touring historical sites around the country with her family.

Though she never visited Fort Stevens, she spent a lot of time in southern Oregon. The

scenery and recreational opportunities stuck with her as she made her decision to move to the West.

After earning an environmental science degree with a minor in biology from Iowa State University, Neal moved west in summer 2014 to work part time at Fort Stevens.

"Oregon really stood out to me as the best," she said. "When I came out here for the interview, it just felt like the right fit."

She spent most of that first summer cleaning and maintaining areas throughout the park.



Laura Neal

In 2016, she became an interpreter, allowing her to host kayak tours on Coffenbury Lake, wildlife viewings on the Tressel Bay Trail, talks at the Peter Iredale shipwreck and tours of the fort itself, among other things.

"It's fun being in the behind-the-scenes aspect of that," Neal said.

For her current position, she ensures there's wood at campsites throughout the park, orders items for the store, manages bookkeeping and hosts tours on busy days.

Neal said she hopes to orga-

nize more events and post signs that help visitors understand the historical significance of various sites.

She recently organized a history quest, in which visitors can follow an informational pamphlet leading them to letters throughout the park. After finding the last letter, they then scramble them to find a word matching a site at the park. The site will have a hidden box, which holds items they can redeem at the store for a prize.

"We have a lot of fonts and batteries, but people don't necessarily know what they are," Neal said. "It's a fun way to teach the kids about history."

— Jack Heffernan

