

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

Festivals bring vitality, revenue to North Coast

Festival season is here. In many of our communities — Astoria, Long Beach, Seaside, Ocean Park and Cannon Beach — these annual events bring thousands of visitors who spend money. They have a tremendous economic impact in their own right and also contribute to a sense in the broader region that the coast is fun and community-minded.

The season really is jump-started in late April and early May — first by the Astoria Warrenton Crab, Seafood and Wine Festival and then with Loyalty Days in Long Beach and Ilwaco, Washington.

Like most of these seasonal events, the crab festival began modestly 35 years ago, in an empty fish processing plant on the river — with families eating crab on tables covered with newspapers. One early festival was held in a hangar at Tongue Point. It is an enthusiastic opportunity to taste some of our region's most iconic seafoods and Pacific Northwest wines, while paying tribute to the hardworking Dungeness crab fleet.

Loyalty Day is among the oldest and proudest of local festivals, with roots in the perilous days following World War II when the threat of nuclear annihilation set the world on edge. In this context, large and small towns throughout the U.S. began staging patriotic events as a response to the May Day parades in Red Square in the Soviet Union. Now expanded to include a children's parade and Blessing of the Fleet in Ilwaco, the event is rooted in preserving small-town love of country.

Astoria's Sunday Market is well into its six-month season. The market has become the equivalent of a sustained festival, drawing visitors once a week.

Astoria's cruise ship visits present a different sort of festival. The cruise ship hosts make Astoria a unique stop for the disembarking visitors. The beauty of the cruise ship traffic is that it comes without vehicles. They arrive in the morning and leave at day's end.

This week we have the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival in Astoria and the Sandcastle Festival in Cannon Beach — both have Oregon Heritage Tradition designations by the Oregon Heritage Commission, along with Astoria's Regatta. There is also a Muscle and Chrome Car Show this weekend in Seaside and the Northwest Garlic Festival in Ocean Park.

As summer progresses, the festival calendar will be filled by Seaside's beach volleyball weekend and the Long Beach Kite Festival. One of Oregon's oldest festivals is the Astoria Regatta in August. The festival that puts the biggest load on the county's transportation network is the Hood to Coast Relay, which terminates in Seaside in August. The Rod Run to the End of the World in Ocean Park and Seaside's Wheels and Waves car show in September provide a grand finale for the main summer festival season.

This assortment of festivals brings vitality and revenue to our region. Keeping them vibrant will require a fresh generation of volunteers on every level of planning and presentation. Seek out these opportunities to make a fun and valuable contribution to the lives of our wonderful communities.

Hatred must not win the game in America

Everyone with a passing familiarity with the U.S. Congress knows of the congressional baseball game. It is a treasured artifact from kinder and gentler times in American politics, when Republicans and Democrats were more likely to socially interact and share common interests.

This good-hearted annual rivalry in America's Pastime still brings congressional members and staffs together in something approaching friendship.

It was an appalling rip in the nation's social fabric for a gunman to target this tradition. While reinforcing the point that no one is safe from gun violence in today's USA, this was a tragic new low. It struck at the heart of something we still cherish: The idea that beneath day-to-day controversies and arguments, we still are a united people.

It's essential to renew our union with one another. We must remember every moment that we all love our families. We willingly serve our country in times of need. We squabble but remain bound together by things as simple as a sunny baseball diamond and as noble as Lincoln's sentiment that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

The best response to this attack is to have the best congressional baseball game ever, cheered on by the entire nation. Thereafter, our elected representatives must put petty backbiting and gamesmanship aside, and get on with conducting the nation's business with courage, intelligence, compassion and fellowship.

We must never allow anyone to tear us apart.



The terrible, horrible, no good, very bad generator

By JOANNE RIDEOUT
Special to The Daily Astorian

At Coast Community Radio in Astoria, we've worked hard this past year to resolve a big issue related to our emergency preparedness, namely, our ability to remain on the air during a power outage.

This conundrum left us without generator backup for our radio stations for months, and continued to haunt us despite our best efforts, including a campaign last summer to raise money to buy new equipment.

I'm happy to say we've resolved our problems, and are grateful that we now have robust, brand-new generator backup in place at our main transmitter site on Megler Mountain. I'm sleeping again at night. And if the power goes off, the station will stay on.

That was not always the case during the past year, when it was starting to look like our much-touted commitment to staying on the air, no matter what, was wearing thin.

So in the spirit of full disclosure, I'd like to tell the story of what happened and why it took so long. No, actually, what I'd like to tell you is the seemingly endless, excruciating, maddening, you've-got-to-be-kidding-me saga of our path to a new, working emergency generator.

I've come to call this experience, "Nightmare on Megler Mountain," or, "The Generator That Wouldn't." I've also called it a few other things that are unprintable, which I will spare you here. One of my faults is that I can swear like a sailor when I'm upset, and I can say I did the maritime industry proud on this one.

No normal days

It all started one seemingly normal day, except, as you probably know if you know us, there are not really any normal days at KMUN. Our facilities in general are old and quirky, and we seem to be a magnet for eccentricity, be it human or mechanical. That day we hit the jackpot, and not in a charming way. Both generators at our Megler Mountain transmitter site across the Columbia River from Astoria, which were old but reliable, and had always been fixable somehow, quit. The same day. Nada. Done.

Both units were so old that tech support people at the companies that made them either didn't exist anymore, or laughed sardonically when we asked about parts. Said unhelpful things like, "We stopped making those at the end of the Civil War."

We specialize in hand-me-downs, and pride ourselves on keeping good old equipment running. We thought that's what we were doing. We were wrong.

A couple of people asked me during this process why we didn't have a rainy day fund, with money set aside for things like this. Well, actually we did. Then we encountered, in the past year, numerous expenses of the rainy day variety. A veritable downpour. By the time the generators failed, our current rainy day money was already spent on expenses we could not avoid.

So we did what we've done

rarely in the past when we encountered this type of emergency: a special fundraiser to ask listeners to help out. With a \$5,000 matching grant from the Samuel S. Johnson Foundation, we asked listeners to pitch in. They did, and then some. We ended up with about \$15,000 after a one-day emergency drive.

Boondoggle

Our tech crew looked around and decided on a manufacturer known for reliable equipment. We ordered online and had them delivered. The generator that ended up being the boondoggle, and the subject of this tale, was the one we bought for our main transmitter building.

The company we ordered this piece of equipment from has a great return policy. We knew, at least, that if we needed to return the generator they'd accept it, no questions asked beyond, "So, I guess you didn't like it?" We didn't know it yet, but we were well on our way to not liking this particular generator really, really a lot.

Our knowledgeable, jack-of-all-trades volunteer Albert Smith, who also does Friday Folk on the air, borrowed a truck with a hoist and drove the behemoth to its new spot on the mountain. Our crew hooked it up. It wouldn't start. And so, our nightmare began.

Getting it back down the mountain was a Herculean job, so instead of returning it, we first tried to fix it. Albert looked at it in depth with a local electrician. No go. Installed new wiring in our building. No go. We got the gas company people up there, because it was a propane generator. Nothing wrong there. Our folks tried a few more miracle cures. It sputtered to life for an hour and died.

Now all this sounds like it might have been a fairly straightforward process, to do all this troubleshooting. But for the sake of this story not becoming a miniseries, I've condensed here literally months of time with people puzzling over that damnable unit.

Slow path

Experts like the ones we needed are not always available just like that. Volunteers (on whom we rely a great deal to get things done around here) are busy with their own lives, tradespeople have other customers, and weather interferes (this was by now happening in fall, going on winter). It was becoming difficult to get people to stop what they were doing and take a trek up a four-wheel-drive mountain road in driving rain, ice and snow to work on our mysteriously nonfunctioning, brand new, %!\$# generator (Sorry, am I shouting again?). It was, at times, a slow path.

At the manufacturer's suggestion, we located a generator dealer who could help, Green Electric in Seaside. Dan Green, the owner, is also a service repair technician. He too went up and looked at it, ran some tests, tried mightily. Even he could not get it to work.

Since we couldn't just toss the offending unit in someone's pickup and return it, Albert arranged, painstakingly, to get it hoisted back on a suitable truck, and hauled to our KMUN studios in Astoria. The company picked it up, took it back and refunded our money.

We were back to square one.

Months had passed; the winter weather was getting worse. And we still had no generator backup on our main transmitter. Meanwhile, the season was taking its toll. Power's out; we're off the air. Power's out; we're down again. Ugh.

We turned to Green once more, as the best route to getting a good new commercial generator. Despite our bad experience with one lemon, the brand he represented was a reputable company. We just needed a new, perhaps harder unit.

But there was another snag, regarding a technicality in warranty coverage for the extended wrangling with "The Generator That Wouldn't." After playing a circuitous shell game with manufacturer customer support, I finally decided that our relationship with our local service tech was more important in the long run than the money. We negotiated payment.

By this time it was spring again. Life was good, flowers were blooming, the sun was out (occasionally), but we still had no generator. With the way now clear, we ordered a new, commercial grade generator and, to fast forward again, had it installed under the capable auspices of our service guy.

I was feeling pretty chipper on installation day until I got a grim, matter of fact, call from Albert. "The new generator," he said. There was a pause. "It doesn't work."

What? I was beginning to suspect the Megler site was under some sort of curse. The generator manufacturer sent another expert to look at it. They found that an important part in this unit had been installed backwards at the factory. We held our collective breath. Finally, with the offending part in its proper alignment, the generator, our generator, worked. Perfectly.

Good news

As I sit in my office at KMUN writing this, the sun is shining, and a soft breeze is wafting in through the window. Summer is almost upon us, and we hope good weather with it. But I know that someday soon, some freak weather event will happen, equipment failure on a pole somewhere will knock out the power, and most assuredly, winter will come again. The very good news is that we now have a solid generator installed, one that should last another few decades. And we have a great guy, Dan Green, on our team to help us keep it running. We thank him profusely for his work.

I'm not sure, of course, but I think that KMUN has now exhausted and made good on any bad generator karma the station had acquired in the course of its existence.

Thank you kindly for your patience during the past year. We say, "Thank You" a lot around here, but we mean it, and we appreciate our loyal and supportive listener family.

They say perspective is everything, and now that I know what can go wrong with a generator project, I'm doubly grateful that things worked out.

And I'm really happy to say that when the power goes out again, and it will, I'm as certain as I can be that we'll be able to stay on the air — for you, our community — just like we promised.

Joanne Rideout is the general manager of Coast Community Radio.