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OUR VIEW



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Participants in the 'Shop the Dock' event in Warrenton this month Friday tour the Skipanon Brand Seafood processing facility after a visit to the local marina. The event was held to inform the public about how to purchase local seafood from local merchants.

Warrenton makes savvy investment in marina upgrades

Warrenton's and Hammond's marinas are endlessly fascinating small-town spectacles — portholes opening into an intriguing culture of commercial and recreational fishing. There can be few better ways to spend a morning than admiring the pragmatic but elegant lines of vessels, talking with fishermen, listening to seabirds, breathing the crisp marine air and fantasizing about sailing over the horizon in pursuit of adventure.

A century ago, hope was lavished on the idea that a full-scale international metropolis might be coaxed into existence on Clatsop County's northwestern tip. So far at least, this vision hasn't materialized. But with a newly renovated dock and related facilities within easy reach of Pacific and Columbia crabbing grounds, Warrenton has a legitimate claim on becoming the capital of fresh, gourmet-quality seafood. This prospect was greatly strengthened by the city's Urban Renewal Agency's \$2.1 million investment in its main marina.

Pacific Coast Seafood's reconstruction of its processing plant, along with ongoing operations other seafood and maritime businesses, is a validation of Warrenton's expenditure. So too are new "Shop the Dock" tours of the marina and the Skipanon Brand Seafood facility. For the sake of future tours and the ongoing waterfront economy, Amanda Gladics of Oregon Sea Grant is planning to connect with fishermen who want to take part in Oregon's recent rule revisions allowing fish sales directly from local vessels.

All this adds up to a river town maturing and learning how best to capitalize on some of its best and most unique assets. It's also a significant validation of Warrenton's model of operating port facilities under the umbrella of municipal government. The combined Warrenton-Hammond municipality is doing a good job of melding town and waterfront in ways that can be beneficial to all.

There can be risks to this. The sinking of the abandoned fishing boat Western Skies, with associated diesel cleanup costs and the potential of much more expense to dispose of wood that may be saturated with hazardous materials, could amount to a substantial bill. There may be another nine boats with similar risks in the marina, taken in before the harbor imposed stricter proof-of-ownership and insurance requirements for moored vessels. As Warrenton apparently understands, marinas are a complex blend of business and government agency: It's vital to have knowledgeable experts minding the helm.

Warrenton is increasingly well positioned to benefit as northwest Oregon's population grows. With its marina investments, it is poised for continuing prosperity, with a reputation as a sophisticated place to live, visit and enjoy a premium natural lifestyle and menu.

While rapid commercial development along U.S. Highway 101 has turned Warrenton into the region's big-box consumer-shopping hub, stewardship of its marinas and miles of seashore and riverbank could ultimately be even more crucial to its long-term success.

The "Shop the Dock" tours sound like lots of fun — a chance to learn to ways to incorporate fresh, healthy, locally landed fish in our diets.

The next 90-minute tours are Sept. 15, 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Reserve a spot at least three days in advance by calling Oregon Sea Grant at 503-325-8573. The tours meet in the Warrenton Marina at 550 N.E. Harbor Place. Organizers recommend attendees wear comfortable walking shoes and arrive 15 minutes early. Space is limited.



"DIDN'T YOU KNOW? I'M A SURVIVOR!"

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Searching for clues to the death of a bandleader

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

Meet Ron Herd, a Memphis, Tennessee, native and founder of the Jimmie Lunceford Jamboree Festival in 2007. Herd, 37, of course never knew Lunceford — along with Count Basie and Duke Ellington, among the most renowned and best-selling jazz musicians of the 1930s and '40s.



But as a student at Washington University in St. Louis, Herd was turned on to jazz and jazz history.

After reading a journalist's account of the music scene known as the "Chitlin' Circuit" in 2007, Herd wondered why Lunceford wasn't better remembered. "I thought something should be done about honoring this guy."

He did just that. Herd founded the "Official Jimmie Lunceford Jamboree" website with salutes to Lunceford, memorials and events, including a June jam session and wreath-laying, this year in honor of what would have been Lunceford's 115th birthday.

Herd plans on using the information and footage gathered for a feature-length documentary about Lunceford, which will be available in 2018. The Jimmie Lunceford Jamboree Festival returns in October.

Lunceford's legacy

As an athletics instructor at Manassas High School in Memphis, Lunceford organized a student band, the Chickasaw Syncopators, whose name was changed to the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra. Under the new name, the band started its professional career in 1929, and made its first recordings in 1930.

Manassas was the first black public high school in Shelby County, and Lunceford was the first public high school band director in Memphis, Herd said.

In 1934, Lunceford and his orchestra took over the prestigious role as the house band at the Cotton Club in New York City's Harlem, following in the footsteps of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway. While Lunceford was the most popular bandleader among black audiences — selling more records than Ellington and Count Basie — his hits like "Margie," "Rhythm is Our Business" and "My Blue Heaven" crossed all racial barriers.

A commitment to education continued even as his popularity grew.

"No matter how big he got he was always starting education programs," Herd said. "Wherever he went, he used to come back from Memphis, he always gave free concerts to Manassas High School students and gave lessons to young musicians who wanted to learn more about their instruments."

Under the baton of Lunceford protégé Emerson Able Jr., Manassas High School trained countless musicians, including Motown star Isaac Hayes.

Death in Seaside

Lunceford's death at age 45 was a shock to bandmates and friends. Lunceford collapsed while signing records for fans at Seaside Radio



Rebecca Herren/The Daily Astorian

Ron Herd pays a visit to the Signal offices.

and Record Shop on Broadway.

Lunceford, a teetotaler, was "a perfectly healthy man who had boxed, run track and played softball," according to trumpeter Joe Wilder in a 2012 biography of Lunceford. "It was one of the saddest days of my life."

In "Rhythm is My Business," author Eddie Determeyer posits that Lunceford may have been poisoned by tainted meat deliberately served by a racist restaurant owner in Seaside.

The Clatsop County Coroner declared Lunceford died of "coronary occlusion, due to thrombosis of anterior coronary artery due to arteriosclerosis" — in other words, a heart attack caused by a blockage.

Jazz historian Lewis Porter suggests that Wilder — a member of the Lunceford band — remembers the racist restaurant owner as having been in Portland, not in Seaside.

"Further, Wilder was present when Lunceford collapsed and he remembers nothing about bad food beforehand," Porter said.

Botulism is not a poison and cannot be "manufactured" or "planted," Porter said. "It's simply a severe form of food poisoning that can occur in, for example, rotten meat. But he (Lunceford) died from a heart attack — nothing to do with the food! He's not the first guy to die suddenly at a relatively young age from unsuspected heart trouble, especially in those days."

On the other hand, Porter said, Wilder, who had a very sharp memory, confirmed that the Seaside venue tried to exclude blacks from that evening's concert.

Determeyer, contacted in 2015 at his home in Holland, acknowledged there was little hard evidence of poisoning.

"Let's hope there will be an aftermath, and hopefully some new clues," Determeyer said.

Seaside connection

Herd was in Seaside this month to expand his research, replete with visits to the Seaside Signal, the Seaside Museum and Historical Society and interviews with jazz fans and folks who remember the days when the city was a hub of big bands and jazz music.

"Engaging strangers on the 70th anniversary of his tragic death at the key spots that played a pivotal role in his last moments was emotionally

and spiritually moving," Herd said.

During his visit, Herd revisited the sites of the landmarks of the past: 10 Downing Street, the restaurant Lunceford ate; the Bungalow, the venue where Lunceford's band played on, even after their leader's death; and Seaside Radio and Record Shop.

Herd met with Tita Montero and other representatives of the Seaside Museum and Historical Society, and talked with Gloria Linkey, author of "A Town Called Seaside."

"I could tell in her voice that she had a lot of respect and admiration for Jimmie Lunceford and his music," Herd said of Linkey. "I always appreciate when I meet someone who is really a fan of Jimmie Lunceford because they can never hide their enthusiasm for this particular unsung music genius. It was very insightful, entertaining and helpful. All were very grateful for the food for thought I provided."

He met jazz lovers from near and far, including fans from Kazakhstan and a bar owner who "photo-bombed" the presentation.

Herd played his trumpet near the site of Lunceford's death, and filmed a short commentary about the significance on "why people should never forget the man or his music."

"I thoroughly enjoyed Seaside in particular and Oregon in general," Herd wrote upon his return to Memphis. "I really did not know what to expect. Being a black man from the American South I am no stranger to racism, both covert and overt."

"The Pacific Northwest has a reputation for being a home and breeding ground for white supremacists," he continued. "Oregon's actual history as a Jim Crow state did not help either. Given that perception, I could easily see a scenario where Jimmie Lunceford might have been killed by a devout white supremacist in Seaside due to the fact he was a proud and confident black man who did not settle for second-class treatment by anyone, regardless of color."

Seventy years after his death, Lunceford's death in Seaside remains clouded.

"To paraphrase William Faulkner, 'The past is never past,'" Herd wrote.

R.J. Marx is The Daily Astorian's South County reporter and editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.