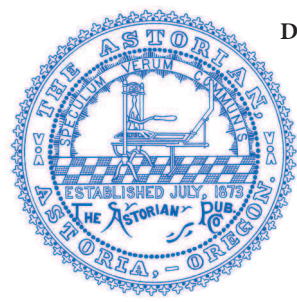


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW

Open records laws cast a public light

When it comes to government transparency and accountability, open records laws provide a great check and balance for the public and not just through the media.

That proved true once again as it played out recently in Mississippi, when a simple records request from an attorney representing a former University of Mississippi football coach led to the resignation of the Ole Miss coach, Hugh Freeze.

According to Yahoo Sports and other reports, the former coach, Houston Nutt, felt disparaged when Freeze and leaders at the taxpayer-supported university deflected NCAA accusations of program misdeeds to the prior coach and administration. According to the reports, the most serious of the violations — if proven true — would have occurred during Freeze's tenure, and Nutt wanted that publicly acknowledged. When the university balked, he sued.

Nutt's attorney, Tom Mars, in conjunction with a defamation lawsuit against the university, filed a records request seeking telephone logs of Freeze and the athletic director to try to show that Nutt had been thrown under the bus. In examining the records, a one-minute call from Freeze's state-issued phone turned out to be to an escort service. Freeze initially claimed it was a "misdia," but university officials, alerted by the attorney's findings, investigated further and found what they said was a "pattern."

Up to that point, the media wasn't involved in seeking the records. Freeze, who is married and religious, immediately resigned and headlines ensued.

Had Freeze been a private citizen rather than a high-ranking state employee, calling an escort service would have been a private moral matter and the accountability would have been between he and his conscience. But as a public figure in a position of high visibility and trust — especially with parents, recruits and players — his phone records are public and he's subject to the same accountability as those in public office.

That level of accountability is important in all states, not just Mississippi.

In Oregon, legislators recently took strides to improve records access, but there's still room for reform.

Among legislatively approved changes are the implementation of specific deadlines for responses to records requests and the delivery of requested information that isn't covered by numerous legal exemptions. The goal of the change is to prevent bureaucratic officials from purposely stonewalling records requests.

The Attorney General's Office will also compile a full list of the state's more than 500 exemptions and make the list publicly available, while a "sunshine" committee within the Department of Justice will work with lawmakers and others to review the exemptions for potential reform.

Legislators also approved the creation of a post for an appointed public records advocate who will mediate records disputes. The advocate, appointed by the governor, will also chair a newly created Public Records Advisory Council and will engage in training public officials on records disclosure.

The changes here are meaningful, and as the Mississippi instance illustrates, the disclosure there wouldn't have come to light without a records request and the clout of the law behind it. Taxpayers benefit from laws that create that transparency and accountability.

In Oregon, legislators recently took strides to improve records access, but there's still room for reform.

LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than

mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com; online at www.dailyastorian.com; delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103.



SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Remembering a 'salty local' and his favorite area haunts

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

I wish I had known Mike Knop. Horse racing, brewing beer, cooking great meals, baseball, hockey and fly-fishing were Mike's favorite pastimes.

"Mike believed in living life to the fullest, chasing dreams, placing bets, cherishing and cultivating relationships, enjoying hobbies, learning something new every day, and reading," read his obituary. "It was important for Mike to live in

paradise, catch and release and spend quality time with friends especially at Cheri's."

Cheri's of course is the quintessential Cannon Beach hangout — locals hold sway here, but well-behaved visitors are always welcome. Former bodybuilder-turned-restaurant Cheri Lerma presides over the establishment, where you check your ego at the door and settle in for the news of the day.

"One of the reviews said there were a bunch of 'salty locals' in here," author Peter Lindsey said.

Mike died suddenly at their place near the Metolius River. He suffered a heart attack while driving and drove into a tree. He was 59.

When Mike wasn't fly-fishing, working on his cabin or betting on the horses, he made his living as a house painter, his longtime friend Rex Amos said.

"He must have painted most of Cannon Beach," Amos said. "He was also a great cook. His scalloped potatoes were front and center on Cheri's food table. Everyone loved Mike, especially Cheri."

It was appropriate then, that I cajoled Rex to put in a good word for me with Barb Knop to gather a few friends together at Cheri's for some informal memories. Amos and his wife, Diane, were joined by Lindsey, Marilyn and Cleve Rooper, along with Barb and of course Cheri, who was doing double duty on a busy Friday afternoon taking orders and sharing stories.

'A Ph.D. in life'

Mike was a large man who embraced life with abandon, Amos said.

"Expert fly fisherman, prize-winning beer brewer, avid horse racing fan who packed Cheri's whenever the races were on TV," he wrote in a remembrance. "He'd run the numbers and study the horses then take up a collection and place the bets. Sometimes the gang got a few bucks, but for me it was just a way to have one hell of a good time losing a few bucks. Mike was one of Cheri's favorite customers. As she said, 'and he was the youngest of the group.'"

Mike came to Cheri's every night. "Since he's not here, it's weird," Lerma said. "We all interact together. Most of them are old locals who live here — I mean old in the sense they've lived here quite a while. We just had a good time with each other as a group, from work to play."

"I could look out the window and still expect to see him with his baseball cap like he would do it every night," Lindsey said.

Topics of conversation ran the gamut: horse racing, fishing, cigar connoisseur and the merits of beers. Mike was gifted at everything he pursued, brewing the best home



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Rex Amos, Cheri Lerma, Marilyn Rooper (back) Peter Lindsey, Cleve Rooper and Barb Knop, front, in Mike Knop's bar chair.



Submitted Photo

Mike Knop

brew Lindsey had ever tasted. He recalled a fussy friend who swore he would only drink Budweiser. Mike's beer changed his mind, Lindsey said. "He said, 'This is the first beer I really like besides Budweiser.'"

As a fisherman, Knop could effortlessly cast, either from the Ecola Creek, Metolius River or along the surf in Cannon Beach.

"It's a bit of a cliché, but Mike could read the water," Amos said.

He was "strictly catch and release," Lindsey recalled. "We told him, 'That's like shooting an elk then taking it to the veterinarian to get treated.'"

"He wasn't pretentious," Amos said. "With his fly-fishing, he didn't worry about getting thousands of dollars worth of gear. He'd just go out there and fish. He didn't do all this false casting or bring out all the gear in the world. Mike would just go out and cast out and there would be the fish."

"I always thought he had a Ph.D. in life, because he knew about everything," Barb Knop said. "He was an expert at everything he did."

Humor was his forte

Knop, described as "Mike the Wheel" in his obituary, was born in Detroit, Michigan, on May 3, 1958. After high school he started his journey to the West Coast with stops in Denver, Colorado, and Kennewick, Washington. Knop met his future wife in Denver in the summer of 1982 when Barb was on vacation and needed a golf partner.

The couple married on the beach in Cannon Beach on June 1984.

"We came here for the summer and we never left," Barb said.

The only thing Mike never took to, Barb said, was serving in local government.

Though he served briefly on the Public Works board when he first arrived in Cannon Beach, he spurned the public spotlight.

"His definition of 'communist activities' were all the volunteer things that I was involved with," Barb said with a smile.

After working as a bartender, Mike launched a painting business. He soon became "the" painter in Cannon Beach.

Though he had the opportunity, he didn't want to become a big business. That would've interfered with his hobbies, Barb said.

He had something in common with everybody, Amos said, and humor was Mike's forte.

"He always had something funny to say," Lerma said.

Cleve Rooper remembers Mike playing practical jokes, swapping habaneros for martini olives and creating ice cream "sundaes" of bear droppings.

The season Terry Porter starred for the Portland Trail Blazers, Mike immortalized him by brewing a dark beer called "Terry Porter," Rooper said.

"When some hops fell off a truck, Mike made beer out of it. He called it 'Roadkill Ale.'"

Mike loved parties: The Super Bowl, Kentucky Derby, Christmas and anything with his fishing group.

"He lived to celebrate every day he was alive," Barb said. "If it involved a party that was OK. There weren't too many occasions that we missed."

An empty chair

At Cheri's, it's not only the barstool with his name on it that will serve to remember Mike Knop.

"I always looked at him like a growly bear that was a little bit cuddly," Lerma said. "He was soft — crunchy on the outside and chewy on the inside."

"We miss him," Marilyn Rooper said.

"It's not the same without him," Amos said.

"I'm thinking of closing early," Lerma said mournfully as the late-lunch crowd settled down.

"I will make a rare appearance and sit in his chair," Barb said, moving to the wooden chair with "Mr. Knop" painted on the back.

A community event in his memory is planned for November, she said. "I think if he were looking down, he would say, 'Just make sure every day you tell the people you love that you love them.'"

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