



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Candace Pozdolski, left, and Jennifer Peden, right, are lead dispatchers at Astoria 911 Dispatch.

CONTROLLED CHAOS

ASTORIA DISPATCH
COPE WITH STRESS,
MANAGEMENT CHANGES

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

‘Controlled chaos’ is the phrase Astoria dispatchers say best summarizes the nature of their profession. For these dispatchers in particular, experience in this realm has been critical.

An independent assessment released in August found that the Astoria Police Department was approaching crisis level prior to Brad Johnston’s sudden retirement as chief. Part of the report detailed issues with management and staffing shortages that have plagued Astoria 911 Dispatch.

With Interim Police Chief Geoff Spalding now on board, the dispatch center has been taking the first steps in solving its immediate issues.

“We’re back on an even keel and moving the department ahead,” Emergency Communications Manager Jeff Rusiecki said. “Everybody knew there was a problem somewhere and things weren’t running smooth. Whose fault is that? I don’t know. I’m not going to put the blame anywhere.”

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Jennifer Peden | lead dispatcher



Lead Dispatcher Candace Pozdolski monitors computer screens at the Astoria 911 Dispatch on Monday.

Hotel fire might be deliberate

Comfort Suites evacuated on Monday night

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

Authorities believe a gas leak and fire at Comfort Suites in Astoria on Monday night may have been started intentionally.

After meeting yesterday at the hotel on Lief Erikson Drive, fire personnel determined a mechanical failure was not the cause of the initial gas leak near a natural gas meter in the back of the building just before 9:30 p.m. The exact cause of the leak remains unknown.

“Right now, the concern is that a person intentionally tampered with the natural gas line causing the leak, which led to the fire,” Astoria Police Deputy Chief Eric Halverson said.

The leak then started a fire that extended into the build-

ing. While the bulk of the fire burned outside, flames did reach the hotel’s laundry room. The inside part of the fire was extinguished after a water pipe burst and a ceiling sprinkler activated. Water from the pipe kept pumping into the hotel, though, causing several inches of water to flood the ground floor.

The fire prompted the hotel, which was at full capacity at the time, to evacuate dozens of guests from 75 rooms and find alternative lodging arrangements in Astoria and Warrenton. No injuries were reported.

Comfort Suites will remain closed for the rest of the week.

The Clatsop County Major Crimes team has joined the investigation and is seeking the public’s help. Anyone who saw someone in the area of the Astoria Riverwalk between Safeway and the East Mooring Basin Monday night is asked to call the Astoria Police Department at 503-325-4411.

Warrenton may pursue dam study

Computer modeling with tide gates on

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — Warrenton will likely seek federal expertise on a computer-generated hydrology model of the Eighth Street Dam with the tide gates on to help gauge the aging structure’s value for flood control.

Mayor Henry Balensifer and city commissioners said Tuesday that they want more study before reconsidering the Skipanon Water Control District’s attempt to remove the dam to improve fish passage and water quality on the Skipanon River.

The water district operated the dam with the tide gates up since 2012 and took the tide

gates off in 2015 with the expectation the dam would eventually be removed as a hazard.

Lance Helwig, the levee safety officer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Portland, told city commissioners Tuesday night there is interest at the Army Corps and the Natural Resources Conservation Service in new modeling of the dam. The Army Corps is the federal partner on the city’s levee system, while the Natural Resources Conservation Service is the former federal partner of the water district on the dam.

The research, which would likely be financed by Warrenton, potentially with federal and state grant money, could help break a stalemate between the city and the water district over the future of the dam.

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A Knappa mom turns pain into action

A voice in drug policy debate

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

An increasingly visible face in local drug addiction policy discussions made an appearance with Gov. Kate Brown last week for a ceremonial bill signing at the state Capitol.

Kerry Strickland, a Knappa mother whose son died of a heroin overdose, watched as Brown signed a new law that allows for quicker access to Naloxone — a drug that reverses opioid overdoses.

After the signing, Strickland attended the first meeting of Brown’s opioid task force.

Strickland, who founded Jordan’s Hope for Recovery, said the signing and meeting signaled a good start as Oregon attempts to fight an epidemic that has led to thousands of deaths in the state.

“They don’t have a plan yet, but they have an idea about the direction they’re going in,” Strickland said.

Strickland founded Jordan’s Hope after her 24-year-old son, the nonprofit organization’s namesake, died in 2015. Jordan began taking painkillers after a high school

sports injury. He eventually developed a heroin addiction despite growing up in a sober household with a mother who had not consumed alcohol or other substances for nearly 30 years.

Strickland’s organization seeks to connect addicts with treatment programs, conduct outreach programs and advocate for addiction prevention policies. Nearly 20 months after the organization was founded, Strickland’s connections include various national and state officials such as U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici,

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Submitted Photo

Kerry Strickland, second, from right, attended Gov. Kate Brown’s ceremonial signing last week in Salem of a new law that improves access to anti-overdose drugs. Strickland’s son, Jordan, died of a heroin overdose in 2015.

