

THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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OUR VIEW



AP Photo/Ronda Churchill

People walk near the Las Vegas Strip shortly after a deadly shooting occurred Sunday at a music festival.

No way to make sense of the senseless

There is no way to make sense of the senseless.

On a Sunday evening in Las Vegas, a 64-year-old man rains death on an outdoor country music festival. Firing hundreds of rounds, he commits a well-planned massacre.

Dozens die. Hundreds more are wounded, some critically. Thousands more — concertgoers, family, friends — will find their lives forever altered.

To say the shooter's act defies comprehension is to state the obvious.

Millions of Americans own guns. Few use them as instruments of mass chaos and carnage.

Millions of Americans are in their 60s. Few commit slaughter.

Millions of Americans struggle with mental illness — murder is not a sane act, even though jurisprudence sometimes judges it as such — yet few resort to homicidal violence.

And so, it is useless to automatically blame firearms or mental illness or whatever else for Stephen Craig Paddock's butchery undertaken from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay Hotel and Casino.

Yet surely, we can all agree that something is dreadfully wrong — deadly wrong — in our culture. Something enables mass violence to proliferate. Something allows humans to take out their societal and personal grievances with deadly precision.

We exist in a culture that increasingly has become "us vs. them," from politics to standard of living to personal vendettas.

However, blaming anyone, from the president to the neighbor next door, will achieve nothing. Rather, we as an American people must get it together ... and bring ourselves together as one.

How can we, as you and I and everyone else, overcome the causes that impel some people to the madness of massacre? How do we spot the signs — presumably of social isolation or of beyond-the-norm anger and unresolved rejection — that foretell impending violence?

A lesson of the 2015 shootings at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg is that lots of people saw oddities in the days and weeks beforehand, but no one put them all together. Without becoming the Big Brother of George Orwell's "1984" or the authoritarian society of Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451," we — family members, friends, teachers, colleagues — must become better at noticing and better at alerting, even when we don't know whether our little piece amounts to anything.

Or whether there even is a puzzle to be solved by authorities.

As for firearms, they reflect a societal truth. Bad things come from good things carried to extreme. Used properly, a firearm has a legitimate, worthwhile role. Used wrongly, a gun can become an instrument of evil.

In our society, instruments of casual carnage are easily available, from bomb-making instructions on the internet to high-capacity, high-power guns that can be obtained illegally when not legally. More laws will not change that, at least not soon.

Neither will new laws change our society's fascination with, and glorification of, mass violence. Books, movies and video games celebrate violence as the perceived solution to one's problems and a measure of one's machismo.

Even if we cannot make sense of the senseless, how do we stop the senseless?

Again, how do WE?

As for firearms, they reflect a societal truth. Bad things come from good things carried to extreme.



SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

In case of emergency, start here

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

SEASIDE — In case of emergency, start here.

Ham radio is at the heart of our region's safety efforts when the Big One hits.

"We know it's going to happen," said Hal Denison, president of the Seaside Tsunami Amateur Radio Society and a licensed expert radio operator.

"We've been training for that on a daily basis."

Amateur radio is the last resource in an emergency when there is no other means of communication.

"That's what we prepare for and back up for," Denison said. "There may not be phones. There may not be cellphones. We don't really know how many are going to survive. But we know that the amateur radio is running."

The more operators, the greater the possibility of having people who can help, Denison said.

Local radio enthusiasts watched with great interest the response in Texas and Florida after a season of hurricanes and floods.

"From a ham point of view, we know those were the only communications down there," Dana Gandy, president of Sunset Empire Amateur Radio Club, said.

Broad-based community

Radio operators in the region range from age 8 to older than 90.

"They all jump in and work together," Irv Emmons, a former communications professional and amateur radio operator, said. "If anyone has any issues, we all jump in and try to resolve them."

Terry Williams received her license 10 years ago when she moved to Seaside.

She got hooked after making radio communication with a radio operator in Scotland. "I've been on the radio ever since," Williams said. "I love it."

Since then she's served as an officer of the Seaside Tsunami Amateur Radio Society and continues to introduce other women to the hobby.

The women hold a practice session every Sunday night at 8 p.m. and a "hams' brunch" at the Uptown Cafe in Warrenton.

A power boost

Users find a wide range of technology, from basic packages to sophisticated gadgetry.

A hand-held battery offers low, medium and high power capabilities, Denison said.

On high power, a battery will be dead in one day. Medium power provides two to three days of communications. Low power lasts longer — up to four days — but limits broadcast reach.

Capabilities are rapidly being enhanced, Denison added.

Solar power, backup generators



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Ham radio operators Dana Gandy, Irv Emmons, Doug Barker, Carl Yates and Hal Denison.

and car-size batteries can provide many days of power after an emergency event.

One operator uses a bicycle power to generate power.

A self-sustaining repeater site in Arch Cape operates on solar power with no connection to the grid, bringing coverage from Nehalem to Warrenton.

Far and wide

Repeater and EchoLink sites allow licensed operators using a computer or smartphone to connect to repeater sites anywhere in the world.

Gearhart approved a repeater site at the city's September City Council meeting.

The site, including pole, electrical communications and equipment, is budgeted at about \$5,000 and will provide amateur radio service from the Arch Cape area to the northern tip of the Long Beach Peninsula in Washington state.

A site in Seaside at the water treatment plant has battery backup and two separate generator backups, Denison said.

A remote message system site in Seaside, located at Seaside Heights Elementary School, uses a laptop capable of sending emails over radio waves.

Global positioning systems capabilities can provide specific information about a user's location when other means fail, helping to identify victims who may be trapped or isolated.

"If you get in trouble, and you have no other means of communicating, you can type in a code in an emergency with your exact location," Gandy said.

He said GPS capabilities have so far been sporadic, but will be brought into all of the county's radio sites.

Training

Training in procedures and communication are not only essential but mandatory, as all operators must be federally licensed.

Amateurs are licensed by class, from the entry technician level to the intermediate general license

and the top level of "extra class," a distinction held by Gandy and Denison.

"The higher you get in, the more complicated it is, but the more benefits you have," Denison said. "You have more frequencies to operate on."

Gandy, a former information technology professional, said there are more than 600 members in the area's two clubs, and the teaching group has trained more than 900 hams since the region's 2007 storm, which brought the need to the fore.

Investment is about \$35 plus a \$15 license good for 10 years.

Denison teaches "everything there is to know" to pass the beginning Federal Communications Commission license classes.

Club members help new hams get started, make wise decisions about what they purchase and give them hands-on experience leading to licensing, Gandy said.

Carl Yates attended a class shortly after relocating to Seaside and earned his technician's license.

"I'm kind of a novice," he admitted. "But I'm an example of somebody who can start from scratch and go from there."

How to train

Clatsop County Auxiliary Emergency Communications presents a ham radio licensing class Oct. 20 from 4:30 to 9 p.m. at Clatsop Community College's South County Campus in Seaside, and all day on Oct. 21.

A similar course takes place Oct. 28 in Astoria.

Groups like STARS check in on a weekly basis by giving their names and information.

A South County check-in — for the communities of Arch Cape, Seaside, Cannon Beach, Gearhart and Warrenton — takes place Wednesday.

"It's a great hobby," Emmons said. "I've been in it since 1960."

"We're all hams first," Gandy said.

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

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. Dis-

course should be civil and people should be referred to in a

respectful manner.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

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