

Help: 'This is a reality check'

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Companies all over the North Coast use LiveRez.com to help manage and rent out vacation houses. As a way to raise money, companies like Olson's are creating silent auction vacation packages, where all of the proceeds of the bid will go to those affected by hurricanes. In a month, LiveRez.com has raised about \$60,000.

"This isn't about helping second homeowners," Olson said. "This is about helping the people who work in this industry put food on the table. If all of a sudden we were without, I don't know what we would do. Vacation rentals are such a huge part of our local economy."

'What are we doing?'

After Hurricane Irma hit, Kelly Willey said all that was on her mind were the basics.

"When we came back, we didn't have electricity. We couldn't flush toilets," she said. "People weren't necessarily thinking about businesses until sometime after. We were focused on little hurdles — like being able to flush the toilet again, thank God."

But after amenities for basic survival started to come back, the reality of what the storm meant for her business, Coco Plum Real Estate, came back, too. Before Hurricane Irma, Willey managed about 70 properties in Marathon, Florida, a town of about 8,000 in the Florida Keys. After Irma?

"Four. Four are operational," Willey said. "My first thought was, 'Oh my god I'm out of business.' When will the visitors want to come back? Will my employees be coming back, and how do we take care of them?"

LiveRez.com estimates about 100 property managers like Willey were affected by Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma, 30 of whom lost all of their properties in the storms. Like Cannon Beach, many of these towns are small, coastal and driven by tourism.

Tina Upson, vice president



Submitted Photos

Business cards and a medallion lie in the debris at Miss Kitty's Fishing Getaways in Rockport, Texas.



A doll found in the wreckage of one of the vacation homes managed in the Florida Keys.

of operations at LiveRez.com, said the company initially responded how they always did after disasters: sent thoughts and prayers. But immediately the company started receiving phone calls and emails.

"They kept asking us, 'What are we doing?'" Upson said.

In response, LiveRez.com launched a program that allows property managers to share inventory. For example, a property manager in Cannon Beach can donate one of their vacation rentals to a prop-

erty manager based in an area affected by a hurricane to rent out temporarily. That way, someone in a place like Rockport, Texas, which is still reeling from inconsistent access to power and utilities, can still make money while their own properties are rebuilt.

The nonprofit is also hosting a silent auction. More than 50 property managers around the country have donated vacation rental packages. Whatever is made off the bids will be donated back to the property managers in

hurricane-struck areas.

In Cannon Beach, Beachcomber Vacation Homes is offering a vacation package with brewery tours, Coaster Theatre tickets, surf lessons and variety of other local goods valued at \$6,500.

"We are trying to learn how to be better prepared for future tragedies. We weren't prepared," Upson said. "But at least now Texas properties can say to their clients, 'You can't stay with us, but you can stay in Cannon Beach' and get a cut from the profit. We're trying to give hope back to companies who thought this was it for their business."

Moving forward

While she always knew hurricane damage was a possibility, Dawn Huff said imagining how destructive it can be is almost impossible.

"Eighty percent of my homes are wiped out. I can't say I really planned for that," Huff said. "This is a reality check."

Huff owns Miss Kitty's Fishing Getaways in Rockport, Texas, a small fishing town hit by Hurricane Harvey. When she returned from evacuation, starting up her business proved to be a challenge. Many of her employees were displaced, and some, like housekeepers, had to be let go. Finding ways to communicate with confused and disgruntled customers was a challenge with phone lines and internet service inconsistent at best.

A lot of these problems will take time to solve. But Huff said having a steady stream of income to help rebuild offices and pay her staff will help her get closer.

Vacation houses are still in shambles, but for Willey, in Florida, it's the little conveniences that count as success.

"I've been able to keep staff employed who have come back," she said. "To me, my success was that I was able to tell someone they could use my fax machine. We don't expect people to do all the work for us. But hold my beer, so to speak, so I can get my people back to work."



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Jon Broderick, far right, plays a song at the Arts Council of Clatsop County reception on Thursday in the taproom at Buoy Beer Co. in Astoria.

Boon: 'It's about giving back'

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domestic product. The retail industry, in comparison, accounts for 5.8 percent of GDP.

The arts also supported 4.6 million jobs and added \$27.5 billion to governments at the local, state and federal levels. Cohen hopes the study illustrates that spending money on the arts is more than simply a charitable decision.

"Those dollars don't just disappear in some black hole of goodness," he said. "It's giving back to the community, cultural benefits and economic impact. Show me another industry in our community that provides that kind of benefit to the populace."

Allison Tigard, a member of the arts council, said the ability to reveal economic data has been the 3-year-old organization's top event thus far.

County Commissioner Sarah Nebeker recalled Thursday a moment prior to her first election in 2012, when she met with Brian Wagner, community arts coordinator for the Oregon Arts Commission. Soon before she decided to run, the two agreed that arts and culture needed more attention within county government.

"I did see, and I still see, this area of the North Coast as being at the precipice in just fabulous growth in the creative economy," Wagner said.

Mall: Facebook page will be set up

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"I really want to do the place like a Roman courtyard," he said. "So there will be the pillars, fluted pillars going like a colonnade on each side."

The building was constructed in 1945 for Abeco, which recently downsized to a location west on Com-

mercial Street. Hicks plans to take off the metallic decoration on the storefront, tear out carpet and polish the original black-and-white tile and otherwise restore the building to its original look when it first opened.

Hicks will be setting up a Facebook page for Astor Court and recruiting interested tenants.



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

From left to right: Michael McNickle, Kerry Strickland and Sheri Salber wait for those in need to take advantage of resources including food, water and a new needle exchange program at Peoples Park in Astoria on Thursday.

Needles: Events are scheduled to take place each Thursday

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"We've had a few interested people but no takers so far," McNickle said. "It's all about building trust. We want people to know we're not going to arrest them or do anything like that."

The six-month pilot program offers drug users the ability to trade used needles in a one-for-one exchange. Exchange sites Thursday were located at 16th Street and Marine Drive in Astoria as well as the Knappa Fire District Station. Staffers operated the first exchange site in Astoria early in the afternoon before eventually heading to Knappa.

The county Board of Commissioners approved the program in August. The outreach is funded through a \$50,000 donation from the Friends of Columbia Community Health.



Sheri Salber with the Clatsop County Department of Public Health checks on supplies during the first day of the new needle exchange program.

The health department will explore potential exchange locations along the Astoria riverfront, a well-known hang-out spot for drug users, and

throughout the county, including Seaside. Events are scheduled to take place each Thursday for the duration of the program.



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