

Neighbor: Carreras has fallen in love with Astoria

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something. You are making something and you're responsible for that and it's going out and people are trying it. People are liking it. ... You're there to see them experience it. It's sort of like theater. It's live."

Carreras should know. She majored in foreign languages, but she minored in theater. Even though she was an introverted kid, she always loved live theater. In college, she was drawn to characters with intense emotions, strong women who didn't take anything away from those around them but who also didn't let others take them. She learned from the characters.

"For me, (theater) is therapy," Carreras said. "It's a reflection of reality. You get to see all these characters on stage and you may find yourself in one of them and you may be going through something similar. You basically see all the options presented."

Carreras fell in love with the idea of learning other languages during a trip to Italy and Spain in high school. She is now fluent in four languages and is interested in tackling French, Greek and Latin.

"(Learning languages),

your voice changes," she said. "There are studies that say even your personality changes a little bit. ... There's always this debate about what came first: language or thought. You talk to yourself, you think to yourself. It's very interesting how once you learn different languages, and you know a couple, you really get to understand how it really does build the psyche."

She cannot remember a time when she did not speak English, even though her parents don't speak the language. She thinks she became so inadvertently proficient because of cartoons and story books, but she honestly isn't sure. Until English-speaking tourists asked if English was her first language, she didn't realize she spoke it so well.

Communication threads many of her interests together, that desire to connect and understand and express. She's figuring out what that means in a small city where she feels visible in a new way. She doesn't consider the move permanent, but she has fallen in love with Astoria. One day she was walking along the Riverwalk, looking out at the water. She felt fully at peace. Her mind was quiet for the first time in a long time, she said. She felt like time froze.

Lockett: Said he was not aware student was living alone with teacher

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Lockett's decision not to take action, the commission found, "demonstrates an extreme lack of professional judgment and leadership and shows serious and material inattention to his responsibilities as principal of Astoria H.S."

But the appeals court ruled that the commission did not detail why Lockett's inaction was a lapse in judgment or what Lockett should have done given the circumstances.

The appeals court found that the commission did not explain the professional expectations they used to measure Lock-

ett's conduct. "For an order to be supported by substantial reason, the agency's opinion must demonstrate the reasoning that leads the agency from the facts to the conclusion," the court opinion held. "Here, that path is missing a link."

Lockett told The Oregonian Thursday that he was not aware the student was living alone with the teacher and would have taken action had he known. "That's a no brainer," he told the newspaper. "Any administrator in any school district, when exposed to that information, would immediately come forward and do something."

Firefighters: Bond formed was invaluable

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Fire Chief Ron Tyson of the Olney Walluski Fire & Rescue District, Amy Lenz, Dallas Ritchie and Justin Perdew of the Knappa Fire District, Brandin Smith and Flint Helligso of the Lewis & Clark Fire Department, Tanner Rich and Angels Perez of the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department, Chris Dugan, Lt. Genesee Dennis and firefighter Katie Bulletset of the Seaside Fire Department, and Cannon Beach Fire Chief Matt Benedict all returned home safely Dec. 20 in time for Christmas.

This is the third time Clatsop County firefighters have been sent this year to combat blazes outside of their jurisdiction — an anomaly for the region. The next most active summer was in 2015. Personnel were sent out only sparingly before then.

"If we're getting called out all the way out here, I thought, how bad is it down there?" Rich said. "But I was excited to have an opportunity to help."

'We were all one'

While on the scene, Clatsop County firefighters were tasked with protecting homes, putting out hot spots and building fire lines to prevent the inferno from swallowing some of the ritziest neighborhoods near Los Angeles. Crew members trimmed back foliage and set sprinklers around houses to beat back growing flames.

Olney Fire Chief Tyson has been in the business of battling blazes in Oregon since 1986, and has seen a number of wildland fire deployments. But firefighting in Southern California, where rain hasn't fallen since last February, brought unique challenges.

"When we went to Sisters, you could tell they built homes with fire safety in mind. They had backup energy in case the power went out to run the sprin-



AP Photo/Noah Berger

A motorist on Highway 101 watches flames from the Thomas fire leap above the roadway north of Ventura, Calif., on Dec. 6.

klers, they didn't have stuff growing up by the house," Tyson said. "But (in California), the yards are full of dry brush litter for mulch, and plants were growing right up by the house. It made our jobs harder, for sure."

What also made this deployment special was the camaraderie of the group, Tyson said. The crew worked 24-hour shifts, judiciously monitoring perimeters and putting out hot spots before they evolved into flames. The days were long and tiring, with members taking turns napping in the fire engines. The news of a California firefighter losing his life in the same fire they were fighting dampened everyone's spirit.

But the bond they formed was invaluable to get through.

"If you are going to get deployed with anyone, this is the group to get. We had so much fun, but we took it real serious, too," he said.

Gearhart volunteer Garcia said the bond crews build is one of her favorite aspects of being deployed on larger fires.

"People were encouraging each other, taking care of each other. What I love is that we were all one — not just firefighters from Gearhart, Seaside, Lewis and Clark, et cetera. Those hardworking days and nights, because of the attitude, didn't seem as hard."

Feeling the gratitude

Garcia started firefighting five years ago at Columbia River Fire Department, and just this year served on three task forces to different Oregon and California fires.

"I just wanted to be apart of something and make a difference. That's how I started," Garcia said.

But what has kept her going five years later — even with the long, cold nights of patrol and the feeling of missing her four children back at home — is the feeling the gratitude of the people she protects, she said.

"It's hard to put it into words. It's different than on TV," Garcia said. "You feel the heat of the flames, you feel the worry of these people, but you also feel the gratitude."

Signs championing firefighters and encouraging messages from locals and family were some ways they felt that gratitude, said Dugan, Seaside's fire division chief.

But one homeowner, still diligently moving his sprinkler around his property day in and day out after everyone had evacuated, stood out.

"He said he was a blue-collar guy, not like the rest of the multimillion-dollar homes that were around him. He was an electrician with a small avocado grove behind their house, and we were assigned to protecting his home," Dugan said.

"He told us this is all he had — he spent his whole life getting it. He was so grateful when we told him we were going to give him a break from protecting it."

Piece of the puzzle

In the abstract, knowing he was fighting a fire that easily could be the equivalent of the distance to Astoria from Seaside was daunting, Dugan said. But in the day-to-day tedium of tasks, sometimes that awe is lost in translation.

"I was talking to someone on the crew who felt like in the middle of it we weren't doing a whole lot. We weren't on the front lines," Dugan said. "But the Thomas fire is a 10,000-piece puzzle. Maybe we were just one piece, a blue sky piece, but without it the whole puzzle doesn't work. That's what we did."

There's a lot to learn from this year's deployments, both Dugan and Tyson said. While local departments hold semi-regular wildland fire trainings, experiences like this can only prepare local forces better for events in their own backyard.

"Most of these areas hadn't seen fires for 80, 100 years," Tyson said. "The lesson is don't get complacent just because we haven't had a fire like this. Because they hadn't either."

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