

Humans of Astoria

New community member **Mitch Eckhardt** collects stories, photos of locals for 'Tell Me Astoria'

By **HEATHER DOUGLAS**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

When Mitch Eckhardt and his family relocated to the Columbia-Pacific area from a small Texas town last fall, Eckhardt was determined to move past the shallow conversations that people normally have. So he created "Tell Me Astoria," a photography/story-telling project featuring Astoria residents.

"Tell Me Astoria" is largely inspired by "Humans of New York," created in 2010 by street photographer Brandon Stanton.

"What I love about 'Humans of New York' is that it's uniquely about people," Eckhardt said. "Any criticism that could be leveled against Stanton — and there are people who say he's not the best photographer — should realize that it's not the point. The point is to share stories around us."

In Stanton's case, the original goal was to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers on the street and catalogue the city's inhabitants. Stanton

began collecting stories along with the photos, and the project went viral with more than 20 million followers on social media and a bestselling book.

Eckhardt's process is less forward. "I'm not just walking up to people on the sidewalk; I want people to come to me. If they're asking me to be a part of the project, it usually means they don't mind being photographed," he said.

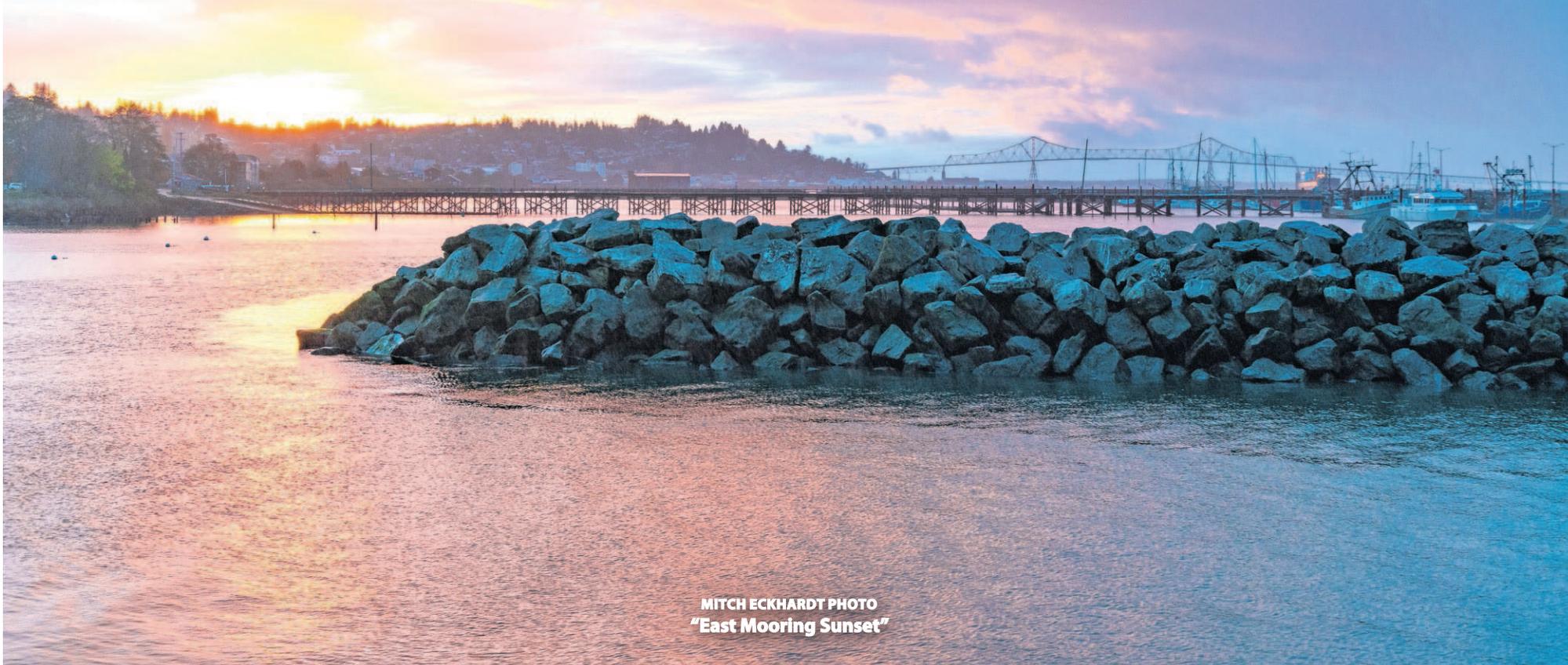
With a desire to interact with the community and a passion to capture his new home, Eckhardt began "Tell Me Astoria" with a post on social media. After receiving a ton of comments, he redirected them to his email and began collecting stories.

Eckhardt originally started photographing artists but has since branched out to anyone who expresses an interest. Sid Deluca, an Astoria visual artist, was recently featured. "Mitch is genuinely interested and enthused by his new town and the people in it," Deluca said. "It was very easy to talk to him, and I think he captures the best in his subjects."



COLIN MURPHEY PHOTO

Mitch Eckhardt takes photos near his office at Pier 39 in Astoria.



MITCH ECKHARDT PHOTO
"East Mooring Sunset"