

OPINION

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THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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OUR VIEW

At 21, FisherPoets comes of age

'The family owned fishing boat is gonna become a past tense unless the quality of regulation starts making sense.'

— Rob Seitz

From his poem "Priorities"

Jon Broderick likes to share credit whenever he can, but there's no question the retired Seaside school teacher should be front and center for applause when writing the history of the FisherPoets Gathering.

This weekend's event will be the 21st annual, a remarkable achievement for an event that, like most fish stories, grows in size with each telling.

Broderick reeled in about three dozen fishers for that first humble gathering at Astoria's Wet Dog Cafe in 1998; the event has morphed into an annual festival that attracts participants, visitors and media attention from around the world. It didn't set out to compete with the well-established National Cowboy Poetry event in Elko, Nevada, but it has certainly become an unusual but memorable event on the nation's calendar.

One hundred and 10 people will recite their poetry at the seven main venues around Astoria, plus three other locales that will host workshops for traditional crafts and fishery issues. The Liberty Theatre will feature the Gathering's first juried poetry slam called "Poetry at the Line." Of the poets strutting their stuff, 18 will be making their debut. Not all are grizzled veterans — some are bright newcomers eager to learn the old ways but bringing fresh ideas to the dangerous and uncertain industry.

All the details will appear Thursday in Coast Weekend, including profiles highlighting two poets who have made a particular impact on the fishing community — Elma Burnham, who has founded a movement, The Strength of the Tides Is Hers Also, that supports and empowers women working in the maritime industries, and Rob Seitz, a North Coast fisherman just returned from California who is restoring one of the



Corey Arnold

'Homecoming' by Corey Arnold is on view at Imogen Gallery in Astoria.

ON THE WEB

For more information on FisherPoets Gathering 2018, go to fisherpoets.org

former Flavel properties in Astoria into a fish market.

The event serves as an opportunity for fishermen and women to share their seafaring tales with fellow devotees they may not have seen in person since last year. Landlubbers are welcome, though they may not catch all the nuanced references to salmon roe, net reels or marlin spikes. Inevitably laced with heavy doses of humor and irony, these creative works entertain audiences while hitting home with additional poignancy to those who have dropped crab pots, mended nets or lost friends to the unfor-

giving river and ocean.

The poems reflect tales of survivors with a rugged authenticity. A cynic might suggest that it's remarkable that there are any fishers remaining afloat in a constantly diminishing commercial fleet hard hit by buyouts, ever-changing regulations, cyclical species declines and an overall downturn in the resources.

Broderick earned his credentials during commercial fishing summers in Alaska, and delights in the interplay of poets, young and old. He reflects on the manner in which the poetry performances and accompanying competitions parallel the perilous industry that's put his kids through college. "We are friendly and competitive, but with an appreciation for what everybody has

done," he said. Fishers compete for the biggest weight slip, yet will pull in their nets and race to the rescue if they hear a "mayday" over the radio.

"We are there to help each other out when needed and that shows in the FisherPoets Gathering," he said. "People who are strangers can connect because we have in common the work we do."

With crab selling for less than \$3 a pound off the boat — though way, way higher in the stores — it's no wonder that fishers who do survive have to be smarter and wiser than those forced to pull out their boats and retrain for land careers.

They deserve our admiration and our appreciation — and perhaps the Gathering helps us remember that, even if it is only one weekend a year.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

The go-to guy for elk answers

For North Coast officials seeking answers to health, safety and property concerns caused by elk, wildlife biologist Herman Biederbeck of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is the first point of contact.

This year, Gearhart officials and residents again seek to find solutions to a growing herd and what they say is a health, safety and property damage issue for visitors and residents.

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Q: What can the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife do to manage elk in Gearhart?

Biederbeck: We're looking at all the options before us to deal with elk damage issues on the golf courses. As you can imagine, with public opinion on the elk divided and somewhat polarized, it makes it very difficult to come up with a cohesive universal strategy that everyone will support.

We're trying to work with individuals that have problems with the elk in light of that. We're working with the golf course interests. They have some very specific thoughts on how to deal with the elk issue. We want a more comprehensive approach, so we're at a little bit of a standstill there.

Q: What would a "more comprehensive approach" entail?

Biederbeck: We came up with a suggested list of different options that could

perhaps help deal with this issue. They tend to emphasize precluding access by the elk to the golf courses, because we believe the golf courses present a large attraction for the elk. It's one of the reasons they're hanging around there. The golf courses are considered by the elk as large forage areas.

If we could get the golf courses protected so that the elk aren't going in there any more, we believe there's a reasonably good chance the elk will leave, because there isn't the forage base to support them.

Q: What do you consider to be a property owner's best option?

Biederbeck: We're not saying it's the most viable, but we're putting fences out as an option for consideration.

Q: Could you fence off the greens?

Biederbeck: The city has a 6-foot fence ordinance. We've talked of a double fence. The concept is to use horizontal distance instead of vertical height to preclude the elk out of the golf course areas.

Q: Wouldn't the elk get stuck between the fences?

Biederbeck: The thought is to have the fences the right distance apart so the elk couldn't negotiate both fences with a single leap. Elk have the ability to look at a fence situation to determine if they can clear it or get over it.

Q: How has the fence suggestion been received?

Biederbeck: The golf course interests lean to trapping and relocating, which has a number of challenges. If we start looking at things that affect the public in Gearhart, like removing the elk, we have to involve the public in any process like that.

They have to make a decision on how they feel about a larger public process to even consider something like trapping and relocation, which, again, I cannot stress enough, has major challenges.

Q: How did the herd grow so fast?

Biederbeck: Five or seven years ago, it seemed like another 50 or so elk showed up from somewhere. My guess is from the north where more development has been occurring.

While we have no way to prove that — we didn't have elk radio-collared or deer tagged — we have noticed the number of elk complaints from further north dropped about the same time the elk showed up in the Gearhart/Seaside area.

Q: Could we see a shift?

Biederbeck: A lot of it depends on what kind of land use goes on there. There could be something that changes, that draws the elk away from Seaside and Gearhart and reduces the number of elk there. A lot of it depends on what kind of land uses occur in and around that area.

Q: How do you track the elk?

Biederbeck: We did an experimental drone project with Oregon State University last winter in the Youngs River area to look at the efficacy of using drones to survey elk. For some surveys, what you buy off the shelf works pretty well. For other types of survey work, you need something with better optics. It turned out to be pretty much of a mixed bag. This was our first investigation here in western Oregon to use drones to survey elk. We didn't have any notion that this project would answer all our questions. As usual with an issue like this, some additional questions and



Neal Maine

Elk with netting in Gearhart.

follow-up are required.

Q: Do you have numbers on the elk herd?

Biederbeck: Our wildlife management unit manages our elk herds. Clatsop County, Columbia County and part of Tillamook County are in the Saddle Mountain unit. Our management goal is 7,800 elk in that area. We're a little below that. We have had some excessive antler-less elk issues that have just been addressed, so the expectations that the elk population will recover and be closer to that 7,800 figure.

Q: Is it likely that wolves or other predators will return?

Biederbeck: That's a good question. Wolves have shown themselves to be pretty adaptable. They do get into trouble, especially with livestock operations, but it's hard to say. They may end up inhabiting the North Coast. They just have to get through some barriers, like the Willamette Valley and I-5 to do that.

We have no confirmed sightings of wolves anywhere near the North Coast yet.

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