

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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ONE DOLLAR



## IN ASTORIA, RODENTS GO WITH THE TERRITORY

By **KATIE FRANKOWICZ**  
*The Daily Astorian*

**I**t is absolutely a fact that when a rat charges down a city tunnel at you it is the size of a buffalo. Why else would you flail around with your flashlight like a beam of light will protect you? You didn't even know your voice could go so high. Thousands of tiny rodent footprints dot the ground in the tunnels below downtown Astoria. Maybe that's just one very industrious rat, Ken Nelson, the city's public works superintendent, suggested. It's possible, right? There could just be one rat down there pacing frantically back and forth.

Sorry. Rats are absolutely in the city's sewer system, where they find both shelter and a steady supply of food. "They're the little garbage men of the sewer," Nelson said. He himself has been charged by a rat roughly the size of a St. Bernard.

Salem, Portland and Eugene are seeing an uptick in urban rat numbers this year. In Astoria, they never left. Some downtown businesses and property owners report several rat sightings this winter. They theorize extra high waters associated with king tides pushed rats out of their usual hiding places.

Though few people want a rat in their basement or business, rats and river towns go hand in hand — and 70 years ago, rats were seen as a big enough problem that Astoria leaders implemented a citywide extermination program.

### Rat wars

In 1948, Clatsop County was one of 22 other localities across the nation selected for a demonstration on how to deal with outsized rat populations,

according to newspaper reports from the time.

That February, the Astoria City Council received a letter from a county health inspector and a county sanitation officer who said Astoria needed a rat control campaign.

The city is a "seaport, accessible to rats bringing disease from abroad," they warned, and "the presence of underground passages and sewers opening on the waterfront encourage the development of a big rat population."

County officials recommended a two-fold war: Attack obvious food sources, then attack the rats themselves.

They suggested Astoria also implement compulsory garbage disposal, improve care of city dump sites, campaign against dumping garbage outside of the city dump and approach private property owners and businesses about rat proofing their buildings and homes.

At one point, more than 10,000 rats were killed at city dump sites in Astoria and Warrenton, victims of the "deadliest

rat poison ever developed."

Astoria and other cities across Clatsop County officially declared war on the rats in mid-April.

### Baited with poison

Two "rat-killing experts," employees with the federal wildlife service, traveled to Astoria to provide demonstrations. Their tools were repurposed apple crates baited with poison. People would later blame a sudden rash of dog deaths on this very same poison, but one expert pointed out that the apple crate death boxes were specifically constructed to keep pets away from the bait.

Astoria Mayor Orval Eaton assembled a committee to look at how to control the rat population. In their investigations, the committee members noticed a lot of overflowing garbage around town, backyard refuse heaps and vacant lots piled high with junk. They argued for a permanent program to deal with rats. The

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## Brown will sign gun bill

Strips guns from stalkers, abusers

By **PARIS ACHEN**  
*Capital Bureau*

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown intends to sign a bill that strips gun rights from convicted stalkers and abusers, the first state gun-control legislation to pass nationally after the mass shooting at a Florida high school killed 17 people.

The governor urged lawmakers to enhance protections against gun violence in the wake of the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, the latest in a string of attacks on schools that has sparked student demonstrations across the country.

"Now's the time to enact real change, and I'm encouraged to see students in Oregon and across the nation engaged and joining the call for gun safety legislation," Brown said in a statement. "It's long past time we hold the White House, Congress and legislators accountable."

House Bill 4145 would close the so-called "boyfriend loophole" in state law that omitted stalkers and abusers in some intimate relationships from losing gun rights.

State Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, who presented the bill on the Senate floor Thursday, said his sister was murdered by a boyfriend with a gun and urged his colleagues to support the new protections. The legislation also would require Oregon State



Gov. **Kate Brown**

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## Port to buy mitigation credits for airport work

Development will impact wetlands

By **EDWARD STRATTON**  
*The Daily Astorian*

The Port of Astoria will spend \$266,220 on 1.5 acres of wetland mitigation credits from Warrenton Fiber at the headwaters of the John Day River to offset the environmental impacts of a taxiway relocation at Astoria Regional Airport.

The Port will cover the purchase with cash reserves. The Federal Aviation Administration will reimburse the Port 90 percent of the cost through a grant.

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## 'ANYWHERE YOU'VE GOT WATER AND HARBORAGE THEN THERE'S GOING TO BE RODENTS.'

Meredith Riley | a county environmental health inspector



## Woman killed in Astoria accident remembered as caring

Burnett delivered newspaper, was active in community

By **JACK HEFFERNAN**  
*The Daily Astorian*

The newspaper delivery driver who was killed Thursday morning after being pinned underneath her car was remembered as a loving mother and partner who was active in the community.

Debra Kay Burnett, 50, of

Astoria, was a delivery driver for The Oregonian and was on her route before the accident near 12th Street and Kensington Avenue. She had worked for the newspaper for several years and had recently been managing — alongside her son — the newspaper's delivery operations in Astoria, said Samuel Burnett, her other son.

"We are saddened to hear the news that an independent dealer of The Oregonian was killed this morning in a tragic accident related to the winter weather conditions," John Maher, president of the Oregonian Media Group, said in a statement posted by The Oregonian Thursday.



Debra Burnett

Burnett also worked as a mailroom supervisor at The Daily Astorian for several years.

"The tragic loss of Debra was shocking to all of us at The Daily Astorian," said John D. Bruijn, the newspaper's production director. "Debra started as an inserter in the mailroom in 1996 and moved up to supervi-

sor in 2002 until 2008 when she left for other opportunities.

"Even after she left the newspaper she stayed in close contact with many former co-workers. She will be greatly missed."

The youngest sibling in the family, Burnett had lived in the region since birth and Astoria for nearly 30 years. Burnett, among other things, was active in Astoria Pride with her partner, volunteered at the Miss Oregon pageant and loved being outdoors.

Her family and friends described her as someone who "laughed easily, made friends seemingly effortlessly, loved movies, music, books and theater, cats and dogs, car racing, sports, good food, strong

drinks and spending time with the many people she loved, her family and friends."

"She was just out there and part of the community," Samuel Burnett said. "She wasn't afraid to speak her mind on matters with people. She was a very caring, very loving mother who would do anything for her family."

Bonnie Ragan, who now lives in Arizona, remembers her youngest sibling for being caring.

"My sister is worth a million dollars. She lived life to the fullest," Ragan said. "She cared about everybody else before herself. She will be greatly missed."

