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ONE DOLLAR



Joan Herman works her way around a sidewalk on her way to Coast Community Radio.

CURB APPEAL

NEARLY EVERY CURB RAMP ON STATE ROADS FAILS TO MEET FEDERAL ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

Nearly all of Clatsop County's more than 500 curb ramps on state roads do not comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. But after an important legal settlement, the state Department of Transportation has committed to repairing all of them — and others across Oregon — in the next 15 years.

Disability Rights Oregon, a Portland nonprofit, filed the federal lawsuit on behalf of people with disabilities and finalized a settlement with the state last year. Since 1990, federal law has mandated that states must ensure all new or improved infrastructure — including areas where pedestrians enter sidewalks — be accessible to the disabled.

As part of the agreement, the state was required to update its inventory of curb ramps that meet federal requirements. More than 20 percent of curbs on state roads in Clatsop County lack ramps. Others have deficiencies, such as ramps with angles too steep for wheelchairs, partially blocked access or lack of bumps for vision-impaired pedestrians.

The state agreed to fix 30 percent of the ramps by 2022, 75 per-



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Joan Herman navigates streets in Astoria on the way to work.

cent by 2027 and all of them by 2032. The state has budgeted more than \$18 million over the next three years to implement the agreement. The settlement also includes repairs to crossing signals, though a timeline for that has yet to be negotiated.

The state is still working on specific timelines, but it does not have plans to repair curb ramps in Clatsop County this year or next, Department of Transportation spokesman Lou Torres said.

Joan Herman began using a

wheelchair full time about 3 1/2 years ago as her multiple sclerosis worsened. She is a member of the Astoria Planning Commission, a frequent city meeting attendee, serves on Coast Community Radio's Tillicum Foundation Board of Directors and runs two radio programs for the station.

Worried that cars zipping by will not see her along busy roadways and driveways, she avoids them as much as possible.

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Walmart kicks off hiring, will open in June

A long-awaited debut

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — The Walmart Supercenter will open in Warrenton on June 13.

Representatives from the store attended the Clatsop County Job and Career Fair on Wednesday as they begin to hire about 300 employees.

A hiring center will open Monday in the former Port of Astoria offices at 422 Gateway Ave. in Astoria. The center will operate from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, and applications will also be taken online.



Kimberly Smith

Overseeing interviews will be Kimberly Smith, the store manager, who started with the company in 2006 as an apparel sales associate and was selected earlier this year to head the new location. She has worked at several Walmart locations in the Seattle metro area and came to Warrenton from a supercenter in Yelm.

"I'm just really excited to get the team built," Smith said.

Walmart aims to hire at least 80 percent of its employees locally, with a goal of 95 percent local workers. The company announced last month a nationwide starting wage of \$11 an hour and averages \$14.44 an hour for full-time employees in Oregon. The retailer employs

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Homeless man faces charges for leak, fire at Comfort Suites

Burke allegedly removed a plug from a gas meter outside the hotel

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

A homeless man has been indicted in connection with a gas leak and fire at the Comfort Suites in Astoria last September.

Matthew Jay Burke, 26, allegedly removed a plug from a gas meter near the hotel. Natural gas eventually leaked into and outside of the building on Lief Erikson Drive, causing a spark outside.

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Hammond fisherman allegedly bribed, threatened sex-abuse victim

Sturgell may return to jail before court case is resolved

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

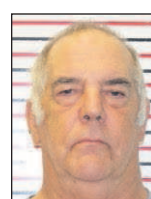
A Hammond fisherman who allegedly committed sex crimes against a young woman may be ordered to return to jail during court proceedings after prosecutors claimed he bribed and threatened the victim.

Dennis Lee Sturgell Sr., 65, is accused of committing several sex crimes against the

woman while she was incapacitated one day in August 2015. James Herbert Cunningham, 46, of Astoria, was also allegedly involved and committed similar crimes.

Sturgell was arrested and indicted in November on sex abuse charges, including first-degree sodomy and first-degree unlawful sexual penetration. Cunningham, who was also charged with rape, was already serving time in prison for a separate case. Both have pleaded guilty.

Oregon Assistant Attorney General Erin Greenawald is prosecuting the case, along with Clatsop County Deputy District Attorney



Dennis Sturgell Sr.



Paul Angelo Leitch

Dawn Buzzard.

Prosecutors presented evidence Wednesday to Circuit Court Judge Paula Brownhill claiming Sturgell made indirect contact with the victim through a meeting with her father.

Two days after his arrest, Sturgell posted \$50,000 bail and was released from jail. As

part of the release agreement, he agreed not to make contact with the alleged victim.

The same day Sturgell was released from jail in November, he contacted Paul Angelo Leitch, also known in the Warrenton area as "Sturgeon Paul." Prosecutors presented phone records showing that Leitch then contacted the victim's father, who rented a storage unit from "Sturgeon Paul."

Leitch eventually convinced the father, who had previously confronted Sturgell shortly after the alleged sex crimes, to go to Sturgell's home and meet with him, prosecutors said.

The meeting was likely

about the ongoing court case, prosecutors said.

"He said that he assumed that was the only reason that he would go," said Jodi Shimanek, a special agent with the state Department of Justice.

In a taped interview with Shimanek played Wednesday during the hearing, the father said Sturgell offered \$5,000 to "make the case go away." Sturgell also allegedly threatened to hire a "dream team of attorneys" that would "dig up dirt" on the victim and anyone else involved in the case.

"He didn't want to go to jail," the father said.

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