



The Daily Astorian

The Morton Nelson Building, home of national retailer J.C. Penney until last summer, has been purchased by Sean Fitzpatrick and Anne Carpenter.

Local apartment owner buys former J.C. Penney store

Restaurants and retail planned

By EDWARD STRATTON

The Daily Astorian

Sean Fitzpatrick and Anne Carpenter, the owners of the Illahee Apartments, have purchased the Morton Nelson Building, home of J.C. Penney until its closure last summer.

Fitzpatrick and Christopher Holen, chef and co-owner of Baked Alaska, are planning a collection of restaurants and other retail vendors inside the Commercial Street building.

The closure of J.C. Penney last summer hit the downtown hard, Fitzpatrick said.

"A lot of people approached me, asking me what I could do with the space," he said. "I gave it considerable thought, but didn't want to take it on by myself."

Fitzpatrick said Holen, a longtime friend, asked him

one night what was needed in the building.

"From the way he asked, I knew we were on the same page," Fitzpatrick said. "I told him I had a very good idea about what was needed at the building, and if he was serious about working on it with me, we should move forward with it. We were on the same wavelength from the start."

The developers are gathering contractors to remodel the inside of the building, with a planned opening some time in the fall.

J.C. Penney moved into the three-story Morton Nelson Building in 1924 after a large fire gutted much of downtown, including the retailer's prior location. The company announced last year it would close 130 to 140 stores amid competition from online and niche retailers, a similar issue faced by other large chain stores such as Sears and Macy's.

Port faces challenge in advancing airport

Struggles over profit margin

By EDWARD STRATTON

The Daily Astorian

WARRENTON — The Astoria Regional Airport, operated by the Port of Astoria in Warrenton, is projected to make about \$4,000 next year, not including capital investments and grants. But Port staff say the slim profit margin doesn't account for the cost of repairing the airport's World War II-era infrastructure and a myriad of other issues.

Amid declining grant resources, Port staff are searching for ways to make more money at the airport and repair a crumbling

infrastructure that supports an estimated 400 jobs.

Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, said the airport in 2003 made an estimated \$60,000 in profits. He pinned the airport's declining fortunes over the past 15 years on several decisions that haven't panned out financially.

The Port in the mid-2000s borrowed more than \$3.5 million to expand and improve the aging hangars used by Lektro, a manufacturer of electric airplane tugs. The company is one of the region's few high-tech manufacturers and employs nearly 100 people.

The Port makes a small profit from the Lektro lease over related debt, said Will Isom, the Port's finance

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REK'S COASTAL CAMPAIGN

Shortly before his death, Kennedy found piece of home on North Coast

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

Gazing at the Pacific Ocean near Fort Stevens State Park, Robert F. Kennedy's nostalgia was apparent.

"I can't believe this is so much like home," the Massachusetts native said. Soon after, he kicked off his shoes and socks, rolled up his dress pants and ran out toward the ocean.

"You could tell he was like, 'Oh my God. I needed this,'" said Rita Hankel Lerwick, a teenage volunteer for Kennedy's Clatsop County campaign team. "I was just shocked."

On May 24, 1968, Kennedy visited Astoria and other places along the coast during his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in the Oregon primary. Less than two weeks later, after winning the California primary on June 5, he was assassinated after a victory speech in Los Angeles.

Witness accounts and news reports from the time reveal Kennedy's visit to the coast caused a stir, making his sudden death shortly after especially poignant.

Kennedy, who entered the race in March, announced May 20 that he would be visiting the Oregon Coast that Friday, beginning with a flight from Portland to the Astoria area. The next day, the campaign's local headquarters was established on Marine Drive as the U.S. senator from New York toured other parts of the state.

"He picked up momentum Wednesday for the Oregon Democratic presidential nomination. He had overflow crowds at each of his five stops in Eastern Oregon, which is perhaps an indicator of Kennedy popularity, but certainly is an indication of more aggressive staff work," an Associated Press story from that week read. "Without crowds Kennedy could lose the image he's trying to build. That is the image of a man who has so caught the imagination of the people that they swarm to him."

Predominantly younger crowds



Photos by Clyde Keller/clydekellerphoto.com

Robert F. Kennedy walks near the Peter Iredale shipwreck with his wife, Ethel, and dog, Freckles.

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Robert F. Kennedy's visit to Astoria in photos

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"The '60s were a real turbulent time," Lerwick said. "We were just so for what he stood for."

'Common endeavor'

Kennedy's plane landed near Astoria shortly before 11 a.m., about an hour later than expected.

Hundreds of people were held back by Clatsop County Sheriff's Office deputies until the plane landed and they swarmed the tarmac. After taking a few steps down the plane's staircase, he grabbed a bullhorn and briefly addressed the crowd, describing "this beautiful part of this beautiful state" and urging residents to "work together in a common endeavor."

He shook hands with spectators after descending the steps, prompting one girl to cry, "I got to touch him." Lerwick, who has a fondness for him still, wore a Kennedy campaign hat, a sash and a navy blue skirt.

Kennedy, the news media, state officials and members of his campaign — including Lerwick — then waded through the crowd and

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'I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS SO MUCH LIKE HOME.'

Robert F. Kennedy



Robert F. Kennedy peers above a crowd in downtown Astoria on May 24, 1968.

Family finds comfort in memory of Astoria man



Dale Larson was a second-generation Astorian with a large family.

Larson killed in crash

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

On the final drive of his life, Dale Larson was going home after taking care of his wife at an assisted living residence. Family members say the trip's purpose was fitting.

"With the way everything went, it felt like he was still taking care of us," said Robin Jensen, his daughter.

Larson, 84, of Astoria, died Tuesday after his white Ford Escape crossed the centerline of U.S. Highway 101 north of Gearhart and collided head-on with a pickup truck.

Oregon State Police are investigating the cause of the crash. Despite the circumstances, the way Larson lived his life has given his family comfort.

Larson's father was a Swedish immigrant who settled in Clatsop County in 1930. The second-generation Astorian was a longshoreman and logger. He owned the Lewis and Clark Shake Mill for 46 years and worked until the day he died.

Along the way, he employed many people.

"They said he was like their second dad and taught them work ethic without saying a word. He was truly gold," Jensen said.



Dale Larson

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