

Kennedy: Was presented with a replica of the Astoria Column

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hopped into two chartered vehicles to head to the beach. Maintaining public beaches — the Oregon Beach Bill had passed the previous year — was a major topic of Kennedy's speech later that day, and his campaign had scheduled a film session of him walking along the shore.

The senator decided to walk 1 1/2 miles, which further delayed his schedule for the day. He even jumped in the ocean for a swim at one point before eventually leaving for Astoria.

After waiting about two hours, a swarm of roughly 3,000 people watched the Kennedy caravan pull up to the former Safeway parking lot near Duane Street between 11th and 12th streets.

In attendance, as expected, were plenty of young people. High school students came from as far as Clatskanie and Ilwaco, Washington, and about 500 absences left Astoria High School "virtually abandoned," according to an account in The Daily Astorian.

'He seemed nervous'

Kennedy's speech — in which he was presented with a replica of the Astoria Column — lasted 20 minutes. He touched on, among other things, education and job programs and pitched tax incentives for private companies to provide jobs and housing.

"He seemed nervous," Lerwick said. "I think he knew Oregon was just a tough state."

Competing with Kennedy in the primary were U.S. Sen. Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota and Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who was not on the ballot in Oregon but eventually secured the Democratic nomination. A noticeable group of McCarthy's supporters also attended the speech in Astoria.

Lerwick recalled seeing a Volkswagen covered in McCarthy stickers.

"I remember saying, 'What are they doing here?'" she said. "I felt like he wasn't welcomed as much as I would've liked him to be."

Vying for the Republican nomination was former Vice President Richard Nixon. After securing the GOP nod, Nixon won Oregon during his general election victory over



Robert F. Kennedy meets with Bumble Bee seafood cannery workers.

Photos by Clyde Keller/clydekellerphoto.com

Humphrey that November.

"We weren't really popular," said Lerwick, who canvassed for Kennedy throughout the campaign. "We got the door slammed in our face plenty of times."

Kennedy took a share of jabs at Nixon in the speech in Astoria, at one point poking fun at the "Nixon's the One" campaign slogan.

"I often wonder, what's the rest of that sentence? Nixon's the one what?" Kennedy asked.

Kennedy was scheduled for a cannery tour that day, but — due to the flight delay and lengthy beach excursion — settled for a meet-and-greet with Bumble Bee seafood workers. After a few hours on the North Coast, he went south.

Narrow loss

Kennedy made more stops along the coast but eventually lost the Oregon primary to McCarthy, who also won Clatsop County. Despite losing narrowly, he hinted in



Robert F. Kennedy wades through water along the beach near Fort Stevens State Park with his dog, Freckles.

news reports after the May 28 vote that he would likely drop out of the race if he lost California.

His final campaign stop came in Los Angeles, where he was shot and killed after delivering a victory speech at

the Ambassador Hotel shortly after midnight June 5.

Those who had recently seen Kennedy on the North Coast were shocked.

"Lights shone through the night in many houses as citizens stayed up to watch the

night's events on television," a Daily Astorian caption read under a photo of Kennedy speaking on the airport tarmac days earlier. "Kennedy moved freely about in big crowds during his local visit and would have been an easy

target for a madman's bullet." Politically active teens were especially distraught.

"We were kind of traumatized after that," Lerwick said. "We were idealistic teenagers and it looked like we would win."

Lerwick compared the assassination to the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. months earlier, as well as the shooting of Kennedy's brother — President John F. Kennedy — in 1963.

"Millennial kids now say they're the school shooting generation. We were the political assassination generation," she said.

For many years after Kennedy's visit and death, Lerwick did not vote. She apparently was not alone, as 1968 was the last time voter participation in a presidential election reached 60 percent.

"I was so disillusioned with politics. I thought, you work so hard, and what's the point?" Lerwick said. "It just changed the way, at a young age, how I viewed politics in the world."

Larson: 'The Chief' organized annual picnics for longshoremen

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Larson was, however, as passionate a vacationer as he was a worker. Camping trips, ski excursions and jet skiing were common. He earned the nickname "The Chief" after organizing annual picnics for longshoremen.

"He was a big guy on tradition," said Tia Van Slyke, his granddaughter.

In recent years, Van Slyke started taking over preparations for family outings. She would often call him at the last minute for a family meal, and he rarely missed one.

"He called me his promoter," Van Slyke said.

One of Larson's favorite traditions was a Sunday family meal at Stephanie's Cabin, which switched to the Uptown Cafe in Warrenton when the former restaurant and inn in Astoria closed. Every time he went, Larson would greet between 10 and 20 people.

"My grandma used to get so frustrated," Van Slyke said. "He would strike up conversa-

tions with total strangers."

His son, Dennis Larson, had similar experiences.

"He thought a smile and a small conversation could save the world's problems, and I agree with him," Dennis Larson said.

The family will hold a viewing at Caldwell's Luce-Layton Mortuary from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, as well as a celebration of life June 9 at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds.

Dennis Larson, as he has done throughout the week, will enjoy speaking to a host of people about his dad. Those conversations serve as a tribute.

"Whenever there was some sort of tragedy, he was always the calming factor, and he always had an answer for it," Dennis Larson said.

What then, would be Larson's answer to Tuesday's crash?

"He knew it was his time, I guess," his son said. "I think he's already told me that, and that's why I go on."

Port: 'We're paying for those mistakes in the past'

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director, but that doesn't take into account all the deferred maintenance on the aging hangars that past lease language has made the Port's responsibility.

"We are hamstrung because of the Lektro lease," Knight said during a recent budget hearing. "We're hamstrung because the Coast Guard uses our facilities, and we don't get compensated for it."

The airport has also lost money from multiple rows of hangars added in the mid-2000s but never fully occupied; faces issues with sewage and intruding groundwater; and lacks direct access from U.S. Highway 101 to make the facility more attractive to business.

Further adding to the airport's challenges are a dwindling supply of grant revenue the Port relies on to improve infrastructure. Knight has raised alarm bells about the state's recent decision to close competitive bidding for its ConnectOregon infrastructure grant program. The state has focused the program through at least 2019 on several specific transportation projects.

The move takes away valuable local matches for larger Federal Aviation Administration grants and could lead to the Port's and other airports becoming federally decertified, Knight said. The airport has so far received about \$12 million worth of FAA funding, he said. More than \$4 million is expected in the next couple of years for runway and taxiway work.

Knight recently laid out his staff's plan to increase the airport's annual revenue by \$51,000 in the near future from increased hangar rentals; two new executive hangars for Life Flight and an undisclosed private party; and a significant increase in an existing lease to the Columbia River Bar Pilots after the expiration of prior rent credits.

The Port has also struggled since 1990 to develop the Airport Industrial Park on the approach to the airport. The Port recently submitted a grant to study the feasibility of turning much

of the industrial park into wetlands surrounding an environmental research station the agency would lease out to other groups. If the Port could earn even 2.5 cents per square foot each month off the land, that would increase annual revenues at the airport by \$65,000 annually, Knight said.

"We're paying for those mistakes in the past," Knight said at a recent budget hearing. "But we're slowly but surely making headway toward making the airport get to a break-even point."

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