

OPINION

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THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Wheel Fun gets on track in Seaside

Former Signal columnist Claire Lovell would be happy. Lovell, who often lamented the passing of what she lovingly referred to as “old Seaside,” wrote in 2015: “Why doesn’t the person who owns the little train on Broadway either fix it up or remove it so someone else can use the space?”

Lovell, of course, was the long-running columnist and chronicler of old Seaside. Lovell died at age 96 in 2017.

“I see little children with their fingers clasped in the fence, look longingly at the little choo-choo and wish they could take a ride,” she wrote. “Now there are the carousel, bumper cars and a bucket on the beach. Whoopee!”

Recalling Claire, I think that was a sarcastic “whoopee” on her part.

But her longing for the return of the miniature train, which ran for years on Broadway on the site of the former Strand Theatre, will soon become a reality.

Patrick and Denise Duhachek are redeveloping their South Holladay Drive property and adding a quarter-mile miniature rideable railway.

“It makes you feel like you’re 13 again,” Patrick said in early June.

“It’s Pat’s hobby,” Denise added. “He loves it. He has so much fun restoring stuff.”

Family affair

In years past, visitors to Seaside enjoyed classic rides like the Octopus, Rock-O-Plane, an ornately decorated carousel and a roller coaster called the Wild Mouse.

The Duhacheks purchased the half-acre South Holladay Drive property on Avenue C from the estate of Denise’s father, Jimmy Rogers. Rogers owned Wheel Fun for 25 years before his death in 2013.

Now the couple plan to build a storage barn and retail facility, adding the miniature train — purchased from Mark and Marci Utti, owners of the Times Theatre, Finn’s and Twisted Fish among other downtown properties — as an added amusement.

Designs show a motorized vehicle rental and storage facility, along with the outdoor amusement ride.

With Planning Commission approval in early June, the Duhacheks now have a go-ahead.

The showroom will be one of four Wheel Fun locations in Seaside. Their two downtown shops offer pedal-pow-



Patrick Duhachek

Trains get a makeover for their return at the new Wheel Fun Rentals facility coming to Seaside.



Eve Marx

Wheel Fun Rentals construction is well underway on South Holladay Drive.

ered vehicles: surreys and bikes “and stuff that goes on the beach.”

Another location offers paddle boats on the river.

While the train will attract the kiddos, the surreys remain Wheel Fun’s most popular attraction.

“We rent more of the double surreys with the two bench seats than anything else,” Patrick Duhachek said. “There are some specialty bikes each offers, but each has a niche of what they might offer.”

Working on the railroad

To learn the ins and outs of railroading, Patrick Duhachek has been taking his studies seriously by visiting amusement parks with similar attractions, participating in online railroad forums

and reading specialty publications.

At its former location, the train ran on aluminum track. The new rails will be made of steel.

“I still have a bit of a learning curve for putting down train track,” he said. “I’m learning as fast as I can.”

Duhachek is not sure yet what the scenery around the track will look like, whether it be old Seaside — or whatever. “We know we have to have a tunnel,” he said. “There will be some landscaping, a water feature — we’re kind of making it up as we go along.”

The battery-operated train will be followed by six cars and a caboose. The conductor will sit in the second car and run the train around a quarter-mile track. The new showroom, with three

18-foot glass-paned garage doors for public viewing, will offer surrey bikes, bicycles, mopeds and motorized electric golf course, along with a small shop for bicycle repairs.

The storage area will shelter train cars at night, along with boats, surreys and other vehicles.

All aboard!

Wheel Fun’s newest venture will join a surge in local amusements, from the Seaside Inverted Experience, the Seaside Shootout and the laser tag arena at the Seaside Carousel Mall.

The Duhacheks hope to open next the new facility next summer. “I have a lot of people who are grown-ups now and remember riding the train, and they’re excited to have their children ride it,” Patrick Duhachek said.

For the rest of us, whether we remember “The Little Engine that Could,” “Chitty Chitty Bang Bang” or “Thomas and Friends,” the train will be a nostalgic nudge to put us all on track.

“We’re excited to get going, to have a new building,” Patrick Duhachek said. “We’re excited with the support from friends and support from the city.”

He would get a nod of approval from our former Signal columnist.

“I always believe old Seaside was a lot more fun,” Lovell wrote in 2015.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don’t single out lodging for taxation

The Clatsop County Commissioners voted 3 to 1 to allow another 1 percent tax on lodging. This new countywide tax — of which only 30 percent can be used for non-tourism promotion — is slated to be used for operations at the new jail.

This is unfair to implement a tax when the reason for the tax has not been voted on by Clatsop County voters. The vote by the commissioners was done with county staff approval, but without consulting the lodging community.

Also, why is The Daily Astorian taking sides with the commissioners who voted yes (“Who should pay to operate new jail?” July 31), and going after the only commissioner, Lianne Thompson, who actually wanted to have the discussions with lodging about ways to be fair in taxing businesses in the county, who all benefit from tourism.

The staff seemed to be demonizing lodging by saying that many times police and/or the sheriff’s department were called to lodgings in the county to combat crime. While I don’t doubt there were calls, it is a fallacy to say or imply that 30 percent of the people in jail are because of calls made to lodgings.

Tourism employs over 7,000 in Clatsop County, and nearly all of those live here, as well. They spend money on goods and services. Lodging guests spend between \$100 and \$200 on restaurants, bars, retail, etc. Why single out lodging to tax?

One commissioner voted to be fair, and to seek a fair tax, not just the easy tax.

DON WEST
Astoria

Who is in danger — the right or reporters?

Regarding the letters “Trump-focused editorials will not change the world” and “Biased news is now obvious everywhere”

(The Daily Astorian, Aug. 1): With Trump catching the headlines on a daily and dramatic basis, any newspaper that pretended nonsense doesn’t exist would be guilty of dereliction of duty.

The Daily Astorian does cover local problems consistently.

I don’t understand how bias is displayed on the part of a news organization that merely reports that Trump stated something one day and the exact opposite the second day, or that Trump stated something that is so blatantly untrue that even the most biased observer cannot be unaware of the attempted deception.

I think political bias is frequently perceived when something is printed or stated in the media that you do not agree with. The Associated Press has a well-deserved reputation for non-ideological accurate reporting.

It is beyond abominable how Trump has turned honest reporters, in the view of his followers, into the enemy with his rhetoric to the point that many reporters fear for their safety. Without the press and other truth seekers we would live in an even more dangerous ugly world.

Please, free press, deliver us from that.

JEAN HOOGE
Astoria

Limit fireworks to July 4th

I have loved city fireworks displays all my life. But this year fireworks began in Astoria neighborhoods just after noon July 3, and continued sporadically for a week from morning to night. As the City Council considers types of allowable fireworks, how about also looking at permitted days for setting them off within city limits?

I have one of the 40 percent of dogs said to be outright terrified by loud booms and the loud cracking sound of fireworks, nail guns and car backfires. Not something they can help, and no comforting words. My Basset Hound, Moose, spent several pitiful days this year trembling, panting, drooling and hiding in an alcove in the bathroom, and when on leash, tried in a panic to



get away from the fireworks, without anywhere safe to go, hurting us both. His nervous system sensitized by that week of fireworks, he continues to startle at sudden loud noises, then refuses to walk, and tries to bolt back home to safety.

I’ve never been one to support curbing enthusiasm, but may I appeal to Astorians to be kind to the nervous among us? May I suggest limiting fireworks in neighborhoods to July 4th? I note that for evening displays, some cities are using “boomless” fireworks.

I can’t imagine how it is for combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but I do know that all our dogs with this terror response can really use the consideration, and we dog lovers wouldn’t have to dread the annual celebration.

FLORENCE SAGE
Astoria

Astoria planning to limit river views

Those interested in what Astoria will look like between 2nd Street and 16th Street, as well as whether you will see river from

the riverwalk or while driving along Marine Drive, should attend this Tuesday’s 6:30 p.m. Planning Commission work session on the Riverfront Vision Urban Core plan.

The agenda shows the plan uses little red dotted lines between large structures built over the river to indicate where people will need to walk to view the river. They call these “river trail extensions and viewpoint.” This allows them to try to convince us that the urban core’s guiding principles to “promote physical and visual access to the river” and “enhance the river trail” are being honored.

I find it hard to believe most Astorians want these limited views. I hope the Planning Commission chair allows those who are able to attend to express their thinking this Tuesday.

The city will tell you that what is currently allowed along our riverfront is worse than this proposal, but that doesn’t mean we need to accept everything that the Riverfront Vision Urban Core proposal would do to our river views. Does anyone else see the irony of calling it the “riverfront vision” plan?

GEORGE (MICK) HAGUE
Astoria