

ART OF STONE



JESSICA DOUGLAS PHOTO
The stage is set to 'rock out' at Amber Cowan's Warrenton home.



COURTESY DANIEL VAROZZA
A rock painted by Daniel Varozza, of Astoria.

Creative communities paint, hide, share rocks

By JESSICA DOUGLAS
FOR COAST WEEKEND

If you spend any amount of time walking around the North Coast, you're bound to see one.

They range in size and shape. They're painted with different colors, designs and pictures. Some have intricate patterns, others one-word phrases such as "smile" or "love."

They are painted rocks hidden in small nooks and crannies throughout Astoria and surrounding communities, waiting to be found.

Astoria Rocks, Warrenton Rocks and other groups of local rock-painting enthusiasts make up a community whose influence has spread across state lines. The "Astoria Rocks" Facebook page alone has more than 4,500 members.

People take up the activity as serious art, to add beauty to the world or just for fun. Some parents do it because it's an inexpensive way to get their kids outside.

Amber Cowan, of Warrenton, started participating in Astoria Rocks and Warrenton's rock-painting community three years ago.

"I just like the idea of leaving a positive note here and there and being able to do something with your kids that doesn't cost an arm and a leg," Cowan said.

People who find the rocks often keep them, re-hide them or give them to loved ones.

Mindy Bizzell, of Astoria, set up the "Astoria Rocks" Facebook page in 2016 when her family created painted rocks to share a bit of kindness as part of a memorial for her son Henry, who died shortly after being born in 2009.

"The most surprising part for me was probably how excited people got, and how into it they got," Bizzell said. "It became just a really warm feeling."

And you don't have to be an artist to participate.

Kim Bohrer, one the "Astoria Rocks" admins, believes it's as exciting to find a 3-year-old's painted rocks as it is to find the more polished ones.

In June, when Bohrer took her family camping at Henry Rierson Spruce Run, she brought rocks for everyone to paint. Her whole family joined in, even grandma.

"What is great about it is anyone who can hold a pen, from 1 year old to 90, can love it," she said.

Bohrer is waiting to hide the rocks until her family can all do it together.

Rock on

For many people, becoming involved in rock-paint-