

# OPINION

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# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

# A crazy genius and his demons

In a town with more than its share of eccentrics and characters, Robert Jacob claimed a place in the Pantheon.

If Astoria had the Faulkner it deserves, Bob, who passed away Monday at the age of 69, would be the protagonist of a short story or perhaps a novella. And after telling a meandering tale of the character's adventures, the author would spring a surprise — that the man had built one of the town's principal monuments.



**STEVE FORRESTER**

There are a few people who were key to Astoria's rebirth that began in the 1990s. Edith Henningsgaard Miller was one. Willis Van Dusen was another. Jake, as he was commonly known, belongs in that group. And Jake was the classic case of the native Astorian who gained experience elsewhere and came back to help change the town.

When Jake came to my office in the 1990s, he brought plans for a hotel over the water. Like others who had seen the plans, I stifled my visible amazement at this vision. Jake was a graduate of the University of Oregon School of Architecture. After working briefly as an architect, he began buying Astoria properties.

Jake's prospective hotel faced permitting obstacles with the state of Oregon. I told him what I knew about the regulatory world, although I'm not sure I was of great service. But he was grateful and brought me to the construction site when the Cannery Pier Hotel was being framed in. It was a startling experience. During that first, get-to-know-you visit, Jake told me about his alcoholism. He said



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

**Robert Jacob was an advocate for development on Astoria's waterfront. He is shown here on the Astoria Trolley during a waterfront revitalization tour in 2013.**

## 'Jake, as he was commonly known, was a key to Astoria's rebirth that began in the 1990s.'

It had cost him a family. At that point he had been sober for a number of years. Our family was in the midst of doing an intervention with my cousin Jacqueline, so I did not minimize the travail of which Jake spoke or the damage that his alcoholism might do to others. When it was my turn to seek assistance,

Jake was most helpful. The board of Liberty Restoration Inc. was pursuing acquisition of the Liberty Theatre, owned by a Los Angeles lawyer and accountant named Edward Eng. It was clear that Mr. Eng did not like our group, and I told that story to Jake. "Well, maybe I'll buy the theater and

sell it to the nonprofit," Jake responded. The story of how he accomplished that is the stuff of fiction. He realized that dealing with Eng demanded a measure of tough talk and profanity. "When he swore at me, I swore right back," Jake said. And most remarkably, Jake started sending checks to Eng — to demonstrate his seriousness of intent and liquidity.

Taking the Liberty Theatre away from a neglectful absentee owner and into local ownership was, in many ways, the start of the rebirth of Astoria's downtown.

The remarkable thing about the Cannery Pier Hotel is that Jake built it without any affiliation to one of the hotel chain marketing groups. And in the parlance of historic restoration, the Cannery Pier was an unconventional but massive amount of repurposing. Jake took a former cannery site and reconstituted it as a hotel with the cannery look. It was genius.

As we began to restore the Liberty Theatre, Jake's alcoholism reared its head. Following a board meeting in the theater, a few directors left via the 12th Street doorway. And standing there was Jake, quite drunk. In hindsight, that startling moment probably marked the beginning of Jake's eventual decline.

On Monday morning, former Astoria City Manager Paul Benoit expressed his surprise at learning of Jake's death. Benoit wrote to me of Jake's "crazy genius and how he kept productive despite his demons." That captures the essence of the human package that was Robert Jacob.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Daily Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian.

Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar, and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month.

Letters written in response to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters in poor taste will not be printed.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Time to negate deal with Hood to Coast organizers

I read a story regarding an extremely unprofessional and sarcastic statement made by Bob Foote, who is described as the founder and chairman of the annoying annual Hood to Coast relay ("Hood to Coast chairman replaced after snubbing women's teams," The Daily Astorian, Aug. 28).

Does Mr. Foote not appreciate that this event has resulted in his joining the growing list of millionaires at the expense of year-round residents who are told by law enforcement officers that we cannot travel on a road to our homes because there are runners present?

And when he realizes that he has zipped when he should have zagged, he conveniently passes the torch to his daughter and bows out. At least maybe until the dust settles a bit. It is my understanding that a "deal" has been agreed upon by Mr. Foote and our city fathers and mothers extending this disruption to continue for several more years. To me that is a win-win for some and a lose-lose for many more.

Our town is already choked in traffic gridlock too much of the time, and it is time to negate the agreement between the city of Seaside and Hood to Coast organizers and full-pocketed executives.

I wonder if that team of ladies who were treated with so much disrespect by Mr. Foote should be refunded their team entry fee.

DON OLSON  
Seaside

### Plastic bags, river views on the city of Astoria's agenda

There are two important meetings this week in Astoria.

On Wednesday, at 9 a.m. in City Hall, the City Council will discuss single-use plastic bags. Recent reports mention plastic is now in our fish, shellfish and even sea salt. A city

with an ongoing history of commercial and recreational fishing should be doing everything possible to prevent more plastic from entering our rivers and flowing to the ocean.

As I walk the Astoria Riverwalk I pick up litter, which includes plastic lids/straws and wind-blown single-use bags. Other cities in Oregon have done this, as has the entire state of California, and Astoria can also do this to make our waterways, ocean, fishing and wildlife better for future generations.

On Thursday, from 6:30 to 8 p.m., in Room 219 of Columbia Hall at Clatsop Community College, there is a town hall meeting to discuss if we are going to be able to enjoy views of the river as we walk along the Riverwalk.

It appears that the proposed Urban Core Plan from Second to 16th streets will permit 28- to 45-foot buildings on both sides of us as we use the Riverwalk. Roof-mounted equipment will make them even taller. This would be like walking through a tunnel of buildings. The plan reads we would be allowed "managed views of the river through building corridors."

GEORGE (MICK) HAGUE  
Astoria

### Gearhart growth should be well thought out, not unchecked

The purpose of this letter is to address certain criticisms directed at my effort to run for Gearhart City Council, Position 1.

Evidently, I have been labeled as an "outsider." It is true that my lovely wife and I have permanently resided in Gearhart for two years, effective Nov. 2. However we, along with our children, and now their children, have enjoyed Gearhart's quiet presence for more than 29 years.

We adore Gearhart's uniqueness and sense of community such that it is my fervent goal, whether elected or not, to actively preserve Gearhart's culture and its habitat. I would seek, with the help of other council members,

to take simple steps to enhance the livability and enjoyment of all residents, giving no regard to special interests.

Finally, I wish to clarify my public statements that I am against growth. I am, in fact, against unchecked growth, which provides opportunity for a few, but at the overall expense of our residents and the environment. We all have seen and experienced biased growth, which exposes the community and its environs to a compromised environment; increased population density, requiring increased services and operating expenses; perhaps taxpayer subsidies; and a platform for additional government spending, hence more taxes.

However, I am in favor of well-thought-out growth, which avoids the aforementioned impediments, and enhances Gearhart's livability and its existing culture; aids and promotes existing local business health; avoids targeted and unbalanced taxation; and pays its full cost of service, which includes any impact to the environment.

JACK ZIMMERMAN  
Gearhart

### Vote Mitchell for state representative

I am a college student who has lived in Astoria for almost two years. I attended Clatsop Community College and, as a young person, I see the toll college tuition has taken on people my age in our community.

Many of my friends, myself included, work minimum-wage jobs to make ends meet and pay rent while we are in school. Most of them cannot fully pay their way through school without working and saving money. Even more troubling is that several of my friends in this community will not even go to school, because they are unable to make ends meet as it is. It is very disheartening for me to see so many people my age unable to get the higher education they need in order to find success in their lives.

Tiffany Mitchell, who is running to be our next District 32 representative in the state Legislature, understands what it is like to struggle to make ends meet while working to pay off her student debt. I have seen the impact Tiffany Mitchell has had in our community through her work with Indivisible North Coast Oregon, and I know Tiffany Mitchell will advocate for hardworking young people by fighting to make college affordable and accessible. Please join me in voting for Tiffany Mitchell in November.

ALLISON SOLIMAN  
Astoria

### Vote Jones for Astoria mayor

Bruce Jones deserves your vote for mayor of Astoria. Currently a city councilor, Bruce has a real grasp of the most pressing issues facing our great city. He has evenhandedly overseen our city's administration while balancing divergent community interests. He desires to keep Astoria a vibrant city with a diverse economy and a high quality of life.

Bruce understands Astoria's challenges and, as mayor, will lead the city's efforts to tackle the issues of homelessness, affordable housing, waterfront preservation and bringing living-wage jobs to our city.

Bruce has the experience Astoria needs to successfully face an uncertain future. While a Coast Guard commander, Bruce effectively led urgent rescue operations in one of our nation's largest natural disasters, Hurricane Katrina, saving thousands of lives. Bruce's firsthand experience will help our city prepare for a Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake.

Bruce has a true appreciation for Astoria, and will fight to preserve the qualities that make Astoria unique. His leadership at the Columbia River Maritime Museum, during a lifetime of public service, and as a volunteer for the Friends of the Astoria Armory and Astoria Column, makes our city better for residents and visitors.

DAN STEIN  
Astoria