

Homeless: 'It can't get any worse than it is right now'

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Other people shared Gimre's post on Facebook, drawing mixed reaction from the community. Many people wrote that they are compassionate to the plight of the homeless, but sick of the messes people leave behind.

Sarah Lu Heath, executive director of the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association, said the association is concerned for the homeless and the "bad behavior of some individuals" that impacts downtown merchants and locals. With the police, the association developed the Property Watch program, an agreement between individual property owners and the police department that allows officers to intervene as needed when issues arise on private property.

"Bad behavior, vandalism and theft are unacceptable and we continue to be grateful for our partnership with (the police department)," Heath said.

Gimre considers himself compassionate. He has given shoes away to people in need and the business participates in fundraising and provides donations for local service organizations. He has also spoken with representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon and the Oregon Law Center, groups that have



Homeless people protest at Heritage Square.

Katie Frankowicz/The Daily Astorian

argued against laws on loitering or panhandling.

But Gimre wants Astoria leaders to step up. His daughters feel unsafe on the Astoria Riverwalk and other residents avoid downtown, he said.

"The city needs to take a vocal stance instead of saying, 'Let's have another focus group,'" Gimre said. "We've reached a boiling point, a tipping point where it can't get any worse than it is right now."

Protest

Olsen pitched a tent in a corner of Heritage Square next to the American Legion and invited others to join her Friday. The square is already a regular hangout spot for some homeless men and women. Over the next few days, more people joined the camp.

Olsen has attended several city meetings where homelessness has been a topic and would like to see the city use land near Safeway to establish a legal homeless camp. She made her recommendation at the City Council meeting where the "no camping" amendment was approved. City Manager Brett Estes said there were landslide issues with the property.

"These are my demands," Olsen said on Friday. "(Clatsop Community Action) makes good on their promise to put people up who are cold now. The county abolishes their overnight parking law."

The Astoria Police Department is aware of the protest and several officers have stopped to talk with them, homeless protesters said on Sunday. About a dozen people sat at the camp in

the late morning, some resting in tents. The interactions with police were friendly, they said.

"We wanted to respect their right to protest as long as it's orderly," Spalding said. However, "the setting up of tents is a new problem that we will need to address."

A downtown business and church are supporting the protesters with food, he said.

Clatsop Community Action has seen a lot of walk-ins since the City Council amended the city's "no camping" rule to include forestland — an omission the councilors believed had been accidental when the rule was written. But, overall, the agency's volume remains at normal levels.

"It hasn't increased it," said Elaine Bruce, the agency's executive director. "It's just a

different type."

The city intends to work with social service groups like Clatsop Community Action as it figures out how to address the dozen or more homeless camps in the woods. They don't just want to displace people, Spalding and Mayor Arline LaMear have said.

Depending on a person's situation, Clatsop Community Action can begin to figure out what programs they might be eligible for to find help. It is not usually a quick process.

Places like the Astoria Warming Center, which won't open until mid-November, or Helping Hands, which is in the process of opening a facility in Uniontown, can provide more immediate services but are limited in other ways.

"But we do what we can, certainly, in all cases," Bruce said.

Misunderstanding

However, some advocates for the homeless misunderstood what Clatsop Community Action is able to offer.

The nonprofit does not partner with the KOA to place people at the Warrenton campground for free, or otherwise, Bruce clarified. This misinformation, which spread through social media, meant campground employees found themselves fielding numerous

phone calls from people asking for a "free site," said Lee Wheeler, KOA's manager.

The agency recommends local campgrounds to people who have been camping elsewhere and ask where they can go to camp legally. Sometimes clients show up in an RV asking for places where they can park for the night.

The KOA in Warrenton is one place the agency recommends. Fort Stevens State Park is another. Both offer an array of tent, cabin and RV camping options. But people who follow the agency's recommendations pay for sites themselves.

In one rare case, the agency was able to use money from its veterans program to pay for a cabin at the KOA for a veteran, something allowed only because the agency had permanent housing lined up. The KOA cabin was a temporary measure until the veteran could get into that housing.

Most programs the agency administers will not allow money to be spent on temporary or short-term housing, since the goal is to put money towards long-term options.

In all these cases, KOA campground managers and state park rangers would not necessarily know if a camper was homeless or just another tourist on vacation unless they asked outright.

Wallace: 'It's a unique experience'

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He joined the board for Camp Kiwanilong, which proved to be a perfect outlet for filling in what he missed, using his skills in forming, funding and managing projects.

If that wasn't enough to keep Wallace busy, his wife asked if he knew they were looking for trolley drivers, saying she felt he would be good at it. He wasn't so keen on the idea, but "it kept spinning around in my head and I thought, 'Yeah, it might be fun.'"

He submitted his application and quickly found himself in the training program. "After I drove the train the first time, I was pretty well hooked," he said.

Wallace has joined an elite group of about 45 certified volunteers, mostly retirees. He goes about once a week, and says there are always two volunteers on the trolley who split the shift, alternating between driving and conducting. There is no set schedule and no commitment.

"That works for me because if I don't have anything going on, I can sign up for a shift if it's available," he said. "I like that."

Wallace enjoys learning about the early history of Astoria and its colorful past. "It's fascinating, especially when you realize how quickly things happened," he said. "Part of that makes me realize how big a focus there was on the Northwest and how many foreign countries were interested in this area."



Seaside's Neal Wallace operates the Astoria Riverfront Trolley.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Though some of the locals are quick to correct Wallace on historical facts, he says "that doesn't happen a whole lot."

"Most people don't know Astoria that much and they enjoy hearing the history. Where else can you look at the most gorgeous scenery for an hour? Where are you going to get that for a buck? It's a unique experience both from my end and the passengers' end," he said.

"It's really gotten under my skin."



Neal Wallace works the controls of the trolley.

Price: 'I respect him and I like him'

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Jones, who had previously said he would not run for mayor this year, changed his mind and publicly announced his candidacy the next day.

Jones faces downtown business owner Dulcye Taylor and community activist Michael "Sasha" Miller in the November election.

Price, who represents Ward 3 downtown, decided to endorse Jones over Taylor, a one-time ally.

"Dulcye can be great fun and I've enjoyed many fine times with her," she said. "She's a good cheerleader for downtown Astoria, and she'd be a good councilor for Ward 3. But mayor is different, or should be."

Price compared the role of mayor to a quarterback in a football game. The city needs, she wrote, "someone who knows the plays, calls the plays, executes the plays. That's Bruce."

In her letter, she described working with Jones on the City Council for the past two years.

"We haven't always voted the same way," she wrote. "I've an idealist's raised-fist 'Fight the Power!' streak that Bruce smiles and nods his head at, and then makes an independent, well-reasoned decision."

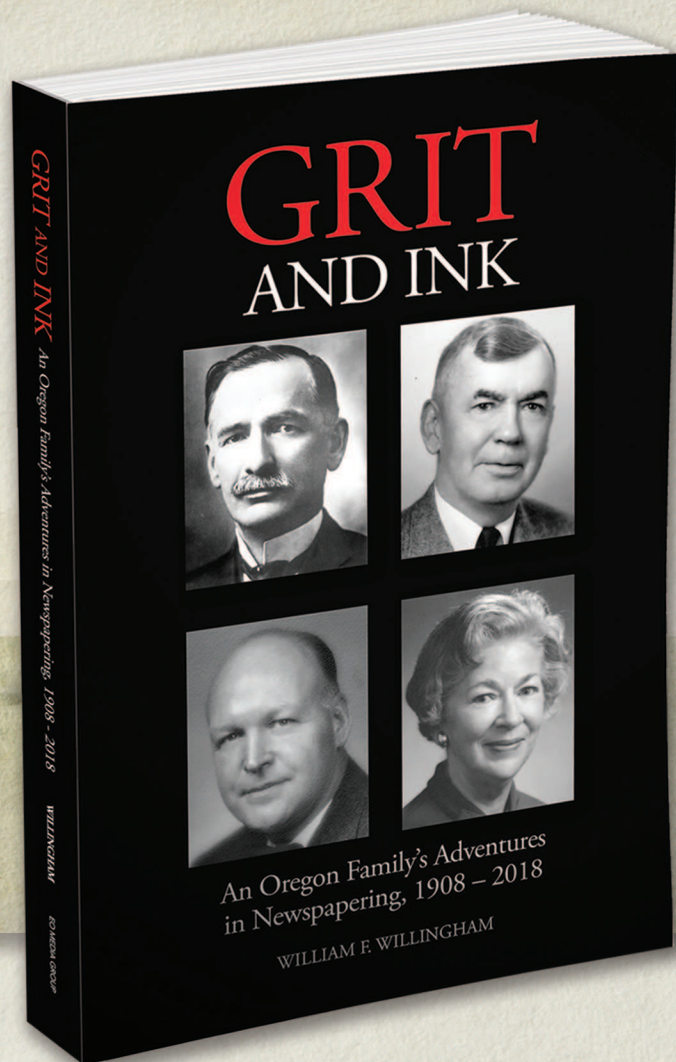
"I respect him and I like him. I trust Bruce to make balanced, inclusive decisions that will benefit all Astorians."

Price also said in an email that she favors Planning Commissioner Joan Herman, who is vying for Price's Ward 3 seat against state forester Ron Zilli.

The mayoral candidates are entering the final stretch of the campaign. Of the three candidates, only Taylor and Jones have filed campaign finance information with the state. Miller has invested his own money into campaign items like buttons and T-shirts, but has put most of his energy to going door-to-door to talk to residents.

Jones' filings show Price contributed \$125 to his campaign earlier this month. Jones has received \$5,225 in contributions, including \$1,000 from Astoria resident and Jones' fellow board member at the Astoria Armory, Dan Stein.

Taylor has raised \$3,539 in contributions so far, with \$200 coming from Van Dusen Family Inc., and an additional \$200 from Pepsi of Astoria, owned and operated by former Mayor Willis Van Dusen. Well-known real estate agent Debra Bowe has also contributed to Taylor's campaign.



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