

# OPINION

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## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

# LIFE IN THE FUR LANE

What kind of person gets in a fur suit and travels across the state for a good cause? For these costumed folks, every day is Halloween. And for others, it is a lifestyle. Louis Lamp of Portland (pronounced "Louie") is a member of a group called the Pool Party, originally intended to spoof the political parties. Earlier this month, they descended on Seaside to spread cheer and to help raise funds for children's swimming lessons and children's theater.

**Q:** What is the "Pool Party?" Is it political?

**Lamp:** The group comes from all walks of life and not all, but most opinions. Most of us are primarily getting away from our jobs, going to have fun. I believe in going out into the community and raising money for nonprofits or interacting with the public. We're working on becoming a 501(c)3.



**R.J. MARX**

**Q:** How hot is it in the fur suit?

**Lamp:** Almost too hot. For folks who do it really they build up stamina, but we make sure they have water and radios, we don't want anyone overheating, imagine the weight of a sofa without the frame. Some people have small fans or cool-in vests built inside. On hot days, shorter shifts, I can't even go 30 minutes. For those who have tolerance built up, they can go 30 minutes to a couple of hours.

**Q:** What's your background?

**Lamp:** I'm retired from the Army.

**Q:** Do you want to talk about your military experience?

**Lamp:** Sure. I was in the Army for about 10 years. I joined in 1999, retired in 2009. I was overseas for almost half my career, four years in Germany and then I invaded Iraq. After the invasion, most of my overseas duty was temporary duty six weeks here, two weeks there.

When I retired from the Army, I had a huge problem with crowds. It didn't matter what kind of crowd, I couldn't get on a bus.

I fell into the furry community by accident. A friend of mine, a writer in Northern California, said, "Stop by, we're having a convention." It was "Further Confusion," in 2009 in San Jose, California. I had more fun than I've ever had at that convention than any sci-fi or anime convention.

Three thousand people in one hotel and I didn't get triggered once. Crowds didn't bother me at all. I called my therapist and said, "I've got a cure for this one thing." For me it was a "no-duh."

I probably got 100 hugs at my first convention. To put things in perspective, veterans often find a few ways to escape and the way I escape is constructive and good for me. It's not for everybody. Of the choices most veterans wind up going through, I think I came out OK.

**Q:** This was almost therapy?

**Lamp:** Quite a big part. I still haven't gone to rock concerts or other crowded events.

**Q:** Tell me about the suits you wear.

**Lamp:** Fur suits are like zoot suits, only warmer.

**Q:** Are they based on cartoon favorites?

**Lamp:** It's much more of a personal expression of an idea, rather than saying "I'm Tony the Tiger" or "I'm Bugs Bunny."

**Q:** Where do you get the suits?



Pool Party

Louis Lamp as Baphnedra in the cockpit of the Spruce Goose at the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum.



Pool Party

Furries on the Promenade in Seaside.

**Lamp:** It's very much a cottage industry. Some of us make our own.

**Q:** If you can't sew can you do this?

**Lamp:** You can definitely learn. I have no talent. A friend is helping with my suit.

**Q:** Are they gender free?

**Lamp:** That is totally up to the individual. I'd say most of the time no one is worried about gender, but they will have an apparent gender, male or female.

**Q:** How much does a typical fur suit cost?

**Lamp:** Costumes are about \$2,000 to \$4,000, and they can run as high as \$15,000.

**Q:** You have parties at pools throughout the state. Do you go in the pool with the costumes?

**Lamp:** No! Just like pets, faux fur will shed. The last thing you want to have happen to a pool pump is for that to shed. We go swimming out of the costumes. In bathing suits.

**Q:** Does the audience see you disrobing?

**Lamp:** We tend to keep any disrobing out of sight, out of mind of families and kids. We call it "ruining the magic." Imagine if you've got your family, kids or grandkids at Disneyland and then Mickey Mouse takes off his head and swigs a bottle of water. It's all over.

**Q:** How many members do you have?

**Lamp:** We've got about 35, including a few couples and teens.

**Q:** What are some of the other careers of group members?

**Lamp:** We have some in the military, a lot of folks involved in art, sewing, illustration, outside the cottage industry side of things, a lot of IT folks, firefighters, EMTs, first responders. Then you have the folks who work at Burgerville.

**Q:** What are some of your favorite causes?

**Lamp:** For conventions it will be for no-kill animal shelters, conservation

efforts, things along those lines. In Seaside, for this year, our pet causes are the Clatsop Children's Theatre Company and the Sunset Rec Foundation. We're raising money for sponsoring swimming lessons for kids who need to learn how to swim but aren't able to afford it.

**Q:** What is your costume?

**Lamp:** Mine is a gray-and-lavender dragon. What we call a "partial." I have a head, paws, tail and feet. I have to wear long sleeves underneath because I don't have a body suit.

**Q:** What's that?

**Lamp:** That covers the neck from the ankles. I have a fur-suit head.

**Q:** How are you generally received?

**Lamp:** Some people are indifferent. If they want space away from us, that's OK. Out in public most of our time is making sure we don't step on people's toes — kidding — but getting on and off the carousel is harder than people would think.

**Q:** How do you communicate with the audience at an event?

**Lamp:** When we're in public there are a number of us who are not in costume, we call them handlers because there are number of characters who might not speak or communicate via barks or chirps. We make sure to have a couple of people on hand to welcome the public, answer questions and make sure no one gets hurt.

**Q:** What sounds does a dragon make?

**Lamp:** I get tired of "Roar!" After 15 minutes my throat is raw, I'm still finding my voice, so to speak.

**Q:** What does the costume say about the person?

**Lamp:** A lot of times it will express who we want to be. A lot of folks are very reserved in public. They don't want to perform or talk with people. They're paralyzed with anxiety. When you are in a suit, all of that disappears and is off to the side, very much like an actor in a role, in character. Whereas an actor has training in



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Louis Lamp in Seaside.

becoming that role, for those who have no experience with that, it's a very easy mental cue. It's important for their identity.

**Q:** Have you ever fallen?

**Lamp:** When I was bowling in a previous fur suit. It's retired now. It had felt on its feet. On a bowling alley it was like a cartoon, the feet shuffling back and forth.

**Q:** I understand you work with children in area hospitals.

**Lamp:** Some of us go to a children's hospital every month to visit the kids.

**Q:** What's that like?

**Lamp:** Nobody goes to a hospital to have a good day, especially kids who are inpatient, 5 to 15 years old. That's the kind of giving back money can't buy. I wouldn't quite put it in the realm of a higher calling, but for a few minutes, when they are interacting with us and getting photos, they're not thinking about insurance, diagnoses, prognoses or how it will affect their lives going forward. It's really nice.

**Q:** How do kids respond?

**Lamp:** Almost universally they are overjoyed to see us. And when they're not, they very clearly don't want to have anything else to do with us.

If I had a tip for parents that encounter us in public, it's happened a few times, if your kid is not clearly interested in being around us, don't force them. "But they're so cute," and this baby wailing. We try to nonverbally communicate, sometimes the handler will intercede, a picture would be nice but another day. I would hate to be that kid.

**Q:** Same with dogs. How do they look at you?

**Lamp:** They look at us like we're weird humans.

**Q:** How will you be spending Halloween?

**Lamp:** I usually answer my door in costume. Some of us trick or treat.

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

### 'Yes' for Astoria schools

It is my privilege to be the principal at Astoria Middle School. I have a very dedicated staff who work very hard. One area that helps promote student learning is the facility and environment that students learn in and teachers teach in.

The middle school classroom wing has sixteen classrooms and only six have windows that go to the outside. The six classrooms that have an exterior window in them have only one small window in a triangular-shaped classroom. The lack of natural daylight does impact learning and well-being for our students.

Unfortunately, we read, hear, and are exposed to news about school violence throughout our country. That is the reality

of the age we are educating our students in. Astoria School District needs to assure that we have facilities that are safe. In particular, the district needs to monitor and control entry and exits, as well as provide security cameras and door lock systems that assure our students are safe and secure while at school.

There are numerous other projects on the bond list at other schools. The average age of our schools is 63 years. We are working to maintain and care for what we have, but much of it is simply worn out. It is time to update our facility so we can serve our community, our children and, our families for an additional 50 years.

Please vote "yes" for the school bond.

LINDA BRECH  
Principal, Astoria Middle School

### One-party rule

This state has been ruled by Democrats for over 30 years. Let's count some of their accomplishments:

We have homeless people like we've never had before.

Oregon has one of the highest dropout rates for high school students in the nation.

The state is building a bike trail from Troutdale to Hood River. It is costing millions of dollars, yet Astoria can't get a bypass.

This state has destroyed the commercial fishing industry for no other reason than prejudice and politics.

The Forest Practices Act in some cases flies in the face of good silviculture management. This state has declared war on

small-scale mining in eastern and southern Oregon.

The sanctuary policy of this state is disgraceful. It costs \$1.2 billion a year for people who are here illegally. Of course, there is no limit to the mainstream media protection of illegal immigrants. The fact remains, it undermines the very existence of not only this state, but of the country. That's why we need to vote "yes" to repeal Measure 105.

As long as we have people in government like Kate Brown, we will never solve the problems, not only in this state but as a nation.

Think about that when you cast your vote in November.

ROBERT BOEHM  
Clifton