



Gabriella Perez, left, attends a vigil for her grandfather, Ruben Vera Perez, who was detained by immigration agents in Astoria in December.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Asylum: ‘We’re going to take it one day at a time’

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Maria Perez and her supporters have been working on getting Ruben Perez released on bond while his deportation is reviewed. Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones and former Mayor Arline LaMear have written letters to the immigration court in support of Perez, asking that he be brought back to the community.

Jones asked the immigration court to consider the economic impact of removing people like Ruben Perez at a time when workers are in short supply.

“Mr. Perez is an example

of the type of ideal employee these local employers are seeking,” Jones wrote. “Removing him from the local labor pool has not benefited the community, region or nation in any way. On the contrary, it is another blow to our local economy.”

Perez’s detention has also put a local spotlight on a national controversy about U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrests at or near courthouses. Many judges and civil liberties advocates, including Paula Brownhill, the presiding judge of the Clatsop County Circuit Court, have spoken out about these types of

arrests, arguing it undermines the criminal justice system.

As the family waits for a bond hearing scheduled for later this month, Maria Perez said it’s a relief to know her husband has options.

“We’re going to take it one day at a time, and I’m trusting in God,” she said.

In the courtroom, Maria Perez and her daughter were able to lock eyes with Ruben Perez before the hearing adjourned. A moment of brief happiness quickly turned to tears.

“It felt good to see him,” Maria Perez said afterward. “But it’s hard knowing he isn’t walking out with us.”

Flyer: Schaefer says he regrets the distress his actions caused

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a hall of mirrors that reflected and amplified Schaefer’s own racist and homophobic sentiments until it seemed like they were everywhere. What once seemed extreme began to feel normal.

“I was radicalized,” Schaefer said.

Schaefer made eight rules for participants in his online forum — which, he said, did draw some interest before he took it down. He told members it was a Christian group, where participants were to refrain from posting graphic images or cursing. He discouraged Adolf Hitler-worship, saying neo-Nazism was as offensive to him as communism. “They’re both gay,” he wrote. Schaefer said he did not want to start a hate group.

Rule No. 8 was, “Racism is tolerated.”

“I told them it’s not OK to hate blacks for no reason,” Schaefer told the Observer. In his view, the forum was a place where local right-wing radicals could go to “uplift” one another.

“We might be racist, but we are not violent in the least,” he wrote.

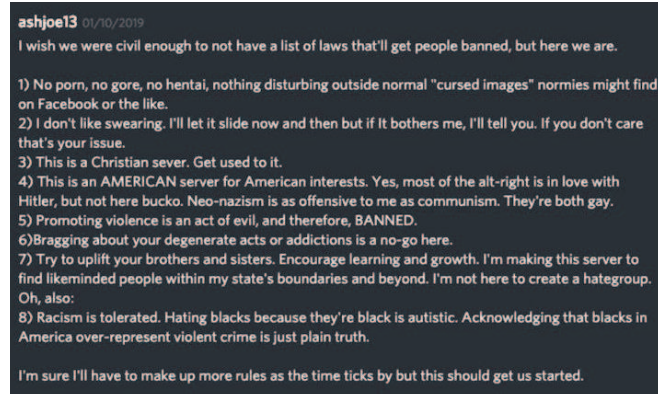
Social media

“Social media is now a critical infrastructure element for engaging even unaffiliated extremists into the fold,” said Brian Levin, an attorney, professor at California State University, San Bernardino and director for the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism.

“It not only ensnares bigots, it also ensnares unstable people who become bigots,” Levin explained.

Many hate groups are easily accessible through social media platforms like Twitter.

“White supremacists are increasingly opting to operate mainly online, where the danger of public exposure and embarrassment is far lower, where younger people tend to gather, and where it requires virtually no effort or cost to join in the conversa-



A screenshot from an online forum set up — and then taken down — by local resident Will Schaefer lays out rules for conduct.

tion,” a 2016 Southern Poverty Law Center report said.

In 2016, researchers at George Washington University found that, in terms of Twitter-recruiting efforts, white supremacist groups were growing at a spectacular rate.

“American white nationalist movements have seen their followers grow by more than 600 percent since 2012,” the study said.

Levin said there is evidence that participation in radical online groups is contributing to the recent precipitous rise in racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic violence in the United States.

Researchers at his center found that preliminary 2018 crime statistics suggest the number of hate crimes in large cities rose for the fifth consecutive year.

According to the Anti-Defamation League, extremists killed at least 50 people, up from 37 in 2017. And while there are extremists of all races and religions and at both ends of the political spectrum, far-right groups appear to be growing the fastest.

In 2018, “Every single extremist killing — from Pittsburgh to Parkland — had a link to right-wing extremism,” a recent Anti-Defamation League report said.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is so concerned about internet radicalization that it launched the “Don’t Be a Puppet” campaign, which aims to teach young

people how to spot and avoid extremist recruiting tactics, including flyers and private chat rooms.

‘A good boy’

Schaefer told the Observer he now sees that he was wrong. He says he regrets the distress his actions caused. He says he has learned his lesson — and he lost all of his friends over the incident.

“The community doesn’t have to be scared of me,” he said.

The consequences continue to ripple, even in his own home. His mother — who had nothing to do with the project — fought back tears as she described the steps she and her husband took to limit the damage, including taking down the flyers and website, and going to the police.

“We’ve done everything we can to make it right,” she said.

She defended her family, saying they are hardworking, law-abiding churchgoers. She described her son as “a good boy” who made “a stupid mistake.”

Asked if he had actually been threatened over the flyers, Schaefer said he received one message that said, “Wanna hang?”

Initially, he was afraid. He thought the note meant someone wanted to lynch him. Later, he realized the person might have just been extending a friendly invitation.

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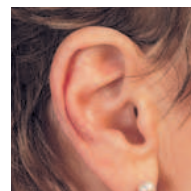
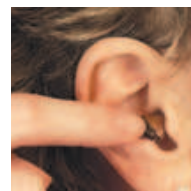
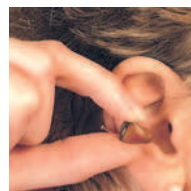


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