

ICE detainee welcomed back home

Astoria man picked up by authorities in December

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Volunteers who helped free Ruben Perez, an Astoria man detained by immigration agents in December near the Clatsop County Courthouse, gathered Saturday night in the Astoria Masonic Hall for a welcome-home party eight days after he was released.

"I want to thank everyone without exception," said Perez, flanked by his wife, Maria Perez, and daughters Mariana Perez, Selena Rios and Gabriella Velasco.

In December, Ruben Perez was detained after he appeared in Circuit Court on a probation issue related to a drunken-driving case. He and his wife were driving to the jail afterward to check in with a pretrial release officer when they were pulled over by unmarked vehicles, and he was taken into custody, Maria Perez said.

His detention localized the national issue of immigration-related arrests in and around courthouses, which some judges and civil liberties advocates say undermines the criminal justice system.

An immigration judge in Tacoma earlier this month found that Ruben Perez could be eligible to have his deportation canceled because it would cause unusual hardship on his wife and children, who are all U.S. citizens, and because he has lived in the U.S. for more than 10 years.

Ruben Perez spent 61 days in the federal Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, he said. He was initially told he'd only be held for about a week.

Volunteers with Pacific Unitarian Universalist raised money to post his bail, and with a loan from retired doctor Frank Erickson of Astoria, freed him Feb. 15.

Erickson felt it was one of the only opportunities he's had to make a real difference, he said. He related his loan to the Perez family to the Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, a Texas-based nonprofit supporting legal expenses.

"For every Ruben, there are dozens of others without the support," he said.

Despite seeing news coverage of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrests, she couldn't imagine what families were going through until it happened to hers, Maria Perez said.

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Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Greg Neitzel performs at the Labor Temple during the FisherPoets Gathering in Astoria.

FISHERPOETS TAKE OVER ASTORIA

The Daily Astorian

The FisherPoets Gathering took over Astoria over the weekend, with readings, exhibits, films and other attractions. The human orca mural was organized by the Backbone Campaign, a conservation advocacy group from Vashon, Washington.



Several dozen people gathered under the Astoria Bridge Saturday to form a human orca mural before the start of the FisherPoets activities. The orca mural was organized by the Backbone Campaign, a conservation advocacy group from Vashon, Washington.



Duncan Berry teaches a class on a style of Japanese printmaking using fish at Studio 11 during the FisherPoets Gathering.



Dozens of people form a human orca mural under the Astoria Bridge before Saturday's start of the FisherPoets Gathering.



Drea Frost hangs a work of art to dry from a printmaking class during the FisherPoets event in Astoria.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian
Ruben Perez, left, handed out pieces of his welcome-home cake Saturday at the Astoria Masonic Hall with help from his wife, Maria Perez, center, and daughter, Mariana Perez.

Volunteer driven by literacy for all



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Judith Pearson, left, reads to third-grader Violet Dailey Friday at Gearhart Elementary School.

By EDWARD STRATTON
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Judith Pearson, a retired teacher, librarian and technology worker, has always loved books and helping people of all ages improve their literacy, from studying their literacy to adults studying for their General Educational Development exam.

Pearson, a volunteer site coordinator with youth literacy program Start Making a Reader Today at Gearhart Elementary School, was recently named its volunteer of the year for the



North Coast.

"I've just always had a strong drive to help people improve their literacy level," she said. "I love the SMART program, because I work with kids, and they're always so spontaneous and get so excited. It's amazing to see the level of knowledge some kids have — Star Wars, all about submarines,

or cats."

Pearson first learned about SMART while living in Portland and unsuccessfully tried to get her parents to volunteer. The nonprofit tutoring program, started by former Gov. Neil Goldschmidt in 1992, pairs adults with at-risk readers in kindergarten through third grade. It serves more than 7,000 children at more than 200 sites. Children receive 14 new books throughout the school year to keep and read with their families.

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