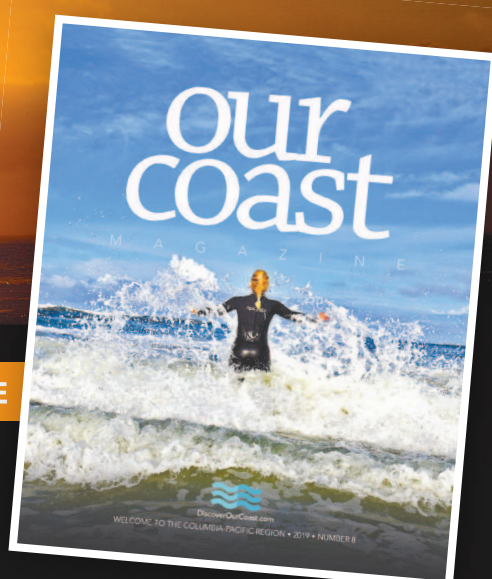


PLUNGE INTO THE MAGAZINE

INSIDE



Spring brings warmer weather, brisker business to local merchants



Photos by Luke Whittaker/Chinook Observer

Doe & Arrow owner Chelsea Johnsen is continually broadening her collection of new and vintage clothing and accessories.

Businesses are hopeful

By LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

A collective sigh of relief washed over Astoria this week with the arrival of spring, signaling a change of the season and the start of more lucrative months for local merchants.

Retailers expressed satisfaction that the winter season was officially over and showed eagerness to begin preparation for busier days ahead.

On Sunday, Table 360 Bakery & Bistro owner Taz Davis cut a Danish pastry and coffee cake into bite-sized pieces before doling them out to people passing his bakery on Commercial Street.

It was the warmest day in weeks and Davis wasn't wasting the opportunity to get outside and experience what he had been missing all winter.

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Table 360 Bakery and Bistro owner Taz Davis is looking forward to the start of the cruise ship season and the Astoria Sunday Market, which he said will bring a considerable boost to his business.

Port backs fee for harbor

Passing ships will pay \$300

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

The Port of Astoria will become one of only two ports on the West Coast to charge a harbor maintenance fee.

The Port Commission voted Tuesday to charge each incoming commercial vessel over 250 feet on the Columbia River \$300 to help maintain Pier 1 as an emergency pullout. The Port's jurisdiction runs to the Washington state side of the river.

Pier 1 sometimes plays host to ships ordered into port by the Coast Guard for repairs. Port staff have estimated more than \$480,000 each fiscal year is needed to maintain the pier, its main berth for log and cruise ships.

The fee, based on an average of 1,500 vessels a year, is meant to capture those costs, and would be applied to maintenance on the pier. It will become effective at the beginning of the Port's next fiscal year in July.

The fee has faced criticism from the Columbia River Steamship Operators' Association, a group representing ocean-going vessel operators in the river. But Michael Haglund, a maritime attorney hired by the Port, has assured the agency it's on solid legal footing.

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Port adopts tour access annual fee

Some operators were barred from Pier 1

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Tour operators barred from Pier 1 because they do not have deals with cruise ships will now be able to drop off passengers if they pay an annual \$100 fee.

The Port of Astoria has become a popular stop on the West Coast for cruise ships, sometimes hosting more than 40,000 passengers a year. The passengers are often sold shore excursions on board through the cruise ship company, which vets the tours and takes a cut of the profits.

Sundial Travel, a tour company operated by the Port's cruise ship marketer Bruce Conner, has most of the business, leading to calls of favoritism by other tour operators. Conner and Jim Knight, the Port's executive director, have said the restriction to tour operators selling through cruise companies is a big reason why the ships come to Astoria.

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Former employee sues housing authority

Accuses agency of discrimination

By BRENNIA VISSER
The Daily Astorian

A former employee of the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority is suing the director and his former supervisor for discrimination.

In a lawsuit filed in Circuit Court, Benjamin Natividad alleges Todd Johnston, the agency's director, and Jason Banghardt, his supervisor, failed to accommodate his learning disability, and that he was wrongfully terminated because of his disability.

Natividad is at the center of another lawsuit against the agency involving his mother and former colleague, Teresa Sims, who in May was placed on paid leave. The housing authority is investigating whether Sims-falsified records to allow Natividad to receive public housing assistance while he was renting from his uncle.

Sims, the deputy director, filed her own lawsuit in February that alleges she has faced retaliation from Johnston and the housing authority for speaking out about mismanaged public funds and unlawful hiring practices.

Investigators hired by the housing authority and the state Bureau of Labor and Industries have dis-

missed other complaints Sims has filed with similar allegations.

"The only comment I have is, again, these claims were already investigated and dismissed by BOLI," Johnston said in an email.

Natividad, who worked as a maintenance technician, alleges Banghardt forced him to rescind his requests for "reasonable accommodation" at work related to his attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He requested assistance in completing timesheets, leave slips and other paperwork.

Natividad felt compelled to rescind his requests, according to the suit, because he feared losing his job.

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