

Bicentennial, calling it the Jane Barnes Revue to pay homage to the first known Caucasian woman to set foot in Oregon. Taylor then took the historical connection and had topsy-turvy fun with it, herself emceeing the event while assuming the persona of Doogie McTavish — the illegitimate lovechild of Barnes and her travel partner, Donald McTavish.

Although the Downtown Association leadership was originally uncertain about the fundraiser's longevity, Taylor was determined to keep it going until people stopped showing up. Nine years later, the organization typically sells all 204 available tickets. Several business owners and well-known community members have participated at least once.

"To me, it's a rite of passage," Leahy said.

Once he agreed to take his turn, Leahy was all in. He recalls going to Taylor's basement where she had a supply of dresses, wigs and shoes and selecting an outfit with the help of his wife, Karen. On the day of the event, the participants were made up at various locations — consuming a few libations to "take the edge off, so to speak," he said — then transported to the venue, which at the time was the Astor Street Opry Company Playhouse.

As the Small Business Development Center director and a big Donna Summer fan, it was only fitting that Leahy danced on the catwalk to "She Works Hard for the Money."

The participants also created a stage name combining the name of their first pet and the street they grew up on. Leahy was "Dinah Irving." Greg Cross, of Northwest Lending Group and a member of the association's board, was "Sugar Bel Air" during his run.



Joshua Bessex photos

An audience member reaches to pick up a feather on the stage, while 'Scooter Yorktown,' performed by Jade Kiosse, dances during the 2015 Jane Barnes Revue.

Cross participated several years, each time selecting a new outfit, such as a coconut bra and grass skirt or his wife Kristy's wedding dress, supplemented with elastic bands to make it fit. After running out of ideas, he continued volunteering as a server, then as a bartender alongside Kristy, who owns The Rusty Cup in Astoria.

'Make-it-rain money'

The Downtown Association raises money through admissions, concessions and a live auction. As a bonus, there's what Taylor describes as the "make-it-rain money," which is showered on performers, or shoved in various places, while they're

on the catwalk. The participants compete to see who collects the most money and the winner gets a small prize.

This year, for the first time, Taylor gets to sit in the crowd. Norma Hernandez, the local WIC coordinator, and Marco Davis, a dancer instructor and founder of Astoria's Drag-alution, will emcee. Taylor looks forward to experiencing the event as a spectator.

"I think of the people in the Downtown Association as a big family, and this is just an expansion of that family and sharing our kookiness and our oddity and our craziness with the rest of the community, and they seem to enjoy that," she said. 



Rodney Merrill, performing as 'Taffy Ammonoosuc,' dances down the stage during the Jane Barnes Revue at the Astoria Event Center in 2015. The money from the event goes to the Astoria Downtown Historic District Association.