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Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Personnel with the Astoria Fire Department train on the Trident at Pier 39.

Partnership forms to fight fires from the river

The Trident has languished

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorain

In 2014, the Port of Astoria took ownership of the Trident, a federally funded emergency response boat with high-tech equipment and two water cannons, promising to add a new dimension to waterfront firefighting.

Since then, the boat has mostly languished on a floating mattress at the West Mooring Basin, its electronics slowly breaking down because of a lack of maintenance.

But with several firefighters freshly trained on the Trident and an agreement forming between the Port and the city to operate it, there is hope the vessel will be available to help fight fires.

Using the boat for firefighting is largely about keeping it stable while shooting up to 1,500 gallons of water per minute, the equivalent to one fire engine.

"If you put that gun straight off the bow, and say the motors are just in idle, you're going to be (pushed) straight back … at a pretty decent rate, a couple to a few miles an hour," said Tom Jaworski, an engineer with the Astoria Fire Department.

During training, the crews went out twice to search for Maya Sanders, a Svensen woman who disappeared into the Columbia River near Tongue Point in March.

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Terry Corbit, left, and Zach Plant hitch a ride on the Trident as it heads back to the marina after a day of training.

The Trident sprays water on a jetty at Pier 39 during a training exercise.

Ballot measures could take on pension challenge

Business interests are behind the initiatives

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Public employees wouldn't have as generous a retirement under initiative petitions being pushed by business interests in yet another effort to reform the state's notoriously complex and expensive retirement system.

The effort has attracted two big names in Oregon politics — former Gov. Ted Kulongoski and Chris Telfer, a former state senator and a member of the Oregon Lottery Commission.

Kulongoski and Telfer say the amount local governments, like cities and school districts, pay to the Public Employees Retirement System each year is poised to grow so much that they will struggle to provide basic services.

Oregon PERS Solutions, a business-funded group backing the petitions, estimates those payments will increase by $10 billion over the next eight years if the system isn't changed.

Instead, Kulongoski and Telfer want some of that money to go to other needs, such as road repairs and teacher salaries.

They are putting their political might behind two ballot measure initiatives that would reduce future retirement benefits for public employees starting in 2021.

The state's 145,000 retirees in PERS wouldn't be affected.

Backers estimate one approach could save public employers $5 billion, and the second could save $3.3 billion. The backers would advance only one measure to the 2020 election.

PERS is a hybrid system, which, in simple terms, consists of two parts: a basic pension and a retirement savings account similar to a 401(k).

If successful, the effort may mean that for new employees, the state could emulate Oregon Health & Science University's retirement options. Workers there have the option to either get the pension plan or contribute to a 401(k)-style savings plan, but not both.

Under both petitions, public employees would contribute to the costs of their pension. But they wouldn't have to contribute more money than they already do to retirement, because the money they contribute to the existing 401(k)-style plan could get redirected to make the required pension payment instead.

And the state would either create a new 401(k)-style savings plan for new hires or have the state treasury study creating one.

Although benefits would get reduced under the petitions, backers argue public employees and taxpayers could see other positive effects — such as being able to hire more teachers or paying those teachers more money.

But if the state does nothing, schools and other public entities would have to make cuts to cover rising PERS bills, said Tim Nesbitt, interim executive director of Oregon PERS Solutions.

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Developer purchases downtown building

Hopes for more rentals

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Joe Barnes has purchased the Osburn-O'Brien Building in downtown Astoria, where he hopes to expand the number of upstairs rooms for rent.

Barnes, who recently opened the 30-unit 5th Street Flats apartment complex near Old Youngs Bay Bridge, bought the downtown building from Above Tide LLC, run by Steve and Debbie Mansfield.

The building runs along 14th Street from Commercial to Duane streets. Along Commercial Street are Allstate Insurance and Thiel's Musical Instruments, which has been in the space since 1974. On Duane Street are two newer tenants, the Creations Studio and Gallery and Bridge & Tunnel Bottleshop and Taproom.

"Everybody is status quo," Barnes said. "We're in negotiations with Thiel's. They're the only people we don't have a lease with."

Rick Holt, who has worked for the Thiel family since the 1990s and has operated the Astoria location for the past three years, said he is in contact with Barnes and weighing options.

Upstairs are five apartments and several more rooms Barnes said

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Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

The Osburn-O'Brien Building along 14th Street has been sold to developer Joe Barnes, who plans on expanding the number of rental units upstairs.

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