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146TH YEAR, NO. 224

DailyAstorian.com // THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2019

\$1.50



Eric Sarin, a native Astorian, has more than 25 years in the sneaker industry and recently started his own sneaker company, Alma Mater Footwear.

Photos by Eric Sarin

Astorian makes his mark in the sneaker industry

Sarin founded Alma Mater Footwear

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

When he saw the photo of retired baseball star Alex Rodriguez wearing his sneakers while proposing to actress and musician Jennifer Lopez, Eric Sarin felt flattered.

The 1989 Astoria High School grad, after gathering more than a quarter century of experience in the sneaker industry, recently started Alma Mater Footwear, a high-end leather sneaker startup that counts Rodriguez among its most famous fans.

“I guess you could just call them sneakers for grown-ups,” Sarin said of his 1980s retro white leather lace-ups, each with a distinctive black Velcro band halfway down the foot, which sell for nearly \$200 a pair online.

The name of Sarin’s company is taken from the stands at Astoria’s gymnasium, where he played high school basketball. Sarin was visiting family when his brother, Mike, took him to the gym, and he saw the alma mater song printed on the wall behind a basketball hoop.

“All the memories of what it was like there came flooding back,” Sarin said of the gym,

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ABOVE: Retired baseball star Alex Rodriguez, left, is a regular wearer of Eric Sarin’s Alma Mater Footwear sneakers.



LEFT: Sarin’s sneakers, made from leather in Portugal, are designed in a retro 1980s style and include a distinctive black Velcro band.

Spruce aphids found on central coast

Pests have attacked Sitka spruce trees

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Spruce aphids are at work beyond the North Coast.

The small, invasive insects have caused Sitka spruce trees in neighborhoods and on commercial timberlands from Arch Cape to Ocean Park, Washington, to turn brown this spring. On Monday, Christine Buhl, a forest entomologist with the Oregon Department of Forestry, investigated reports of infestations and found evidence of the pests from Pacific City to Cape Meares and inland from Tillamook.

The good news is she expects many of the trees she examined — even the ones that looked very bad — to survive. The aphids impacted last year’s needles and will not affect this year’s new growth.

There are no reports of spruce aphid infestations on the South Coast, but the area experienced a cold snap that likely checked aphid populations. Farther north, the winter was mild, providing perfect conditions for an aphid invasion.

While pest outbreaks are one expected consequence of climate change, Buhl is not ready to call this year’s spruce aphid infestation “the new normal.”

Aphids seem to come in cycles. Foresters have seen far worse spruce aphid infestations in Alaska and Canada and trees have rebounded, she said.

Still, it is a concern and the state will keep a close eye on trees going into next year. Buhl and others plan to monitor for aphid populations and set sticky traps on a mix of public and private lands beginning in February.

“It could be that we’re moving towards an increased frequency in these outbreaks just because conditions are better for some of these insects,” Buhl said. “That is something worth thinking about for long-term impacts.”

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Land trust short on purchase

Property at Tongue Point

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

The Columbia Land Trust and Clatsop Community College face a \$141,000 gap in their effort to turn South Tongue Point into wildlife habitat and a living laboratory.

The land trust preserves several properties along the lower Columbia River. It secured \$1 million from a national grant program run by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a \$332,000 match from the state Watershed Enhancement Board to buy nearly 100 acres of South Tongue Point.

The land trust plans to restore the property into salmon and wildlife habitat under the guidance of the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce. It would then transfer the land to the college for use as a living laboratory in support of its environmental sciences program.

But the land trust secured the grants before an appraisal of the property came back higher than expected, said Christopher Breitmeyer, the college president, while updating the college board Tuesday.

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Warrenton considers farmers market

Gatherings would be held on Thursdays

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

WARRENTON — A farmers and fishermen’s market could be coming to the Warrenton Marina this year.

City commissioners gave their blessing to the project at a meeting Tuesday. The city would hold the market on Thursdays and not conflict with other farmers markets in Clatsop County.

The logistics of setting up the market, funding it and staffing it still need to be hammered out, but the City Commission’s approval will allow city staff to move forward on putting together a plan, City Manager Linda Engbretson said.

Marina staff have spoken with other market organizers and are already reaching out to vendors. The market would be held at the marina parking lot area.

While Mayor Henry Balensifer supported the idea, he wanted to make sure the long-term business model for the market is sustainable and focused on building revenue. He was also concerned about how much time staff will need to devote to



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

The city is considering a farmers market at the Warrenton Marina.

the market beyond their regular marina duties.

Both issues are things city staff still need to examine, Eng-

bretson said.

“I think we’d be foolish not to try to run with it,” City Commissioner Rick Newton said.

