

# the Astorian

146TH YEAR, NO. 232

DailyAstorian.com // TUESDAY, JUNE 4, 2019

\$1.50



One sixth-grader at Astoria Middle School donned the pink elephant head of Ganesha, a Hindu god of beginnings, for a recent wax museum.

Photos Edward Stratton/The Astorian

## ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS FLOOD HALLS OF ASTORIA MIDDLE SCHOOL

A living wax museum

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Astorian

The halls of Astoria Middle School transformed for 90 minutes on Friday into a living wax museum full of figures from Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, India, Greece and Rome.

Around 170 sixth-graders assumed the guise of historical figures for a social studies project. They fashioned costumes, dressed up and stood stoically until a passerby pressed a custom button to hear a recitation of their character's life and impact on history.

Each class took on a different civilization. Kids chose their characters through a lottery and bartered with others for their preferred choice.

Jackson Brown, a student in Sam Abbate's class, chose to be a terra-cotta warrior. He assumed a defensive stance, his spear jutting out. But press his button, and Brown shifted to a more conversational stance, recounting the history of the funerary figures from Chinese history.

"I just thought it was an interesting topic," Brown said. "I learned about the first emperor of China, Qin Shihuang, who ordered the construction of the terra-cotta army."

Students spend the better part of a month preparing for the wax museum. Carrie Kaul, a teacher who oversees the project, said it provides an all-inclusive lesson building research and public speaking skills, while exposing students to ancient civilizations.

See School, Page A6



Sixth-grader Jackson Brown played a terra-cotta warrior during a recent wax museum at Astoria Middle School.



Sixth-grader Jaelyne Mandujano-Rojas played Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships.

## Mitchell faces backlash over PERS vote

Mixed reception at town hall

By EDWARD STRATTON  
The Astorian

WARRENTON — State Rep. Tiffany Mitchell faced a mixed reception at her town hall on Sunday, three days after a controversial vote to reform the state's pension system.

The state faces an estimated \$26 billion in unfunded liability in the Public Employees Retirement System, which serves 176,000 public workers. Mitchell voted Thursday with 30 other Democrats in the state House on a set of changes expected to save an estimated \$1.2 billion to \$1.8 billion per two-year budget cycle.



Tiffany Mitchell

The changes extend the minimum payment schedule on the debt by eight years, accounting for about three-quarters of the savings. The more controversial portion redirects a percentage of what employees contribute to a supplemental retirement account to help cover pension benefits until the system, about 73% funded, reaches 90% funding.

The legislation leaves pension benefits intact, but trims a 30-year employee's overall retirement benefits by an estimated 1% to 2% of pay.

Mitchell, a former employee of the state Department of Human Services, quit her job to run for office. Public employee unions heavily backed her campaign, leaving some voters to wonder whether she'd be willing to take action on reforming the pension system.

"I hope people know it was really, really hard for me," the Astoria Democrat told the crowd gathered in the Warrenton High School cafeteria Sunday. "This is my retirement too."

Mitchell and others at the town hall agreed that the massive unfunded pension liability is not the fault of public workers. But the unfunded liability, combined with rising retirement contribution costs that could cause staff cuts in local governments and a possible recession, meant the Legislature had to do something, she said.

She cast pension reform as a requirement to getting the support among the business community needed to pass the Student Success Act, a gross receipts tax forecasted to add \$1 billion a year to school budgets. She also warned of a possible ballot measure to turn the entire public pension system into a 401(k) retirement plan to save money.

"If you had to look at those options, I would argue that just about every single person in this room would make that same decision," Mitchell said, eliciting some opposition from the crowd. "That is why I made the decision I made, and I understand there will be people who disagree, but there really was no other way."

Janelle Wagner, a fourth-grade teacher at Lewis and Clark Elementary School, was one of several who saw Mitchell's vote as a betrayal.

"We fought to get you in, and we're feeling basically — and forgive my language — screwed," she said.

See Mitchell, Page A6

## Shipwright must make ship right

A unique class in carpentry

By PATRICK WEBB  
Chinook Observer

ILWACO, Wash. — Stephen Blasko's carpentry class at Ilwaco High School offers terrific value.

- For everyone, the importance of safety around tools;
- For many, learning lifelong crafting skills;
- For some, the possibility of a lucrative career in a skilled trade.

One other attraction for students



was at the forefront Thursday: Fun. For one of the last projects each year, Blasko has his students design and build a wooden boat.

And not one shirks the details — because they are expected to sail their creation on Black Lake.

It was a matter of a few minutes before the boats were hauled from pickup beds by hand on to the dock. Their weight and cumbersome shapes meant it took considerable exertion to get them in the water. Some young sailors climbed

in with confidence, others more gingerly.

All the ships were colorfully painted, christened with names like Swiftly or SS Gary Come Home. Most had an oblong shape, many with sloping side panels. One clever designer angling for bonus points had added wooden paddle wheels that could be hand cranked.

Soon a mini fleet was paddling around, with students showing off their creations, while trying not to bump their neighbors.

Arianna Bell took charge paddling her sturdy vessel as it left the dock, then offered to change places with Anderson Stoddard, who was clinging onto the sides. She stood up, he stood up, the boat started to



Patrick Webb/Chinook Observer

Not all voyages were successful. Under the safety-minded gaze of Ilwaco High School instructor Stephen Blasko, left, Shasta Stolle and Aaron Farrar haul their boat out of the water while others play in Black Lake behind them.

See Class, Page A6

