

IN BRIEF

Health advisory lifted for Short Sand Beach

The public health advisory for Short Sand Beach in Oswald West State Park has been lifted. The Oregon Health Authority issued the advisory Wednesday after water samples showed higher-than-normal levels of fecal bacteria in ocean waters. Recent samples taken by the state Department of Environmental Quality show bacteria levels are lower. However, officials recommend staying out of large pools on the beach that are frequented by birds, and runoff from those pools, as the water may contain increased bacteria from fecal matter. Officials encourage recreational activities on the beach, but warn water contact should be avoided when advisories are in effect.

Explosive device in Seaside causes a scare

SEASIDE — Authorities disposed of an explosive device that was found on the beach in Seaside on Thursday. The object, described by police as plastic tubing capped at both ends with duct tape, was viable and filled with black powder substitute. The fuse appears to have burned out before initiating the powder. Avenue A between S. Columbia and S. Edgewood was closed midday while authorities investigated. The Oregon State Police explosives unit took possession of the device for destruction at an undisclosed location.

Columbia Memorial nurses hold town hall at Fort George

Columbia Memorial Hospital nurses are holding an open house Sunday after the most recent round of negotiations with the hospital’s management. Nurses, union negotiators with the Oregon Nurses Association and other union representatives will gather at 6 p.m. Sunday in the Lovell Showroom at Fort George Brewery in Astoria. Nurses will provide updates on contract negotiations. Guest speakers will include Val Hoyle, the state commissioner of labor and industries; state Rep. Rachel Prusak, D-West Linn; state Rep. Tiffany Mitchell, D-Astoria; Tom Chamberlain, president of Oregon AFL-CIO; and Kevyn Paul, labor cabinet chairman of the Oregon Nurses Association. Nurses and the hospital’s management have been negotiating to replace a contract that expired in May. The two sides remain apart on issues such as staffing and the docking of hours when patient counts are low. — The Astorian

Strong quake rattles Oregon Coast

COOS BAY — An underwater earthquake with an initial 5.9 magnitude struck Thursday off the southern Oregon Coast. The U.S. Geological Survey said the quake happened about 180 miles from land at a depth of 7 miles. There were no reports of damage or injuries. The quake happened around 8 a.m. in the same area where a 6.3-magnitude temblor struck on Aug. 29. The larger quake Thursday was preceded by one with a 3.7 magnitude. A 4.0 magnitude quake followed the larger one. The earthquakes off the coast of Coos Bay are being caused by slipping along an offshore fault that has nothing to do with the more well-known Cascadia fault, which is believed to be overdue for a major Pacific Northwest earthquake. — Associated Press

DEATHS

Sept. 4, 2019
GRAHAM, Gerald Richard, 70, of Warrenton, died in Warrenton. Caldwell’s Luce-Layton Mortuary of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

Sept. 1, 2019
PHILLIPS, David W., 76, of Astoria, died in Astoria. Ocean View Funeral & Cremation Service of Astoria is in charge of the arrangements.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

MONDAY
Youngs River Lewis & Clark Water District Board, 6 p.m., 34583 U.S. Highway 101 Business.
Cannon Beach Rural Fire Department Board, 6 p.m., Fire-Rescue Main Station, 188 Sunset Ave.

TUESDAY
Astoria City Council, 9 a.m., work session, City Hall, 1095 Duane St.

Clatsop County Planning Commission, 10 a.m., Judge Guy Boyington Building, 857 Commercial St., Astoria.
Warrenton City Commission, 6 p.m., City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.
Lewis & Clark Fire Department Board, 6 p.m., main fire station, 34571 U.S. Highway 101 Business.

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Sunset in Seaside



A sunset near the Prom in Seaside.

Jeff TerHar

North Coast man sentenced for sex crimes

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

A North Coast man was sentenced Friday to more than six years in prison for sexually assaulting three women. Parker Philip Whitsett, 22, pleaded no contest to one count of attempted rape in the first degree and guilty to sex abuse in the first degree and attempted sex abuse in the first degree. The no-contest plea was not an attempt to to evade accountability, James Lee von Boeckmann, Whitsett’s attorney, said, but because he has no memory of the incident since he was intoxicated at the time. Whitsett was accused of having sex with a woman who was unable to consent while she was unconscious and under the influence of intoxicants at a get-together in December 2017. At a different gathering in

November 2018, he was accused of having sex with a woman while she was unconscious and making sexual contact with another woman who was unable to consent. Two of the three women abused by Whitsett shared their thoughts prior to sentencing. “I just hope he gets help,” one woman told the court over the phone. Another woman was in the courtroom and tearfully gave her testimony. “I knew Parker before this and I don’t think he’s a bad person even if he did bad things and I do hope that he does get help,” she said. “I just hope he learns from his mistakes and doesn’t make the same ones when he’s free again.” “I do pray for his family because I do know if I



Parker Philip Whitsett

were in this situation this would be really tough,” she said. “I do forgive him and I want to move on with my life and I think that looking forward I have a pretty bright future so I’m not going to let this define me.” Chief Deputy District Attorney Dawn Buzzard shared her pride for the women’s strength and called them her heroes. “I understand I’ve caused a lot of pain and, for that, I’m deeply sorry,” Whitsett said. “I hope that by the time this is all over I can change the person I am enough to where I can more than make amends for the problems that I caused for these people, and I want to thank them for their willingness to forgive.” Rape and sex abuse are violent crimes that take something away from a per-

son while they are compromised, so the punishment is severe, Judge Cindee Matyas said. “We sort of cast off these young women who will have to draw upon their own strength and support and family and their own deep convictions to move out of this,” Matyas said. “They don’t have the same structured support that offenders do and I think that’s so tragic.” The judge said the sentence could be an opportunity for Whitsett to learn and change, which would be a success for the women who were brave enough to come forward. “It’s just kind of the culture we live in, sadly,” Matyas said. “But they’ll know that they have suffered not in vain, but for some purpose and that will be a good outcome, Mr. Whitsett, so you have a lot of work to do.”

Contenders emerge for Circuit Court vacancy

New judge to replace Brownhill

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Six contenders have emerged to fill a vacancy on

the Clatsop County Circuit Court. Gov. Kate Brown will appoint a replacement for Judge Paula Brownhill, who plans to retire in November after 25 years on the bench. The presiding judge was appointed by Gov. Bar-

bara Roberts in 1994 and has been elected four times. The primary election is next May. Brownhill hopes Brown will appoint a new judge before she retires. The contenders include Deputy District Attorney Beau Peterson and defense

attorneys James von Boeckmann and Kirk Wintermute. The other applicants are attorneys Arthur Saito, Kelly Stearns and Diana Taylor. Misha Isaak, the general counsel at Brown’s office, is accepting comments on the applicants.

Heat wave: Agencies stepping up monitoring efforts

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Southwest Fisheries Science Center. Ocean conditions had yet to return to normal following the Blob. Biologists aren’t sure yet what the full effects of this new heat wave will be but, given its size, they say it has likely already started to impact marine ecosystems. Commercial and sport fisheries have noted poor landings off Washington state and Oregon this year, Mantua said. The conditions created by the Blob resulted in one of the largest harmful algal blooms ever recorded on the West Coast. Domoic acid, a naturally occurring marine toxin, shut down crab and shellfish fisheries. Multiple fishery disasters were declared and thousands of young California sea lions were stranded on beaches. Salmon entering the ocean endured unusually bleak conditions and returned in low numbers to freshwater habitats. Researchers have even drawn a connection between



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Massive harmful algal blooms shut down the popular razor clam fishery during an unusual warm ocean water event that began in 2014 and persisted for several years. Researchers are seeing a return of the same conditions this year.

higher numbers of whales tangling with fishing gear. In response to temperature and forage conditions, the large mammals shifted into areas where they were more likely to tangle with gear, said Chris Harvey, a research fisheries biologist with NOAA’s Northwest Fisheries Science Center. “We had a lot of expectations about how things would respond,” Harvey said about the years following the Blob’s appearance. “Some of them were correct and some were not at all correct and then we got

a lot of surprises.” Researchers are working with a sample size of one, he noted. After the Blob, this new warm water expanse is the second largest marine heat wave in terms of area in the northern Pacific Ocean in the past 40 years, according to researchers. “And since we only have a sample size of one we should expect there to be some surprises we currently can’t anticipate if this event persists (for several years),” Harvey said. But while the Blob caught many people by surprise in 2014 — no one was quite sure what they were looking at as it formed and then persisted — researchers were more familiar with the signs this time around. They may not be able

to completely predict what will happen, but agencies have stepped up some monitoring efforts, particularly following the huge harmful algal bloom in 2015. “We also now have a little bit more of a better understanding of the impacts of that harmful algal bloom in terms of how extensive it was, the duration of fisheries closures that it caused, the socioeconomic impacts to fishing communities,” said Stephanie Moore, research oceanographer with the Northwest Fisheries Science Center. This knowledge will “help us to get the message out so that those groups can be better prepared in the event that (another bloom) does occur,” she added. Researchers can’t say with certainty whether the heat wave is directly related to human-caused climate change or if the weather patterns that caused the heat wave and the Blob signal the start of a new normal. But the Blob’s effects did appear to be exacerbated by underlying warming in the ocean linked to climate change, Mantua said. For now, the question is whether the heat wave will stick around long enough to cause long-reaching problems like the Blob or if a shift in weather patterns will break it up. Forecasts show the heat wave moderating but continuing for months.

WANTED
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