

the Astorian



People from across the country attended a tourism conference this week in Astoria. Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Tourism conference sparks conversation



State Sen. Betsy Johnson discusses shifts in the economy toward tourism and recreation.

Mixed feelings on economic shift

By LUCY KLEINER
The Astorian

John Jacob Astor doesn't give up that easily ...

Locals have heard the story before, but on Wednesday morning, McAndrew Burns, executive director of the Clatsop County Historical Society, introduced the history to a room filled with people from across the country.

"That is our story of Astoria," Burns said, finishing his presentation, and the crowd of at least a hundred erupted in applause.

The story helped kick off the biennial Sustainable Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Conference, hosted by Oregon State University Extension Service and Oregon Sea Grant at the Holiday Inn Express & Suites. The nationwide conference drew professionals in the tourism industry to discuss how recreational tourism is impacting Astoria, and what it looks like on a larger scale.

"We picked Astoria for a lot of reasons," Miles Phillips, who focuses on tourism and business development for Oregon Sea Grant, said. "Astoria has so much to showcase."

Initially, the pure location of Astoria was enough to draw the planning committee back in 2014. Throughout the past five years, however, the local shift in economic drivers across Clatsop County made it an ideal place for the conference.

See Tourism, Page A8

Homeless liaison could coordinate county's approach

Questions about the cost

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Government leaders across Clatsop County appear supportive of naming a homeless liaison, if the position and how much it will cost can be better defined.

Astoria Police Chief Geoff Spalding broached the idea at a recent meeting of the city's homelessness solutions task force, noting a 300% increase in calls this year related to the homeless, likely tied to increased awareness of the issue.

The police chief used the example of a similar temporary position added by Gresham and said he'd like to bring a recommendation to the Astoria City Council by the first quarter of next year.

Members of the task force warmed to the idea, seeing it as a way to help the homeless, make residents feel safer and reduce pressure on police, parks and other agencies that often interact with the homeless. But because of the cost and transient nature of the homeless population, it became clear the task force would need buy-in from governments across the county.

Spalding and members of the task force brought the idea to a roundtable

See Homeless, Page A8



Colin Murphey/The Astorian
Lt. Matt Phillips plans to run for sheriff.

Phillips will run for sheriff

Bergin recommends his replacement

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Lt. Matt Phillips, the commander of the Clatsop County Jail, will run for sheriff next year.

He is the first candidate to publicly emerge in the May election to replace Sheriff Tom Bergin, who is retiring at the end of the year. Bergin has recommended that the county Board of Commissioners appoint Phillips as interim sheriff after he steps down.

"I'm really excited about the possibility and opportunity," Phillips said.

"It's something I've wanted to do for a long time and have been trying to prepare myself in as many ways as possible through education, training and learning how the different divisions within the sheriff's office work."

Bergin, who was first elected sheriff in 2004, announced this summer he would retire a year before his term ended following a trying time of dealing with personal matters. He said he is confident he will be leaving the sheriff's office in good hands.

"I believe Matt is more than capable," Bergin told county commissioners Wednesday night.

See Phillips, Page A8

Mental health agency wants to buy respite center

Negotiations over the price

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Clatsop County commissioners said they will support Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county's mental health contractor, in efforts to purchase the crisis respite center building in Warrenton.

The mental health agency is

trying to buy the building from Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc., but has been unable to agree on a purchase price, Amy Baker, the agency's executive director, told commissioners Wednesday night.

GOBHI had long administered financing for Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, but, earlier this year, the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Organization chose CareOregon to take on the role.

"One of the pieces that has been a little bit frustrating to me has been around GOBHI potentially looking at selling the building to anybody really who will pay a higher price for that

building," Baker said.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare has been conditionally approved for a loan to buy the building, and, in the meantime, has come to an agreement with GOBHI on a lease price, she said.

GOBHI could not immediately be reached for comment.

Baker told commissioners the respite center, which opened in 2016, is worth the investment. The facility offers residential mental health treatment and crisis care, but has at times struggled financially and has not fulfilled a promise for secure beds.

"You will not find an organization more committed to this

community and these clients than CBH," she said. "That is where our heart is, that is who we care about."

Clatsop County Manager Don Bohn said he reached out to GOBHI to discuss the importance of the crisis respite center to the county.

"I did talk to GOBHI myself and relayed the importance of this facility to the community and that alternate uses of the facility are not what the community and county are looking for because what we need is a continuation of its current use," he said.

See Respite center, Page A8

