

OPINION

the Astorian

editor@dailyastorian.com

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

OUR VIEW

Authenticity key for FisherPoets

It’s time for the 2020 version of the FisherPoets Gathering. We’re delighted to welcome the poets and the audiences who will savor their salty tales and applaud their creativity.

Simple statistics are one measure of its remarkable success. Poets from all over the world will descend on the greater Astoria area for three days of performances. There are seven venues and 112 performance slots.

From a modest start in 1998, it has grown into one of the North Coast’s staple events — right up there with the Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival, the Astoria Regatta and the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival as a must-attend fixture.

“We have always put authenticity over quality,” says founder and organizer Jon Broderick, who anticipates a writer’s annual question about why it flourishes. “It’s all about people who value their profession.”

Broderick, a retired teacher from Cannon Beach, has run a set-net operation on Alaska’s Bristol Bay every summer. His credentials are matched by performers who will come from Canada, Belgium and the East Coast, as well as West Coast ports and Alaska.

Pat Dixon, who edited an anthology of fisher poetry a few years back, spent 20 years gillnetting for salmon in Alaska’s Cook Inlet. More recently joining the ranks was Rob Seitz, who fishes



Colin Murphey/The Astorian
A performer reads at the Liberty Theatre during the FisherPoets Gathering.

the West Coast and has established a retail outlet in Astoria.

In some ways, the gathering captures the spirit of the National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, an event created in 1985 which draws thousands to Elko, Nevada, and runs six days. But some performers there are professional poets — not truly working cowhands.

Broderick and fellow organizers Hobe Kytr, Florence Sage and Jay Speakman point to the contrast in their lineup. The performers in Astoria this weekend are fishing professionals; their vibrant poetry is secondary. Their hands are scarred from ropes and hooks; they wash fish guts off their boots every workday. But like cowboys in the bunkhouse, they maintain an oral tradition — except their stories are of ships’ bellies full of sockeye or finicky diesel motors.

Organizers are mindful of keeping their Astoria festival manageable, however, although press coverage in the New York Times and even the BBC attests to its worldwide appeal. “We want to make sure that we don’t get too big,” Broderick says.

What especially delights us when this annual gathering rolls

around is the opportunity to celebrate a core part of our North Coast heritage. As the hub of the commercial salmon industry in the 19th and early 20th centuries, scores of canneries lined the Columbia River. As fish populations dwindled, many commercial fishermen relocated seasonally to Alaskan waters.

Fishing is still in our blood, even as working the river and ocean has changed over the decades. Gear is more sophisticated. Regulations abound. Those who survive the rigors of the industry have demonstrated the smarts to ride economic waves, as well as real ones.

And what has not changed is that nothing short of wartime combat can match the dangers on the rough water. FisherPoets capture that essence in visceral words that resonate with veteran fishermen while educating landlubbers. They write of ineffective rain gear, a favorite knife, a filleting technique or a quirk with nets.

Broderick acknowledges that some of the poetry often does not read well on the printed page. “It has to be performed by the artist, the one who has been out there doing the work,” he says.

We join him in welcoming the 2020 poets and thank his team for another potentially fun weekend. As he notes, “I think there is a hunger for authenticity in our culture — and here it is.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Heart smart

Did you know heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women? As a survivor of a heart attack in 2018, and becoming a Mayo Clinic-trained WomenHeart Champion, I want every woman to be “heart smart.” That means learning the symptoms for heart attack.

Women fill many roles — mom, wife, grandma, caregiver, boss, employee, volunteer and all-around problem solver. Women are notorious for taking care of everybody and everything before taking care of themselves.

Women’s heart attack symptoms are not like men’s. Here’s Mayo Clinic’s list: Neck, jaw, shoulder, upper back or abdominal discomfort; shortness of breath; pain in one or both arms; nausea or vomiting; sweating; lightheadedness or dizziness; unusual fatigue.

I had all of these warning signs, and made excuses for each one because I was too busy that day to go to the emergency room. I self-diagnosed my discomfort as an anxiety attack. Big mistake.

Thankfully, my cardiologist and hospital saved my life by getting me to the cardiac catheterization lab and putting in two stents. Always call 911 — it’s far better to have a false alarm than to die from a heart attack.

SUSAN SMITH
Seaside

Precautions?

Hopefully everyone is way ahead of me regarding my question concerning the arrival of cruise ships beginning at the end of March and the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports on the spread of the coronavirus.

Does our little community of Astoria have to be concerned about thousands of travelers arriving in our port and, are there precautions that our citizens and businesses need to be advised of, and be prepared for, ahead of time?

We do not want to wake up one morning with the news that someone locally has come down with symptoms of the virus.

I have not heard of this being discussed on a local level.

LARRY ALLEN
Astoria

Violations

I don’t understand why politicians and other citizens repeatedly raise or imply

the question: Why impeach a duly elected president?

Every president or other high-level government official who has been impeached was either duly elected, or duly nominated and confirmed. If they were not already elected or confirmed, they would not be in office.

Impeachment has nothing to do with being duly elected, it has to do with violations of the Constitution.

FRANK SATTERWHITE
Astoria

The great implosion

For most of my adult life I’ve been under the impression that the verb “implode” meant a reduction in mass, dynamic or inert. But the local maven of true politics (“Finally ashamed,” The Astorian, Feb. 13) has disabused me of my error.

When the Republicans lost their majority in the House of Representatives in 2017, they had exploded and purified themselves of some of their more putrid numbers. Now, if the long-tenured, titanic

champion of truth is about to be Rushed from this earth, the explosion is enhanced.

If the American people should terminate the lease of the current inhabitant of the White House this fall, the explosion would be nearly complete. And the “bleeding-heart” Democrats would “implode” even more thoroughly.

ERHARD GROSS
Astoria

Prove them wrong

This letter is strictly bipartisan. Illegal foreign interference in our 2016 elections has been proven by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

America professes the rule of law and fair play — don’t we? It’s one thing for foreign interference to happen, but it’s quite another to accept it without serious consequences.

We all know mistakes happen, but in my opinion, accepting the results of an illegal election is an even bigger mistake on top of a big mistake, and is one definition of the end of democracy.

But don’t take my word for that. Look at the despot-ruled countries in the world, that we criticize for their sham elections, that keep the tyrants in power. How many of them are democracies?

So, do we go on accepting mistakes, and setting a powerful precedent for future elections, or will we learn and do better?

Because our government consists of elected officials, “we the people” hold the ultimate power. The time is approaching (Nov. 3) when we the people have the chance to express the type of country we want, by the most powerful method ever devised — voting.

The pen is mightier than the sword, and free and fair elections prove that. It is incumbent on we the people to protect our democracy, the way the Founding Fathers intended — by voting.

In my opinion, if ever there’s been an election in the history of our country that called for or needed 100% participation, it’s now. Let’s prove those who say our country might fall from apathy within wrong. Let’s make history.

CARL DOMINEY
Astoria

