

CORONAVIRUS

PURPLE AND GOLD



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

The Astoria Column glowed purple at sunset on Friday night in honor of Astoria High School's Class of 2020, whose senior year was interrupted by the coronavirus. The colors switched between purple and gold until dawn.

Feds fund new tent for local shipwright

A \$573,000 federal grant

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Astoria-based WCT Marine & Construction, one of the few remaining shipwrights in the region, has secured a \$573,000 federal grant to build a self-contained outside work area at North Tongue Point.

The U.S. Maritime Administration provided the grant through its Small Shipyard Grant Program. WCT will match \$191,000. Carol and Willie Toristoja started at North Tongue Point several years ago, eventually buying out the neighboring J&H Boatworks and Columbia Steel Supply and nearing 50 employees at times.

Remi Toristoja, an in-law of the family and office manager with Columbia Steel, wrote the grant with consultant Bill Cook, a former Port of Astoria administrator.

The company's been applying for three years, Remi Toristoja said, while slowly

See Shipwright, Page A6

EVERYDAY people

Wellness provider responds to virus

Crossfield is a health educator

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

After living in India on and off for four years, Paula Crossfield moved to Astoria in 2018, where she runs a business as a health educator specializing in essential oils and Ayurveda, an ancient Indian health science and sister science to yoga.

She started practicing yoga about 20 years ago while she was in college.

"I thought yoga was mostly just about stretching your body and feeling less stressed for about 10 years," she said. "And I did

See Crossfield, Page A7

Paula Crossfield moved to Astoria in 2018.



Loss of lodging taxes a blow to cities

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

Cities on the North Coast have outlawed short-term lodging and pleaded with tourists to stay home to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

But entering budget season, local governments face millions of dollars in lost lodging tax revenue that, along with an uncertainty about property taxes, has leaders wondering how to continue operations with no clear source of state or federal support.

Seaside, by far the city most dependent on tourism, estimates that more than \$1 million will be lost in lodging taxes through the end of the fiscal year in June. Astoria estimates a loss of around \$500,000, while Warrenton projects \$250,000.

Warrenton, where Mayor Henry Balensifer said visitors at Fort Stevens State Park and private campgrounds can double the city's population, was the first to ban recreational camping, short-term rentals and hotel stays for all but essential workers. The city also stopped disconnecting water and sewer for customers with late payments, costing it an estimated \$20,000, and has frozen utility rates and other fees.

Gov. Kate Brown has eased requirements on holding budget meetings but has kept the same June 30 deadline for cities to have new spending plans.

Warrenton City Manager Linda Engbretson, used to austerity without the pandemic, said the city's proposed budget was an estimated \$115,000 in the hole, including the departments' various asks and losses from coronavirus.

Staff have cut new police and fire vehicles, along with badly needed administrative help, in an attempt to cobble together a balanced budget to the City Commission on May 16. They're planning to begin the new fiscal year with \$50,000 in reserve, compared to \$110,000 this fiscal year. That beginning balance has to get the city through the first several months of the fiscal year before property taxes start coming in, said April Clark, the city's finance director.

"That's another concern, is we don't know how people are going to react to this, whether or not they'll be able to make their tax payments in November," Engbretson said. "It



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

With the beach blocked off and hotels under restrictions, Seaside sits empty at a time when tourists usually flood the coast.



Fort Stevens State Park and the neighboring KOA campground are closed by government restrictions.

takes three years for the county to foreclose, so if you're behind on everything, you may choose to put food on your table rather than pay property taxes."

Cuts are coming

In a recent Astoria City Council

meeting, City Manager Brett Estes echoed Engbretson's comments about the uncertainty over property taxes on top of the loss in lodging taxes. The city has taken the route of creating a similar proposed budget to this year's, with a prioritized list of cuts to account for a loss of

\$1 MILLION

Estimated loss for Seaside

\$500,000

Estimated loss for Astoria

\$250,000

Estimated loss for Warrenton

revenue.

"We know that we're going to have to come back with some revised budgets at some point next (fiscal) year," said Susan Brooks, Astoria's director of finance. "Because there are just too many unknowns to be reasonably close."

Asked where the cuts might likely come from, Estes said parks facilities, including the Astoria Aquatic Center, likely won't restart for some time, first because of social distancing orders and later because of the lack of lodging taxes and fee revenue.

See Lodging taxes, Page A7

