

OPINION

the Astorian

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LEFT: Ed and Eda Ross set up the first of the Astoria High School scholarships. MIDDLE: Cheri Folk, the former president of the Bank of Astoria. RIGHT: Blair Henningsgaard Sr. was an Astoria internist.

Donor lists are a tapestry of generosity

Charitable organizations enrich our lives on the North Coast. Youth athletics, child and human welfare programs and the performing arts are kept alive by generous donors. Looking at a donor list is like examining a tapestry. The list is an assortment of life stories, united by themes of generosity and gratitude.

The two pages in *The Astorian* on June 9 — dedicated to Astoria High School scholarship donors and recipients — reminded me of the cemetery scene in Thornton Wilder’s play, “Our Town.” In the graveyard of Grover’s Corners, the dead sit in chairs. They tell their life stories and describe the New Hampshire town.

Like gravestones, the donors’ names on the scholarships given to Astoria High School seniors evoke a succession of vivid personalities and great characters who walked our streets over several decades.

Ed Ross and his wife, Eda, set up the first of the Astoria High School scholarships. In the late 1950s, the couple capitalized their fund at \$100,000. Ed Ross was a member of Astoria’s Class of 1923 and a University of Oregon graduate. He worked for Westinghouse until joining the military for World War II. Following his wartime service, Westinghouse made Ross president of a new company that installed coin-operated laundromats across America.

Immigration is an element in many of these donor stories.

The Silvers sisters — Elsie and Annie — emigrated from Finland to Astoria in the 1930s. Elsie earned a degree from the University of Oregon; Annie from Oregon State College. Annie also earned a master’s degree from New York University. They returned to Astoria as teachers — Annie for 31 years and Elsie for 18. At the close of their careers, they separately established scholarships.

Bing Gong Fong came to Astoria from



STEVE FORRESTER



Lilian Johnson was accepted at Linfield College only months after arriving in America as an immigrant.

China. As a chef, he owned and operated a restaurant. In gratitude for assistance he received as an immigrant, he gave back to the community through an Astoria scholarship.

Another immigrant was Lilian Johnson, who was born and raised in Rangoon, Burma. She came to America in 1969 at the age of 18. Her husband, Robert, says, “Lilian exemplified the immigrant spirit by being accepted at Linfield College only months after arrival. She put herself through school. After graduating with a business degree, she held several junior management positions in the Portland area.”

I remember the sumptuous Lunar New Year dinner that Lilian pulled together at the old House of Chan. Following Lilian’s untimely death in the spring of 2001, Robert established the scholarship in her name.

Some of the donors’ stories are reminiscent of the 1996 book, “The Millionaire Next Door.”

Robert W. Cummings earned a degree in chemistry from Oregon State. While doing information technology work for Hauke’s Sentry Market, he was an astute investor. Cummings died with no heirs,

and he left \$500,000 gifts to the Astoria scholarship fund, the Columbia River Maritime Museum and Clatsop County Historical Society.

Kenneth and Robert Drucker came to Astoria following World War II. Ken invented the oscilloscope, and the brothers’ company manufactured them in a building at the former U.S. Navy hospital. Neither brother had heirs. An initial gift came following Ken’s death. When Bob died in 2009, an even larger gift to the scholarship fund followed, along with gifts to the Maritime Museum and the historical society.

One of the largest funds in the Astoria scholarships program came from Don and Grace Gramms Goodall. Don graduated from Astoria in 1936; Grace in 1937. Don worked briefly at this newspaper. He had a career in public relations. The Goodalls’ gift is in memory of the teacher Fern Curry, who impressed upon the young couple the importance of how they wrote and spoke.

Other teachers are represented among the donors. They include Phyllis Edy, Marjorie Halderman, Rose Tolonen and Ann Marie Frederick.

Arvid Wuonola contributed a physical element to Astoria’s appearance in the midcentury years. I remember seeing Arvid in a choir robe, walking down the aisle of Grace Episcopal Church in 1988. Wuonola was a sign painter whose work was apparent throughout Astoria’s downtown. When the Hotel Elliott was restored in the early 2000s, Wuonola’s sign, with his signature, was retouched on a wall that faces Commercial Street.

Some of the scholarship fund’s gifts were born of tragedy. The Lavis-Navarro scholarship was created in memory of two Astoria students. Honour Lavis and Margaret Navarro died in an automobile accident near Youngs River Falls in the spring of 1992. Honour’s father, Pat, established the fund, which received contributions from the girls’ friends and classmates.

Cheri Folk’s name is on the newest fund. Her death in 2019 was a shock to many Astorians who had relied on Cheri’s leadership and civic involvement, including service on the board of the scholarship fund. The fund’s trustees established the Cheri Folk fund, which is receiving contributions from her friends and family.

Dr. Blair Henningsgaard Sr. and his wife, Edith, came to Astoria following his World War II combat experience in Europe. Henningsgaard’s 101st Airborne unit was surrounded in the Bastogne. As an Astoria internist, he became president of the Oregon Medical Association in 1960. He died of a sudden cardiac event at the age of 61 in 1980. The scholarship was given by Edith, who would become Astoria’s first female mayor in 1983 and serve until 1990.

These lives would make a compelling “Our Town” cemetery scene. But the larger metric is that Astoria’s rich concentration of humanity is well beyond what you find in most American towns of about 10,000 people. A friend of mine explains our rich concentration of humanity by likening it to the fertility of the estuary that lies nearby.

Steve Forrester, the former editor and publisher of The Astorian, is the president and CEO of EO Media Group.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Go figure

While talking to a friend, a true blue “Trumper,” I asked why he was so enamored with President Donald Trump. He explained, “I see the U.S. as one large company, the populace being shareholders, and Trump as the CEO. I like his hard line on China.”

I don’t want a CEO who: filed for bankruptcy many times; has paid hundreds of thousands in hush money to cover up his sexual escapades; was forced to shut down his sham university and pay a fine of \$25 million; refuted all of our intelligence agencies’ reports that Russia was involved in our 2016 election, Trump saying Putin said “nyet” and he believed him; again refuted intelligence reports of an American citizen murdered and butchered by Saudis, and ordered by the crown prince, while Trump stated that the prince says he wasn’t involved and he believed him; exchanged beautiful love letters with North Korea’s Kim Jong Un; had to go overseas for money; is a self-proclaimed stable genius, who gets a court order to block release of his college transcripts; and held back information on the pandemic virus, possibly causing the untimely deaths of thousands of Americans.

And, most of all, I don’t want a CEO who finds it nearly impossible to tell the truth. Do you?

By the way, my friend’s parting words were, “Yes, he is an ass, and I probably wouldn’t work for him, but he is my guy!” Go figure. Hurry, hurry November.

HOWARD GILBERT
Astoria

Haunting view

I would like to thank Patrick Webb for sharing “The coronavirus takes no prisoners” (*The Astorian*, June 16). With your usual beautiful writing, you gave us another look into the life of a special woman that, through your past writing, we have come to know in a small way.

This haunting view of your tremendous loss of her in your life is a gift, and a shortened eulogy about her to our community. Too often, I think people dismiss the life of those of us over 70, perhaps thinking we have to die of something, anyway.

But the truth of it is, we might not have to die this kind of death if people would just wear a mask in public and show kindness by social distancing. Statistics show that with a very small sacrifice, less of us end this way, and to the devastation of those who love us.

When I see people without masks at the grocery store or post office, I can’t help but think they surely must be unaware. Who would be so cruel they wouldn’t care about the kind of loss to others you’ve expressed so profoundly?

KITTY PAINO
Astoria

Increasingly concerned

I have become increasingly concerned about comments in this newspaper in favor of banning vacation rentals, or complaining that homeowners contribute to the

housing crisis by removing homes from the full-time rental market.

The *Astorian* quoted Warrenton’s Mayor Henry Balensifer regarding rentals in Seaside: “... when you have that many vacation rentals, you are not helping the housing crisis” (“Warrenton considers restrictions on vacation rentals,” June 11).

Unfortunately, it also does not help the housing crisis when towns assess and tax private homes as if they were vacation rental properties. My family owns a small, three-bedroom house in Seaside, which has been in the family for three generations. Property taxes have risen high enough that we must now offer part-time vacation rentals.

With taxes approaching \$10,000 annually, offering the property as a full-time rental would be prohibitively expensive for most working people. If vacation rentals are eliminated, the demographic most likely to afford the property will be telecommuting professionals who have fled the city — and they will not support Seaside’s tourist industry as vacation rentals do.

Please consider the difficulties imposed on homeowners when the towns tax properties at rates that make full-time rentals prohibitive, and part-time vacation rentals necessary. Let’s acknowledge how those vacation rentals contribute to our economy.

And please, scale back the rhetoric about how homeowners are supposedly contributing to the housing crisis by not offering their homes as full-time rentals, when the town’s tax structures make those same rentals unaffordable to both the

homeowner and renter.

AUGUST WATTERS
Astoria

Exceedingly proud

I’m exceedingly proud of my journalist son, who used to work for *The Astorian*, and now works for *The Bulletin* in Bend.

When your most frequent letter-writer has to throw into his diatribe about how great President Donald Trump is — the well-worn conservative talking point about “the most biased, unprofessional and dishonest national media of my lifetime” (“Past stupidities,” *The Astorian*, June 16) — I have to take exception to that.

Without journalists and the free press, we would not have a democracy. It is the only profession specifically mentioned in the Constitution.

I have no problem finding good information and insight from all sides. I don’t know what the problem is when people don’t like the message. Truth never changes, there are no alternative facts. Journalists aren’t perfect, and they print corrections all the time. But they are incredibly hardworking, always facing deadlines, and tasked with the challenge of uncovering the truth from those who want to hide it.

President Trump is damaging our democracy on a daily basis, and I feel sorry for those whose blind allegiance can’t see it. But please respect journalists, they are just the messengers.

JIM SPURR
Cannon Beach