



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian
Arnie's Cafe will move in early August to the former NAPA Auto Parts building in downtown Warrenton.

Brewery: Part of downtown revamp

Continued from Page A1

an industrial, concrete look paying homage to the brewery's namesake.

"We wanted it to look as much like a battery on the inside" as possible, Elliott said. "So slanted lights. We wanted to do concrete floors, but we'll have to see about that. We had a contractor that said he knew how to do a concrete bar for us. He can do concrete seating."

Downtown revamp

Warrenton's downtown, sometimes forgotten amid the bustle of commerce at big-box stores along U.S. Highway 101, has received more attention in recent years, with new sidewalks, planters and the Warrenton Memorial Plaza constructed near the post office.

City Commissioner Rick Newton announced last week that Arnie's Cafe, a popular local breakfast and lunch spot, will open in early August in his former NAPA Auto Parts store after moving closer into downtown from near the high school.

The project at the Fenton Building is part of a larger budget for the city's Urban Renewal Agency,

which includes paving a parking lot next to City Hall to make it more attractive to food carts, adding more sidewalks and moving utility lines underground along Main Avenue.

Kevin Cronin, the city's community development director until he left Friday to be city manager of Mount Angel, had been searching for a brewery that could help drive more people downtown.

Cronin faced questions from city commissioners last week about whether the matching program, bigger than many of the city's facade improvement projects, was being properly overseen.

City Manager Linda Engbretson gave her word that the facade improvement will be overseen to ensure the city's money is properly spent. Cronin cast the renovation of the drab Fenton Grocery building as a more involved project that could ultimately reap bigger rewards for downtown.

"Really, when you think about it, it's really a stimulus package for the downtown," he said. "And God knows we need something for our downtown, given the situation that we have today."

PAC: Approaching the future 'with eyes wide open'

Continued from Page A1

When the college decided it could not afford to continue operating the facility, curtailed the performing arts curriculum and considered a sale of the building, the Partners fought for preservation as a community center, fundraising and campaigning to keep the doors open.

Monday's transfer represents the culmination of years of advocacy and effort, but it couldn't have happened at a stranger time.

In addition to navigating new terrain as full custodians of the Performing Arts Center, the Partners also face a challenge all venues are grappling with: the coronavirus.

A large question mark

The pandemic shut down most traditional live performance venues in the spring and reopening remains a significant hurdle. With state restrictions on crowd sizes still in place and as the number of cases of the disease continues to rise, few venues have a firm plan in place for reopening. Even events scheduled out as far as October still come with a large question mark attached. Certain types of performances might be impossible to stage safely for a long time.

This reality has not dimmed the Partners' excitement.

"The excitement is pretty high," said Charlene Larsen, the group's president. "Moving forward, I think everybody is in a mode to say it's time to think outside of the box."

They are approaching the future "with eyes wide open," she said.

When the coronavirus began to spread, performing arts venues were the first to close — "and we're going to be the last to open," said Jennifer Crockett, executive director of the Liberty Theatre.

Crockett is helping to



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

facilitate regular Zoom calls with other performing arts organizations. They talk about how people are doing, what funding sources are available, what advocacy is occurring and the various, often shifting guidelines for reopening. They also try to provide mental support for each other.

"So many of these organizations, the people that run them, this is their lifestyle," Crockett said. "It's wrapped up in your mental well-being as well as your financial well-being."

Theaters, dance studios and other venues and studios are facing the same conundrum restaurants face, Crockett said. How do you pencil out reduced capacity while also meeting staffing costs? How do you make events safe? Will people come?

Advantages

But in this future, the Partners believe the Performing Arts Center has some key advantages.

It is a fairly large venue, but not too large — the "little sister of the Liberty Theatre," said Kit Ketchum, a board member of Partners for the PAC.

It is large enough that organizers believe an audience and performers will be able to maintain the recommended distance from each other to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. But not so large that the possibility of a

smaller audience or performance automatically means a less profitable or less compelling show.

It is also a versatile space and has been used to host everything from classes to debates, in addition to musical and theatrical performances. It fills a true community niche, said executive director Bereniece Jones-Centeno.

The center has always been a place for community discourse, she added. She and other board members believe the social tumult of the coronavirus and deeper cultural and social questions raised by recent events like the nationwide Black Lives Matter protests provide an opportunity to go deeper with events and speakers.

"The events that reflect who is Astoria and what its environs are, the voices that we might not have heard have been heard at the PAC and they will continue to be heard," she said, adding that the Partners themselves made a statement when they hired her, a Black woman, to be their executive director.

Constance Waisanen, a local financial adviser and former board member for Partners for the PAC, is the reason the Partners now get to wrestle with programming questions, reopening challenges and the old building's maintenance needs in a much more direct way.

She purchased the property from the college with

the intent of giving it to the Partners in the future.

She is not wealthy. She is not building an arts empire, nor does she plan to use the building in any other way except to offer it as a community performing arts center.

"I think I pretty much have everything I need in this life," Waisanen explained. "I felt like I wanted to do something good for the community."

She worried if someone didn't step up, the building could be sold away from community use or razed to make way for something new.

"Most of us don't think big enough about what we're actually able to do as an individual," she added. "It's just imagining on a bigger scale."

She believes in the power of art to change and enhance lives and thinks it is especially important to expose young people to art. She and Larsen are both eager to offer more educational opportunities out of the center, much as the college once did.

If Waisanen opened the doors to ownership, though, she is adamant that Larsen is the woman who brought the group to this point, the anchor for everything else.

"She's a rock," Waisanen said.

Larsen has "done everything from cleaning the toilets to meeting with (state Sen.) Betsy Johnson and (Congresswoman) Suzanne Bonamici," Jones-Centeno said. "She is on all sides of this thing ... That woman has been the force behind the life of the Partners for the PAC."

"She is a force. I wish I had her tenacity and fortitude."

Waisanen retained the right to rename the building if she wanted to. Unknown to Larsen, she chose to rename it the Charlene Larsen Center for the Performing Arts.

The new name debuted Monday.





Need groceries, but don't want to venture out? We'll do the shopping for you! A free community service during the pandemic. www.astoria.coop

Fun Beach

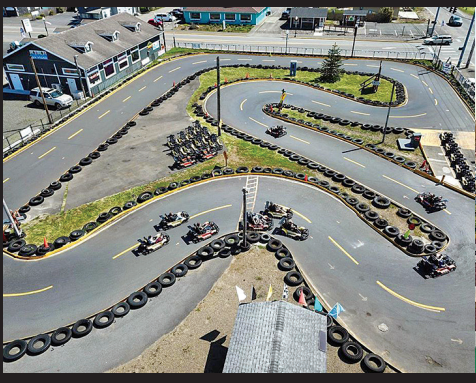
F U N C E N T E R







NEW MANAGEMENT! NEW OWNERS!



COME JOIN US FOR SOME FUN!



GO KARTS, MINI GOLF, ICE CREAM & ESPRESSO AND MORE!

Visit us on Facebook or
on our website at
funbeachfuncenterlb.com

915 PACIFIC AVENUE SOUTH LONG BEACH, WASHINGTON 98631 (360) 777-3684