

OPINION



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editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGES
PublisherDERRICK DePLEDGE
EditorJEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation ManagerJOHN D. BRUIJN
Production ManagerCARL EARL
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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Cleaning a county's clothes

Behind the counter at the Astoria Cleaners is a constant hum of steam and squeaks of clothes being cleaned.

The work is methodical. It takes time and knowledge. It takes care.

Karen Shinabery has seen the variety of clothes Astorians have worn since she was 17.

But after more than 50 years, she's nearly finished cleaning them.

Clatsop County will soon be without a dry cleaner, with the closest cleaners located in Longview, Washington, and Tillamook.

One of the reasons she hung on for so long is she hasn't been able to find anyone to train as a successor.



JONATHAN WILLIAMS

"I feel bad for the community not having a dry cleaner, and if there was another dry cleaners in Clatsop County, I'd be so happy, I'd be helping them out all I could, truly I would, but I do feel bad because the community needs a dry cleaners and there isn't one," Shinabery said.

Her goal: get someone interested in starting their own scaled-down, part-time laundry business.

"That would be my perfect goal is if I could get somebody interested in doing that and help them get started," she said.

Working with clothes

Shinabery got into dry cleaning because she needed a job.

She learned her craft in town and at seminars in Portland. The classes, held by the Oregon Dry Cleaners Association and taught by instructors from the International Fabricare Institute in Maryland, taught Shinabery about different fabrics, how to identify them and the variety of spotters for removing stains.

Shinabery also learned about Astoria's cultures through cleaning peoples' clothes.

She's cleaned Scandinavian outfits, vintage clothes, Chinese men's wool and women's silk, as well as U.S. Navy, U.S. Coast Guard and local law enforcement uniforms.

At her busiest, she used to press 25 pieces of clothing an hour for eight hours a day.

Cleaning a wedding gown could take nearly three hours.

"I've always enjoyed pressing wedding gowns because to me that's like the future — these people have a future," she said. "It's kind of like having a brand new baby only this is a wedding gown."

The building, off of Marine Drive and split between a coin-op dry cleaners and Shinabery's dry cleaning service she co-owns with her partner, Rob Tikkala, feels timeless. On a recent day, there were fall decorations next to the calming sound of the dryers. I can remember growing up going through the drive-thru at Dairy Queen and seeing the constant glow of lights streaming through the building's tall glass windows.

Shinabery's shop is like others that have closed over the years in Astoria. Her trade takes time to learn. Another that holds similarities is Thompson's Instrument Repair, owned by Roger Thompson. I took viola lessons with Roger. He spent a lifetime learning his craft of fixing stringed, brass and wood-



wind instruments. The closest instrument repair shops are in Longview and Portland.

The back of Shinabery's shop resembles a clothing factory mixed with the warmth of a bakery.

"It's like being a cook in a kitchen and having heat fires all around," Shinabery said.

Some of the equipment is as old or older than Shinabery.

Some have names like "Susie," which is a foot-powered machine used to press clothes, or "George," who helps steam pants. They also have a "magic wand," which takes the form of a hot iron.

The cycle of life for clothes includes checking them in, sorting them into baskets, cleaning them and then wrapping and hanging them on racks up front.

She explained that the dry cleaning machine she uses requires putting in cleaning chemicals and soap but no

water. The clothes are also dried in that same machine.

"I enjoy taking something that virtually looks like crap and making it look really nice," she said.

Shinabery also wants people to not try to take a stain out themselves. But if you do decide to take the spot out, use cloth — not paper — to blot it out.

"I always tell everybody when they're using a paper napkin it's like using a piece of bark," she said.

Hanging it up

To have an operation like Shinabery's, you'd need an air compressor, boiler, vacuum, electricity and the presses.

But the new cleaners Shinabery envisions wouldn't need all that equipment. They'd just need a washer and dryer and a car to bring clothes for dry cleaning to Longview.

Photos by Jonathan Williams/The Astorian

ABOVE: Karen Shinabery has cleaned clothes in Clatsop County for more than 50 years. **LEFT:** A sign at the Astoria Cleaners.

All someone would need to get started is a counter, cash register, a couple of racks and tickets for the clothes, she said.

"I got tickets. Cross my name off them and put your name on them. Kinda tacky but it gets ya started," Shinabery said. "I can't get anybody interested."

In addition to bringing clothes to Longview for dry cleaning, they could do customers' basic laundry.

Shinabery tells every customer about her idea.

"I've got this job, you could work for yourself, be part time, you could set your own hours," Shinabery said. "And I feel bad because that would be the answer to us still having a dry cleaner in Clatsop County."

David Lum, the owner of Lum's Auto Center, even came in and offered to help set a space up for her in a building in town he owns.

She didn't plan on being the last dry cleaner in the county.

But her own business's decline has been accelerated because of the coronavirus pandemic. She had to lay off most of her staff.

"We went from 80 pieces a day to 10," Shinabery said.

Shinabery is no longer accepting clothes for cleaning but is staying open through Thanksgiving for pickup of clothes.

She jokes that her brain sometimes nags her to keep working. It's not that she doesn't want to, she said, but that she wants a partner to help train.

You could be that partner.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of *The Astorian*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Count every ballot

We, the people, the eligible voters, get to pick our elected officials who run our government. Over 150 million people voted in this 2020 November election, the largest turnout ever in any election.

Every ballot should be counted. And, in every election, many votes continue to be counted for days after the election. There is nothing different this year other than there are more mail-in ballots because of COVID-19.

Some states allow for ballots to be received and counted after Election Day as long as they were postmarked by Election Day. Twenty-nine states have laws that allow military ballots to be received and counted after Election Day.

We can wait a few days to make sure that whoever wins, it is the result of a free and fair election, where every voice and vote has

been heard and counted.

LAURA ALLEN
Seaside

Our turn

Our votes have been cast, and the turnout has been phenomenal. Now we wait while all votes are counted.

The U.S. has always held elections and upheld the results, even in times of great crisis. We held successful presidential elections amid the Civil War, the great influenza pandemic of 1918, the Great Depression and both world wars.

It is our turn to prove that nothing will stand in the way of counting every vote and delivering our democracy. Candidates may say what they like, but it's the will of the voters that decides. That's how we deliver our democracy and swear in a government of, by and for the people.

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