

Crab festival goes virtual over virus

By **ALYSSA EVANS**
The Astorian

The Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival will be held virtually in April, marking the second year the festival has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

On Wednesday, the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce announced the festival will be held virtually from April 23 to April 25.

“This year we are taking a more unorthodox approach. To ensure the safety of our vendors, attendees, and volunteers the 2021 festival will take place virtually ... The festival has a large and loyal following and this year we’ll be able to accommodate fans from the safety of their own homes,” the chamber said in a statement.

The festival is a major

fundraiser for the chamber, which typically raises money through ticket sales. The gathering is regularly attended by more than 10,000 people, which earns the chamber about \$100,000. The Astoria Rotary Club relies on the festival to fund about \$10,000 in scholarships to local high school students.

“It’s a big fundraiser for us every year,” said David Reid, the chamber’s executive director. “We took pains to find out who are the stakeholders in our festival to find a way to get them engaged, including nonprofits and hotels. In a normal year, crab festival is at least a million dollar impact to our economy.”

The festival will be held through a virtual platform, Event Hub. During the festival, attendees can watch virtual performances from local

musicians, chefs and artists. Attendees can learn about local nonprofits, make donations to organizations and purchase vendors’ products through a virtual marketplace from April 23 to May 23 at astoriacrabfest.com. Vendors will be available to talk to customers through video calls and instant messaging during the festival.

“We’re very pleased by what we’ve been able to come up with this year’s pivot. We don’t feel like it’s a compromise. It’s going to be a fun festival,” Reid said.

Last year’s festival was also held virtually after large gatherings were discouraged to help contain the spread of the virus.

“Last year, we had sort of a vendor expo. This year we’re doing more of a festival on a virtual platform. It was not

practical or safe for us to do a live event, given the COVID restrictions,” Reid said.

This year’s festival will be free to the public. While the festival will be virtual, the chamber plans to host some in-person events that will follow coronavirus guidelines.

“We’re creating a restaurant event during the festival and days following that’ll get people out to local restaurants and maybe some retail shops,” Reid said. “It’ll be a draw for people who want to come to town and stay safely in hotels.”

Vendor applications opened Tuesday, so the chamber doesn’t yet know how many vendors to expect.

“Some wineries have already signed up. We expect a similar mix of vendors as usual but the exact quantity and mix of vendors is still coming out,” Reid said.

Retired county public health director steps in as interim director

By **NICOLE BALES**
The Astorian

Margo Lalach, a former Clatsop County public health director, will step in as interim director beginning Monday while the county conducts a search to replace Michael McNickle.

The Daily World in Aberdeen reported last week that McNickle accepted a job as director of Grays Harbor County Public Health and Social Services in Washington state. He will start on March 15, according to the newspaper.

The news came as a surprise to county leaders. McNickle has declined to comment on his departure. The county said McNickle’s last day is March 5.

Lalach was hired by the county as a public health nurse in 1998 and served as the director of the Public Health Department from 2009 to 2013.

Following her time at the county, Lalach served as the director of health services for the Multnomah Education Service District until 2017.

Most recently, she held a contract position as executive director of Hawai’i Keiki with the University of Hawaii School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene.

Lalach has served as a humanitarian response nurse for nearly 20 years for Medical Teams International of Portland and did tours in Africa, Asia and Europe.

“Cannon Beach and Clatsop County are home to me,” she said in a statement. “I look forward to supporting public health and working with community partners to ensure a smooth transition while continuing an effective



Margo Lalach
Margo Lalach at a refugee camp in Bangladesh.

response to the pandemic.”

The county said it plans to launch a search for a permanent replacement for McNickle shortly.

“So incredibly fortunate to have Margo Lalach in our community and able to step in and lead our Clatsop County Public Health Department,” Mark Kujala, the chairman of the county Board of Commissioners, said in a Facebook post.

“She has a distinguished career in health care and made an impact in humanitarian causes across the globe. Her experience and leadership will be a huge asset to our county team.”

The Public Health Department has 25 staffers and an annual budget of \$4.1 million. The department provides a range of services and programs, including maternal and child health, immunizations, reproductive health, communicable disease response and environmental health.

Survivor: Broke bones behind her neck at top of her spine

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Kenia loved balloons, Martin-Ramirez said. “Every time we would go to the store, we would either buy a balloon for her and would tie it to her arm and she would have fun with that,” she said. “She also loved baths. Not a lot of babies love baths. She would actually cry when we would take her out of the bath.”

Martin-Ramirez shared her Catholic faith with her child, singing church songs and hymns. “Esperanza would play them for her and she would calm down,” Ramos said.

On Valentine’s Day, the roommates made cards for friends, and Kenia joined them, gluing and playing with the balloons, memories that Martin-Ramirez will never forget. “Those little moments are the ones that stay with us forever,” she said.

After the crash, everything changed.

Late in the day on Feb. 15, Esperanza and Kenia

were in a Mazda driven by Rony Tomas-Garcia, 23, of Seaside. They were heading southbound on Ecola State Park Road in Cannon Beach when the car veered off the road, struck a tree and came to rest on its top. Martin-Ramirez was taken to Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria before being transferred to Oregon Health & Science University Hospital in Portland.

Tomas-Garcia, who was not injured, was arrested for manslaughter, assault, reckless driving and driving under the influence of intoxicants. He is in Clatsop County Jail. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement lodged an immigration detainer on Tomas-Garcia on Feb. 16.

While Martin-Ramirez declined to speak about the investigation, she reflected on the days immediately after the crash.

She broke bones behind her neck at the top of her spinal cord, which must heal by themselves — a healing that

could take at least six weeks.

“I was the first one she called and I was heartbroken,” Ramos said. “It was surreal.”

At first, Martin-Ramirez was about to give up, but relied on her faith and counseling for inspiration.

“Both her arms and shoulder blades are very sore because of the impact,” Ramos said. “She was wearing her belt. Everyone was wearing their belt. She’s very sore still, she can’t be up for a lot of time.”

After returning home, Ramos and other roommates have been “super supportive,” Martin-Ramirez said.

Co-workers have been in touch and checking up on her.

“She is such a strong woman, it is amazing,” Ramos said. “I am amazed. It’s crazy how she’s been through so much and she still doesn’t give up. Everything happens for a reason. Now she’s thinking positive, at first not so much, but with our support and a counselor’s support, it’s helped a lot.”

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 Flag Waver.
 Friend.
 1A & 2A Supporter.
 Constitution and Bill of Rights Supporter.
 “YUGE” President Trump Supporter!
 You will be greatly missed Sir.
 Love and ultimate respect brother,
 Clatsop County Patriots