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Astorian

148TH YEAR, NO. 118

DailyAstorian.com // THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021

\$1.50

CORONAVIRUS



Betty McWhorter leads the congregation at Grace Episcopal Church in Astoria, in-person and online, in prayer during the Palm Sunday service.

Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

'Throughout this year, we have never been alone'

At Easter, churches wonder about the future

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

It isn't usually so difficult for Betty McWhorter, a veteran Episcopalian reverend, to write the annual Easter letter to her congregation.

But after a year marked by disease, isolation, loss and social upheaval — a year where Easter celebrations happened on the calendar but not inside most church buildings — the interim rector for Grace Episcopal Church in Astoria labored over what to say this year.

Easter, the springtime commemoration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, is seen by Christians as a time of renewal, newness. In the letter McWhorter eventually wrote, she concluded that, despite everything, "throughout this year, we have never been alone."

On Sunday, some North Coast churches will mark Easter in-person, with people sitting at a distance from each other, masked. Other churches will continue to worship over a Zoom call or Facebook Live. One church is in the middle of polling members about how they feel about returning to in-person worship and will offer a drive-thru style gathering instead.

"All the trappings that we put around how to make it perfect: the music, the flowers, the new clothes, the hats ... whatever it is that we said, 'Oh, this



A table at the entrance to Grace Episcopal Church has palm crosses for the congregants and sign-in sheets for contact tracing in the event of an exposure to COVID-19.

makes a perfect Easter," McWhorter said. "Those have all been stripped away. We're back to the bare bones of the story."

And even as communities finally start to see a light at the end of a long pandemic tunnel, every church is going to come out of this changed, church leaders believe. The question is what to do next.

'We have only met on Zoom'

Pastor Michael Avila has never met the congregations he leads in person. He was appointed to the United Methodist churches in Seaside and Astoria last July, in the middle of the coronavirus

pandemic.

"We have only met on Zoom," he said.

At the direction of their bishop, the churches have continued to meet online even as churches in other denominations return to their buildings. So Avila stands in front of a camera during Eucharist, or Communion, in the office that reminds him of NBC Studios in New York City — down to the blue curtain and the chilly temperatures — and says the familiar words: "This is the body of Christ, the bread of heaven ..."

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Appeals court overturns 'peeping Tom' convictions

Cazee was sentenced to more than 35 years in prison

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The Oregon Court of Appeals has overturned the convictions of a Surf Pines man who was found guilty of several charges tied to "peeping Tom" incidents in his neighborhood.



Kirk Richard Cazee

Kirk Richard Cazee, 59, was sentenced to more than 35 years in prison in 2018 after a Circuit Court jury found him guilty of peering through bedroom windows and recording videos of residents during private moments. He was convicted on six counts of using a child in a display of sexual conduct, eight counts of invasion of personal privacy, five counts of stalking and four counts of criminal trespass.

The appeals court found that there was not probable cause to obtain a search warrant for Cazee's cellphone because no one ever saw him holding a cellphone or using one during his crimes.

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Convention center looks beyond the pandemic

Manager hopeful that events will rebound

By R.J. MARX
The Astorian

SEASIDE — With a newly renovated building and contracts for events through 2030, Russ Vandenberg, the general manager of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center, projected optimism as he presented the center's annual report.

"COVID-19 taught us to be stronger and more resilient," he said. "We can now toss aside our 2020 calendars with hope and anticipation that 2021 will be a better year."

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A collaboration of craft and science

Netmaking survives along the coast

By JILLIAN FARMER
The Other Oregon

NEWPORT — In an industrial building near the port, men worked on a fishing net to the sounds of the radio, the rain and the "click-click" of needles working the twine.

"It's not noisy," said Sara Skamser, the owner of Foulweather Trawl.

When it comes to making nets, Skamser said it is best described as knitting. Except she uses rope and

twine instead of yarn.

The basic material is commercial-grade fish netting, mostly polyethylene from Japan or Ireland. It arrives in a bale that's about the size of a bale of hay.

When the bale of netting arrives, it is opened "like a bolt of cloth" and pieces are then cut out and assembled into the shape of whichever net is being made. Rather than shaping the pieces into a pair of pants, Skamser said you would shape it, for example, into a funnel-shaped trawl net.

"Then you use a needle full of twine and sew the seams," she said. At Foulweather Trawl, that process is referred to as "lacing" and that needle is almost a foot long. "That's how the shape and structure start coming together."

To make the net rugged enough to be pulled on and off a vessel, and strong enough to hold fish, ropes are then put on the laced seams to give it strength.

Skamser started the business in 1984 with her husband, John, but never thought she would end up in such a niche market.

Over the years, her business has stood out with its specialized nets designed to keep out unwanted fish. The style, spearheaded by scientists, made net fishing much more precise. That has earned Foulweather Trawl a customer base from Monterey Bay, California, to Neah Bay, Washington, and from Kodiak to Akutan, Alaska, as well as the Aleutian chain.



Jillian Farmer

Shawn Lafontaine, a net builder, holds up a shrimp net made with a grill to help keep out unwanted species.

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