

# Preschool: Program is expensive to run

Continued from Page A1

Like other parents and former teachers who heard the news, Nelson said she is in shock. She doesn't understand why Charis Kids is closing. A letter sent to parents and a subsequent conversation with Marc Hagman, the conference center's executive director, left her with only more questions.

The letter to parents provides no concrete reason for the preschool's closure, but Hagman told The Astorian a combination of factors — including the coronavirus pandemic — led to the decision.

## Stresses and strains

The conference center is not in a bad financial state and the closure of Charis Kids is not an indicator of tough times ahead, he said. Still, the pandemic brought certain stresses and strains, especially when it came to operating a preschool. The center's leadership has been looking more closely at its overall mission. When conference center leadership began reexamining its programs and offerings last year, Charis did not seem to fit, Hagman said.

"If we hadn't gone through COVID," he said, "I don't think we'd be at this point."

The program is expensive to run and, given the center's primary responsibilities to conference and retreat guests, "it can't just be a break-even sort of thing," Hagman said.

But, he added, the decision to close the preschool was not easy.

"Charis Kids has had great impact in the work they do," Hagman said. "Not just in reaching kids, but their families and their extended families, too. For me, there's nothing that minimizes their compassion and their skill. What we're doing is not a comment or commentary on them. It's just this is what we need to do at this point."

Hagman said they will look to find other job options



Charis Kids

Kids play with colorful blocks at Charis Kids.

within center operations for the teachers and staff of Charis Kids who want to continue at the conference center.

Since the announcement, former teachers have reached out to Hagman and the conference center leadership, asking them to reconsider their decision.

Dana Jones, a former employee at the preschool whose children attended the program when they were young, said communities would be left without reliable and affordable child care if the preschool closes for good.

"I understand that COVID has forced businesses to reevaluate, but I don't understand why you'd take away a ministry and outreach to our community that provides jobs and meets such a critical need," she wrote in a Facebook post addressed to Hagman.

"As Oregon goes back to work, our community needs child care options. Parents are scrambling, sacrificing their careers and asking 10-year-old siblings to watch their infants because there aren't enough child care options in our community."

Clatsop County — along with every county in Oregon — is considered a child care

desert. Many centers and preschools operate with lengthy waitlists. Parents who might want a particular program for their children struggle to find something that fits their needs and their budgets.

Preschool programs often function as a form of day care for working families and are touted by education experts as a key way to prepare young children for kindergarten, as well as establish a foundation for the rest of their school careers. Administrators with the Knappa School District pointed to these benefits when they recently announced plans to open a public preschool later this year.

But day cares and preschools are rarely profitable ventures. Programs often struggle to find and retain qualified staff and keep prices affordable for families. With the pandemic, centers faced restrictions on how many children they could accommodate and other costs and hurdles. Before the pandemic, Clatsop County had 12 state certified child care centers. After shutting down temporarily last spring because of the pandemic, only a handful had reopened by July.

Which makes Charis Kids even more special to the fam-

ilies who have come to rely on the program.

Shelby Gosser, a hospital nurse administrator, relies on Charis Kids for child care but also appreciates the education her daughters received. She had been looking forward to sending her third child to the program soon.

"For me, it was the amazing light at the end of the tunnel," she said.

The closure will not just impact her, she said: "Moving forward, it will severely impact working families that would be the ones growing this community."

## 'Shocked, saddened and sick'

Gretchen Corbin taught at the preschool for 13 years before being laid off in March 2020 because of the pandemic. She had previously let administrators know she would be leaving the program to move to Seattle. The pandemic and the layoff hastened her timeline.

Now she feels "shocked, saddened and sick."

She respects Hagman and knows it was a difficult decision, but she hopes the conference center will reconsider.

"We got so much feedback that we were meeting a crucial need in the community for families of every social and economic level," she said. "We served them all and we worked with them all to make sure everybody could come."

During Corbin's time at Charis Kids, the preschool served students from Astoria to Nehalem. It had also adjusted operations to make it through difficult years.

Nelson wishes the community had a chance to work with the conference center to figure out a way to keep Charis Kids.

"If it was a funding issue, why not give the community a chance to help?" she said. "If there was an issue we could have helped you solve, why couldn't we have been given an opportunity?"

# Graduation: Seaside will replicate drive-thru ceremony

Continued from Page A1

pandemic, some administrators are waiting to see what conditions — and Clatsop County's case metrics — are like closer to the date before they lay concrete plans. Others anticipate graduation events similar to last year's socially distanced, drive-thru ceremonies.

Clatsop Community College recently announced it would hold a commencement ceremony at CMH Field in Astoria on June 18.

The field will also likely be the site of the Astoria High School graduation, Superintendent Craig Hoppes said, though he isn't sure yet exactly what the ceremony will look like. He hopes it can be a bit more intimate than last year's graduation, a drive-in ceremony where students and their families spent much of the time in their cars and at a great distance from each other.

Still, Hoppes expects

some social distancing will still be necessary in June, too.

Seaside School District will replicate the drive-thru ceremony it held last year, complete with a parade down Broadway Street to a vehicle turnaround at the beach where graduates received their diplomas. The district will then hold a formal ceremony at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center parking lot.

"We know that is doable under any metrics that we see," said Jeff Roberts, the Seaside High School principal. Also, he added, the drive-thru event was "incredibly well-received by graduates last year."

Students this year specifically requested it for their commencement ceremony.

In other school districts, there have been preliminary discussions about what graduation ceremonies might look like this year but nothing final.

The rural Jewell School District is considering different possible graduation ceremony scenarios for a June 19 event depending on the county's risk level.

While specifics are still hazy, Principal Jon Wood said, "We are going to do something and it's going to be more traditional than last year."

The hope is to be back in the low-risk category again and have a "more normal" event, he said.

Last year, the graduation ceremony for Warrenton High School students required months of planning. In a normal year, the ceremony would not take nearly so much preparation: there would be a rehearsal the day before and then the actual event.

Fortunately, high school staff told The Astorian, they've gone through a pandemic graduation once and have a better idea now of what to do.

"Worst-case scenario is we do what we did last year," said Josh Jannusch, the Warrenton High School principal. The pregraduation parade through downtown Warrenton and then the drive-thru ceremony were successful, he said, and well-received by families and students.

In Knappa, the high school is looking at using, ideally, the gym — for a more traditional ceremony — or the high school football field — if capacity is an issue and case numbers are high. It is possible to livestream events at both locations, noted Laurel Smalley, high school administrator.

Still, what the ceremony looks like, where it is held and how many people can attend will depend on the situation in the county just ahead of the June event, Smalley added.

"We're trying to think ahead," she said. "If COVID's done anything, it's made us think ahead."

# Gearhart: Highlands site is 10 feet higher than High Point site

Continued from Page A1

"If our land is brought into the urban growth boundary and annexed into the city, we will end up with additional buildable lots, given the city's zoning," Steve Olstedt, of the Cottages at Gearhart LLC, wrote in a letter to the city. "It will also allow the city to 'loop' the city's water adding redundancy to the system. If the property can be brought into the UGB and city, we are willing to donate land for the fire station and a public park. This will save the city over \$3 million as well as all the legal expenses associated with the other site."

Land within the city's urban growth boundary could be exchanged for land outside the urban growth boundary on an acre-to-acre ratio, Watts said.

The exchange would allow the developer to go from 1-acre zoning to 10,000-square-foot or four units per acre.

City lots in the exchange could come from a portion of the "no-build" area along Gearhart's western edge.

The proposal comes at a time when the High Point site for a resiliency station faces legal challenges from the Palisades Homeowners Association and a reluctant seller in landowner Edward Murphy.

"In your presentation accompanying the 'new public feedback survey' it is implied that the Murphy family is agreeing to sell the property for \$3 million," Murphy said in a letter to the city delivered at the meeting. "Two years ago we would have agreed in order to avoid litigation but since then,

assuming that the city was no longer trying to take our property, we have planned on listing and sale for residential purposes."

Murphy asked the city to sign an agreement waiving its right to condemn their property. "We hope you will let the voters know that you will need to litigate to acquire our property if they are in favor of a bond," Murphy wrote.

Even without the homeowners' association's approval, the city could pursue eminent domain to demonstrate public need for the new station at the High Point site, Watts said. Rezoning, annexation and other legal issues could complicate the process.

The Highlands site presents an outcome where everyone wins, Watts said. "The win to the city is we

would save \$3 million to \$3 1/2 million, so we would be offering our citizens a great amenity with a fire station at an even higher location than the High Point station."

The elevation at the site is between 72 feet to 75 feet, City Administrator Chad Sweet said, 10 feet higher than the High Point site.

"Given all the positives, it seems to be likely public support for this location," Watts said.

The next step, Sweet said, would be a visit to the location with councilors, negotiations with developers and a survey of public interest.

A geotechnical study, at an estimated \$25,000, would follow.

"I think the site is a very good site for our fire hall," City Councilor Dan Jesse said. "I think we should pursue it."

# Port: Will likely receive another yearlong deferment of loans through the state

Continued from Page A1

a very simple transaction," he said. "And I'm excited as much as you folks are, because when we are able to save our members money in the process and get them good financing, then we're doing our job."

The Port moved out of its third-floor offices in the Taggart Building in 2019 to save money, returning to the former headquarters at Gateway Avenue. The agency has since leased most of the upstairs of the Taggart Building to medical offices, including Watershed Wellness and Dr. Kevin Baxter, who left Columbia Memorial Hospital in September and restarted his former practice, Baxter Family Medicine.

Will Isom, the Port's executive director, said the Port will also likely receive another yearlong deferment of loans through the state's Infrastructure Finance Authority.

Business Oregon, the state's economic development agency, gave the Port one year off of principal and interest payments starting last spring in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Isom estimated the one-year deferment saved the Port \$900,000 in principal and \$300,000 in interest.

"Depending on the loan, we had various payments that were going to start coming due between April of '21 and June of '21, and those will be extended for an additional 12 months," Isom said.

# Consult a PROFESSIONAL



LEO FINZI  
Astoria's Best



HP 24" ALL-IN-ONE COMPUTER,  
INTEL I3, 8GB RAM,  
256GB SSD  
\$699.99

Mon-Fri 10-6, Sat/Sun Closed  
77 11th Street, Suite H  
Astoria, OR • 503-325-2300  
AstoriasBest.com

## Some areas in my home have poor Wi-Fi reception

A Wi-Fi extender can help expand your existing Wi-Fi network, when your primary router can't cover the entire house. It is an effective way to improve your Wi-Fi speeds and coverage. They capture the Wi-Fi signal from your router while it is at half strength, and then rebroadcast it at full strength. Wi-Fi Extenders have come down significantly in price, starting at \$49.99.



JEFFREY M. LEINASSAR  
DMD, FAGD



503/325-0310  
1414 MARINE DRIVE,  
ASTORIA  
www.smileastoria.com

## Q: How does sensitive toothpaste work?

A: Imagine one of your teeth — it has two main sections: the crown above the gum line and the root below.

People with sensitive teeth experience pain when their teeth are exposed to something hot, cold or when pressure is applied. The layer of enamel may be thinner and the gum line may have receded, exposing more dentin, which makes teeth more sensitive.

Sensitive toothpaste, usually containing a chemical called strontium chloride, works by blocking the tubules in the dentine. Repeated use builds up a strong barrier by plugging the tubules more and more, leading to less-sensitive teeth.



ASTORIA CHIROPRACTIC

Alicia M. Smith, DC  
Owner

503-325-3311  
1490 Marine Drive,  
Suite 202  
Astoria, Oregon

## Q: I have a hard time just moving around. Is chiropractic good for me?

A: Absolutely! We have a lot of patients who are limited in their movement, even finding it difficult to walk. Yet chiropractic care by and large facilitates the healing process. If you can get here, we can help!



Delores Sullivan  
MSW, LCSW

503-741-5923  
564 Pacific Way  
(inside By The Way  
Coffee Shoppe)

Gearhart OR 97138

www.deloresullivantherapy.com

## Q: What are some simple ways I can maintain mental health?

A: Creating a daily routine of self care helps you locate good mental health. Here are some suggestions:

1. Maintain a consistent sleep and wake schedule
2. Eat regular healthy meals to fortify brain chemistry
3. Take a walk, listen to music, watch something funny
4. Stay connected to those you love and who encourage you
5. Avoid abusing substances such as alcohol/other drugs
6. Practice self compassion, and daily affirmations