

Continued from Page 8

While Owen believes excitement is high for the tournament's return, he expects turnout to be lower than previous years. The nature of the multiday event makes lodging a necessity for visiting competitors. He anticipates that will keep some people away.

"There may be a challenge to find hotel rooms just because travel has been so robust on the coast," Owen said.

### A modified Regatta

This weekend also marks the return of an abbreviated Astoria Regatta, the beloved Columbia River celebration dating back to 1894.

Organizers initially announced the entire 2021 event would be canceled but had a change of heart. In July, the board announced they would host a smaller, socially distanced celebration.

"We wanted to have something to look forward to because we all can agree we've had a long stretch of a whole lot of disappointment and canceled everything," said Melissa Grothe, president of the Astoria Regatta Association. "Having something positive like a morale boost for our community is incredibly important."

Grothe says board members and a former Regatta president have pitched in to help plan the last-minute events.

The modified Saturday festival will include a Seamen's Memorial at 11 a.m. in Astoria's Maritime Memorial Park, and a Highwater Boat Parade, viewable from the Astoria Riverwalk at 5 p.m. The Astoria Yacht Club will also hold races Saturday and Sunday.

The sudden change was welcome news to 2020 Regatta Queen Annalyse Steele, who was crowned in a socially distanced court ceremony last summer. Steele grew up admiring the pretty dresses and crowns of the Regatta Court, never imagining the chance to fulfill her dream of serving the community would become an unprecedented and mostly virtual experience due to the virus.

"It's been hard not getting to know everybody, not getting to branch out and make connections in our community," Steele said. "I'm glad we're returning to normal. Going forward, I think we will cherish getting to interact with people."

Steele will be leading the boat parade on the Columbia River Bar Pilots' boat, before she heads off to college this fall.

Grothe said the board stands by their decision not to host traditional events like the Grand Land Parade, as they didn't feel it was appropriate to ask community businesses to sponsor a large-scale event given the economic difficulties induced

by the pandemic.

"I'm really hoping the community comes out and supports these events and recognizes this year isn't the same, but people worked really hard to put something together," said Grothe.

Despite the pandemic-related challenges, the Seaside Chamber of Commerce believes the volleyball tournament's return will be well-worth the planning headache. The event has become a tradition for families.

"It gives me goosebumps thinking about it," Owen said. "This is what Seaside was designed for. We are a family destination. We have juniors and adults playing both together and separately. One of my favorite things to do is see some of our pros come in and play on center stage and have their day, but when they're done they're watching a lot of the youth playing and then they start giving youth tips and it becomes a whole coaching atmosphere."

Organizers for both events are quick to share their excitement for next year. The Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament will celebrate a "bigger and better" 40th anniversary. Grothe said the Astoria Regatta should return in full force, and the board has plans to begin recruiting a Regatta Court this fall.



Mitch Eckhardt

**Mara Dowaliby, the 2019 Astoria Regatta queen, passes her crown on to Annalyse Steele, the 2020 queen.**



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**Katie Spieler dives to bump the ball into the air for teammate Delaney Knudsen to hit over the net in the center court during the 2019 Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament.**