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Photos by Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Gigi Thompson thanks the staff of Providence Seaside Hospital before returning home in December after battling COVID-19.

## 'I thought I would never get it, and boy was I wrong'

Astoria woman recalls her battle with COVID-19

By ABBEY McDONALD  
*The Astorian*

**G**igi Thompson doesn't remember the August night when she knocked on her neighbor's front door, desperate for help. She doesn't remember getting in the neighbor's truck to go to the hospital, or saying goodbye to her husband and asking him to watch over their pets.

She doesn't remember being transferred from Providence Seaside Hospital to St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland the next day, or getting the scars on her neck.

What she does remember, from moments in and out of consciousness, is the feeling of the oxygen mask tight on her face and her sense of suffocation.

She remembers a nightmare that seemed so real, where she died and cold hands pulled her into the darkness of a mortuary drawer as she kicked at them and begged God for more time. She doesn't think she'll ever forget that.



Providence Seaside Hospital staff clap for Gigi Thompson as she leaves to return home.

Thompson spent 122 days in the hospital after contracting COVID-19.

Her neighbor drove her to Providence Seaside on Aug. 15, and she was quickly transferred to St. Vincent, where she stayed until early November. She then spent another month back in Seaside, getting less-intensive treatment and physical therapy.

Thompson has pieced together

what happened through conversations with doctors, family and friends.

Her neighbor filled her in about the night she was admitted. Her daughter told her she had approved the emergency tracheotomy that cut into her neck, leaving scars but saving her life. After she woke from a month-long coma, a doctor told her she had nearly died twice.

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## Researchers see good ocean conditions for Chinook salmon

Promising signs from ecosystem indicators list

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ  
*KMUN*

Ocean conditions look better than they have in years, which could be good news for salmon.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently posted its ocean ecosystem indicators list. The list paints a picture of how the ocean is doing and what kind of world young, ocean-bound salmon are about to enter.

The list looks at a variety of factors, including the abundance of certain minuscule but key prey groups and large climate and atmospheric processes like seasonal upwelling, which brings nutrient-rich water to the surface.

Researchers assign different colors to each indicator: green is good, yellow is fair and red is bad news.

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## Former firefighter sues over discrimination

A \$5 million complaint

By ERICK BENGEL  
*The Astorian*

A former paramedic firefighter at the Knappa Fire District is suing for more than \$5 million, alleging she experienced gender-based discrimination and harassment at work.

Amy Lenz joined the fire district in 2003 and served as an emergency medical services officer.

Her claims against the fire district were the basis of a state Bureau of Labor and Industries report issued in December 2020. The bureau found substantial evidence that the fire district engaged in an unlawful employment practice, including subjecting Lenz to "disparate treatment and a hostile work environment based on her sex."

The Bureau of Labor and Industries declined to press charges last summer. Lenz is pursuing a lawsuit with Portland-based Dolan Law Group PC.

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### SEASIDE

## Former high school sold for \$3.2 million

Local business owners buy property

By R.J. MARX  
*The Astorian*

SEASIDE — The Seaside School District has sold the former high school to TM Development LLC for \$3.2 million.

Registered agents of TM Development include business owners Tom Utti, Mark Utti and attorney Jeremy Rust.

"They do not have any immediate plans that I'm aware of for

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## Firefighter finds purpose in preparing recruits

Marine helps build the fire service

By ERICK BENGEL  
*The Astorian*

**C**ANNON BEACH — As a teenager, Lt. Shaunna White, the recruitment and retention coordinator at the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District, swore she would never be a firefighter.

Her mother worked at Gearhart's fire department, then at Seaside's. Her boyfriend, now husband, T.J., worked at the Cannon Beach department. And both worked for Medix Ambulance Service, as well.

With her loved ones' pagers going off more or less constantly, White started to resent the paramedic firefighter profession. "Hated the fire industry, to be honest," she said.

After she and T.J. left the U.S. Marine Corps, White struggled to transition from the military mindset to civilian life. T.J. convinced her to join the Cannon Beach fire crew in 2014, the year two memorable wildland fires — both the



Erick Bengel/The Astorian

Lt. Shaunna White, the recruitment and retention coordinator at the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District, sits atop a fire truck.

result of strong winds reigniting slash piles — erupted in Arch Cape and Falcon Cove, torching about 400 acres.

White asked if she could go on the second fire — she had joined the department a couple of months before — and was told she was too new. It was a formative disap-

pointment, one that motivated her to gain as much knowledge and as many certifications as she could.

Later, a new fire chief, Matt Benedict, showed White how the industry was "supposed to be," she said: organized, hierarchical, team-oriented and full of camaraderie — the parts of the military

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people

she didn't realize she'd missed. White was ready to pursue firefighting as a career. "I saw the road of what I needed to do," she recalled.

White went on to earn her associate degree in fire science from Clatsop Community College. Cannon Beach hired her full time in 2019. She is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree in fire services administration through Eastern Oregon University and minor in communications.

The construction throughout Cannon Beach worries her. Many homes and buildings have cedar shake siding or resemble log cabins. Structures are frequently not up to code — several major hotels don't have sprinkler systems, for example. And the fire department hasn't had a full-time fire marshal

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