

Oja: ‘We can’t wait for the festival’

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back,” she said. “We tried to limp along over the last couple years. We did the downtown stationary Optog parade, which turned out to be a lot of fun.”

And a blessing in disguise.

The stationary parade, where motorists drive by participants who stand on the sidewalk, “got us downtown again,” Oja said. “We had the festival years ago at the high school, and prior to that at the armory and the old fairgrounds where the aquatic center is.

“We were real visible to people coming into Astoria. We had lots of people who would drive by and honk, and we had a grand marshal and people holding the flags.”

People will see a few changes at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds when the festival returns June 17 to June 19.

“The outdoor stage where we’ve had the flag ceremony, that’s been torn down,” Oja said. “It was in disrepair, so it’s gone.

“The flag raising will be where the midsummer pole is, and we will open at 2 o’clock on Friday.”

The festival unofficially starts earlier that Friday with the dedication of the Astoria Nordic Heritage Park at 11 a.m. off Marine Drive downtown, “then we’ll all rush to the fairgrounds for the festival opening.”

Also, “the beer garden will now be at the barn, where we had the church service,” Oja said. “The church service on Sunday will be back in the exhibit hall. And we’ll close an hour early.”

Festival organizers “really wanted to throw

a bang,” so Arrival, the ABBA tribute band from Vancouver, British Columbia, was invited back.

Tickets are available at the Liberty Theatre.

“A lot of the reserve seats have been sold already,” Oja said. “We had them for the 50th anniversary and also two years later. This is our 55th year. We want to pull it together and get the momentum going.”

If you don’t see Oja at the festival, you can occasionally find her watching Astoria swim meets.

She coached the Fishermen, along with Paul Gascoigne and the late Paul Dessen, for 17 years, from 1994 to 2010.

“I always miss the swimming,” she said. “So many great memories. But we can’t keep doing everything forever. The baton needs to be passed. I’m sure Alyson (O’Connor, the current coach) is going to do marvelous things. She really loves the kids she has now.”

Oja’s sons, Curtis and Clinton, were both swimmers, as was daughter, Kristin.

Her daughter, Kaitlin, “wanted to swim, but she was a dance-teamer, too,” with Pizazz.

And all of Carla and Alan Oja’s children love the Scandinavian festival.

“As one of my kids says, they’d rather miss Christmas than the Scandinavian festival,” Oja said. “Just like the Regatta and all these things we haven’t been able to have, we can’t wait for the festival. Let’s get back to normal.

“We’re going to be working like crazy the next couple months until we’re done,” she said. “Then we can kick up our heels and say, ‘uff da!’”

Levy: Fire district short budgetwise

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“We’re looking at maintaining and hopefully expanding what we can do for the district and our patrons,” Fire Chief Kurt Donaldson said.

The fire district, which has a crew of about 20 volunteers, hopes to add another full-time employee to work with Donaldson.

When the fire chief was hired in 2019, a visioning process with the fire district board and volunteers identified adding an employee as a priority.

“We’re at 640 calls or so last year, and it’s almost starting to be more than just one person can deal with as the only full-time person,” Donaldson said. “It’s probably time for us to look at bringing on somebody else.”

The new employee may take on training, recruiting and retaining firefighters, and could allow the district to



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

A firetruck is parked in a bay at the fire district station.

have someone at the station at least one day on weekends.

The fire district is also short budgetwise, Donaldson said.

The firefighters need new turnout gear, such as helmets,

gloves, jackets, pants and boots, he said.

The money from the tax levy would allow the fire district to buy new equipment and repair existing equipment.

Fire vehicles, for example, need to be regularly maintained and the components — such as pumps and ladders — tested. “The days of just doing an oil change and calling it good — that’s gone,” Donaldson said.

In recent years, the fire district has turned to grants to replace self-contained breathing apparatuses — the respiratory packs firefighters wear when they enter hazardous environments — and do seismic upgrades on the main fire station.

While grants may still be used — such as for new cardiac monitors — Donaldson said relying on them cannot be a long-term solution.

“They’re competitive, and eventually your luck runs out and you just don’t get ‘em,” he said.

The fire chief said he plans to hold educational meetings about the ballot measure for the community before the election.

Seaside: School district will also mull numerous fixes

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“The crossing at Alder and Spruce is a highly traveled area during school commute hours, but facilities are inadequate for safe travel for all active modes,” the planners wrote.

Costs for that crossing alone are estimated at just under \$214,000.

Sidewalk replacement on Spruce east of Alder is estimated at about \$85,000.

Crossing improvements at Wahanna Road and Broadway are penciled in at about \$46,000 to install high-visibility crosswalks and curb ramps on all four legs of the intersection.

At Wahanna and Spruce, crossing improvements are estimated at more

than \$197,000 to install a curb extension and curb ramps on the northeast corner. School crossing signs would be added at the crosswalks across Wahanna.

The school district will also consider numerous fixes.

The study area involves neighborhoods within a 1-mile campus radius, such as Sunset Hills, Whispering Pines, Lea Way, Spruce and parts of Wahanna and Broadway, where the Sunset Recreation Center and Seaside Public Library are located.

The Department of Transportation partners with the city and school district to work on and fund the Safe Routes to School

project identification papers, Kenneth Shonkwiler, the senior region planner for ODOT, said.

“We are involved to help the school district and city but also to come up with solutions on ODOT right of way for children accessing school via active transportation,” he said. “The solutions range from physical infrastructure to educational and enforcement-related. The planning project identifies solutions that can then be funded by the Safe Routes to School construction grant.”

The city has already tackled a few projects, such as creating a crosswalk on Spruce and restriping the road at the intersection with Wahanna Road to

add a turn lane.

Right now, the planning document is still a draft.

“Input from the community is a vital part of the process,” said Kathy Kleczek, the Safe Routes to School region coordinator, who oversees projects in Clatsop, Tillamook and Columbia counties. “Everyone sees things from a different lens, so input from people that will use the routes, whether school related or not, is important.

“The plan will not all be implemented at the same time, and it will be used as a blueprint for how to make the routes to school the best they can be for our future generations. We do not want to miss something because we didn’t see it.”



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Passengers get views of the waterfront from the Astoria Riverfront Trolley.

Trolley: Almost entirely run by volunteers

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The Harrisons, from Tigard, have been riding the trolley for 15 years. They were by their friend Brenda Ayers and her two children, who were on spring break.

“This has always been a highlight of our trips to Astoria,” Dan Harrison said. “This being the first time of the season is awesome.”

Their children, 11-year-old Teagan and 7-year-old Ella, were also repeat passengers.

As more riders got on and completely filled each polished wooden seat, Ella stood at the front, gazing ahead like a ship’s captain at the prow.

As the trolley approached intersections, driver Ann Stiles encouraged Ella to pull the cord and ring the bell.

Friday’s ride opened Stiles’ ninth year volunteering with the trolley.

“We were so excited,” she said. “We were chomping at the bit to get out of the barn and get going.”

Stiles said that meeting people is her favorite part of the work. On Friday, the trolley had passengers visiting from as far as New Hampshire.

“Definitely the interaction with the people. But I love to drive the trolley, and I love learning the history enough to narrate it,” she said.

The trolley is almost entirely run by volunteers, with one paid position for volunteer organizing. It costs \$1 to board, or \$2 for a day pass.

For opening day, the fee was an optional donation.

When the trolley reached the eastern end of its route near Pier 39, passengers stood to flip the backs of their seats and faced the other way for the return journey.

Kemp and Stiles switched places, and Kemp picked up the microphone in the back to resume his narration on the history of the trolley.

“We’re just honored to be able to be some of the volunteers that run it,” Kemp said.

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