

IN BRIEF

Parking limited for crab festival

The Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival will have park-and-ride shuttles available to address limited parking at the event this weekend.

Parking will be extremely limited at the festival site at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds, and organizers encourage using the park-and-ride service.

On Friday and Saturday, routes will include lodgings in Astoria and Warrenton and neighborhood stops. On Sunday, the Port of Astoria park-and-ride will be the only stop. There will be a special shuttle route for volunteers and vendors.

Not all shuttles on the routes are equipped with lifts, and disabled parking spaces will be available at the event for those with handicap placards.

For more information and to view routes, visit www.astoriacrabfest.com

Seaside police eye suspect after break-in spree

SEASIDE — Police are investigating thefts and damage to several downtown buildings.

The crimes occurred at The Spay and Neuter Thrift Shop, Patty's Wicker Cafe, Coastal Eye Care, Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Toyas Chiropractic and the Nike Factory Store, police said.

The suspect is believed to have left the area.

While impacted businesses are still compiling insurance reports, Detective Sgt. Josh Gregory estimated an aggregate loss of \$9,000, including property damage and stolen goods.

Brownson holds 'Meet Your Councilor' event

Astoria City Councilor Tom Brownson is holding a "Meet Your Councilor" event from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Saturday at Peter Pan Market & Deli on Niagara Avenue.

Mike Francis will be joining Brownson to talk about the possibility of creating a South Slope Community Association.

— *The Astorian*

Brown signs farmworker overtime pay bill

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown has signed into law House Bill 4002, which phases out the state's agricultural overtime pay exemption.

The new law establishes overtime pay requirements for agricultural workers in Oregon after 40 hours per week, with the requirements phased in over five years starting in 2023.

"I view this bill as an important step in the right direction, to correct a historic wrong," the governor wrote in a letter Friday to legislative leaders. "This policy will make a significant difference in the lives of farmworkers and their families."

Under the law, farmworkers will be owed time-and-a-half wages after 55 weekly hours of work next year, after 48 hours of work in 2025-2026 and after 40 hours per week beginning in 2027.

— *Capital Press*

Long Beach declines electric scooter offer

LONG BEACH, Wash. — City councilors have turned down an overture from an electric scooter company that would have brought the two-wheel vehicles to the city's streets.

The issue was in front of the City Council at its April 4 meeting, after the electric scooter company, Bird, approached the city to see if they could strike an agreement on a one-year trial period to see if their product was viable.

The deal would have brought a minimum of 50 scooters into the community, at no cost to the city.

City Administrator David Glasson said he had several concerns about Bird's proposal, which included the fact that the company doesn't have a physical business location in the city.

"They just kind of want to scatter (the scooters) along the sidewalks and in areas that are near the public," Glasson said.

The Astoria City Council rejected a similar offer from Bird last year.

— *Chinook Observer*

ON THE RECORD

Theft

• Gabriel J. Dalpiaz, of Powell River in British Columbia, Canada, was arrested on Sunday at the intersection of U.S. Highway 101 and S.E. Ensign Lane in Warrenton for second-degree theft and unlawful possession of a firearm. The alleged theft occurred at Walmart in

Warrenton.

Criminal trespass

• Joseph William Blackler, 40, of Warrenton, was arrested on Monday for second-degree criminal trespass and second-degree criminal mischief. He allegedly broke a window at the west-end Mini Mart in Astoria with his fist.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

THURSDAY

Seaside Transportation Advisory Committee, 6 p.m., City Hall, 989 Broadway.

the Astorian

Established July 1, 1873
(USPS 035-000)

Published Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday by EO Media Group, 949 Exchange St., PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103 Telephone 503-325-3211, 800-781-3211 or Fax 503-325-6573. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Astorian, PO Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103-0210

DailyAstorian.com
MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
MEMBER CERTIFIED AUDIT OF CIRCULATIONS, INC.

Circulation phone number:
800-781-3214

Periodicals postage paid at Astoria, OR

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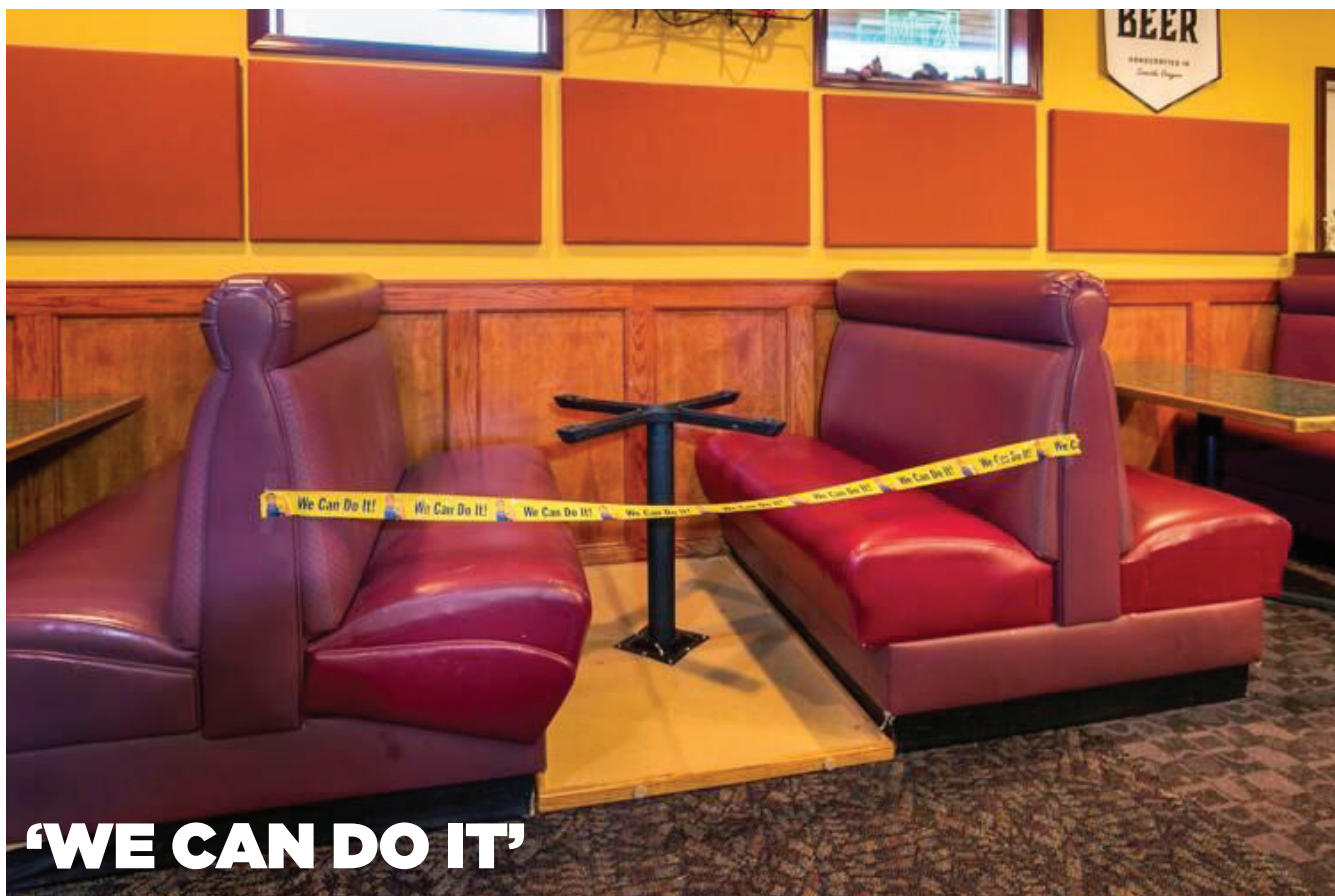
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'We Can Do It', by Don Frank, shot at the Great Wall Restaurant in Gearhart. The photographer's show at the Imogen Gallery in Astoria sums up the past two years in photos. 'The Lost Winter' captures the sense of closure — or closings — of buildings, businesses and schools as the coronavirus pandemic took hold.

Chainsaw artists revved up about creating critters

A veteran and former paraeducator

By PATRICK WEBB
Chinook Observer

OCEAN PARK, Wash. — Michelangelo is believed to have said, "The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material."

Blaine Gunkel would laugh at being compared to the 16th-century Italian genius.

But he does view his chainsaw art the same way. For him, a block of cedar already contains an eagle, a fish, a bear and sometimes, an ice cream cone.

He just has to free it.

"It's being able to look at a log and you remove the negative and it is in there," he said. "I have never been an artistic person. I couldn't even draw you an artistic stick person, but I can carve a bear or an octopus or a fish."

Gunkel and Kim Dill are partners in life and in Bear Creek Chainsaw Carving. She prefers to downplay her role as his carving assistant, keeping saws fueled at contests, handling sales at shows, but it's evident she is as enthusiastic as he is.

"We are an excellent team," Gunkel said.

The couple moved to the Long Beach Peninsula about nine months ago, fulfilling a dream of living at the beach, using their Ocean Park acreage as home base for attending Northwest chainsaw carving shows.

Inspired by masters

Gunkel, originally from Montana, grew up in Wenatchee, attended Central Washington University, and had several careers including a stint in the U.S. Army. Dill is from Texas and works as a recruiter in the financial services world.

More recently, Gunkel embarked on a rewarding later-life career as a paraeducator in Belfair. "I loved helping kids," he said. "I would see the kids go from struggling and then having them bring their report cards to you the next year. I got a small glimpse into the rewards that teachers receive."

When COVID restrictions shut that down, the couple looked for other options, first close to Ocean Shores, which hosts annual carving events, and then



Patrick Webb/Chinook Observer

Chainsaw artist Blaine Gunkel with the tools of his trade.

Ocean Park. Wood creations had been Gunkel's hobby for about five years, inspired in part by viewing YouTube tutorials by master carvers like Steve Backus, of Whidbey Island, then later meeting him.

The interest mushroomed for Gunkel, who now considers himself in the semi-professional class. He has been inspired by artists from Mongolia, Japan, Europe and around the Northwest. He and Dill attend multiple shows each year, displaying their work and competing. Some contests offer cash prizes; competitors are often asked to participate in a "quick carve" and produce a named critter from a provided block of wood in just 60 or 90 minutes. Sometimes it is broad, like a farm-related item. Rules specify what tools can be used.

The rewards go beyond prizes or sales revenue.

"I love to make people smile," Gunkel said. "I love it when people have that some kind of wonderment — 'How do they do it?'"

His work has included fish, an octopus, whales, turtles and birds like cardinals, eagles and herons. Bears are common. "They are cute

and people love them," Dill said, "and every single one is different."

Buyers place them on their front porches. "Bears with signs that say 'Go away' sell three times faster than the 'Welcome' bears," she laughed.

"Bar control" is a key learned skill for chainsaw artists. Many early efforts, like one of Dill's fish, end up much smaller than planned because chunks are inadvertently sawn away. One way to learn is "cut for cut," where teacher and pupil carve their own similar-sized piece of wood alternately. As her skills have improved, she has created a bear, a mushroom, a tree and a gnome. Both donate their items for charity auctions; one tree wall hanging by Dill sold seven times, raising \$350.

But at public events, she is happy to stay in the background, handling sales and being a supportive assistant. "It's definitely rewarding, but I don't want to keep bothering him," she said. "At shows, I don't carve because he is in his 'zone.' I love to finish, sand and paint. And I oil and gas the saws."

Tempted to keep

At 61, Gunkel enjoys the physical and mental challenges his art provides. He is fastidious about safety, always wearing gloves, eye and ear protection, and kevlar chaps to protect his legs. Sturdy scaffolding is pre-

ferred to risky ladders when creating taller pieces with unforgiving 20-inch saws.

Like artists in other media, his inspiration comes from music. "I want to go out and carve. It is good physical exertion," he said. "The music, rap, country, Christian, I listen to ... I don't know if it's the energy in the songs ..."

As a dehumidifier whirred in his packed display area drying a dozen smaller wooden creations, he thumbed through a 2-inch thick photo album. It showed dragons, snowmen, items with Seattle Seahawks logos, customized family benches with kids' handprints and apples and pencils created for teacher appreciation days at his last job. There was even a hamburger and french fries.

Dill sometimes laments their departure. "There's so much I want to keep for our house!" she smiled.

Every photo has a story. One wooden bench incorporates a grandfather's metal Dodge Ram tailgate. The most unusual was an urn, created for a fellow artist who wanted her remains placed in a carved box shaped like music icon Prince's love symbol. The most difficult was his largest, an 18-foot tree stump carved in place with an eagle, a whale and a turtle, with rocks and starfish around the base.

And the most poignant always stirs his respect for fellow veterans. "The one that has brought tears to my eyes is the helmet, rifle and boots of a soldier's cross," he said. "People come to shows to watch you carve, and you can see who has been in the military. They have these memories ... it warms my heart."

Gunkel's L-shaped yard on his Ocean Park acreage is stocked with three waist-high 6-foot logs that he has cleared from neighbors' properties. Cedar's usually fragrant smell and insect-resistant quality make it his preferred wood, although he sometimes uses driftwood. He scooped up a handful of sawdust to inhale its scent, labeling it "man glitter." It adorns his black sweatshirt.

Recent popular items have been bird houses with "spirit faces." He uses the fire from a weed burner to darken the completed box, then brushes it vigorously to create color which highlights its texture. A similar technique produced smooth-backed turtles which had been burned but appeared as if stained.

He sees no limit. "I like to carve something I have never carved before," he said.

Inevitably, he is his worst critic.

"I see the fault in all of them."

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