

County to finance child care grants

A \$500,000 investment of federal stimulus money

By ERICK BENDEL
The Astorian

A new grant program may help local child care providers stay in business and aspiring providers get in the game.

At a Clatsop County Board of Commissioners work session on Wednesday, the county's child care task force introduced the proposal to stabilize funding for providers.

The task force, an advisory group of specialists, stakeholders and community leaders, formed to address the region's lack of child care options.

The North Coast has been steadily hemorrhaging child care slots. Over the past five years, the county has lost more than half of its licensed child care capacity, *The Astorian* has reported.

Child care workers often make low wages, have no benefits and do the kind of work that burns them out, Eva Manderson, director of Northwest Regional Child Care Resource and Referral, said on Wednesday. It is also difficult to make child care operations pencil out.

"We want the solution to be as easy as, 'I know of a building around the corner from my work that's open where we could open child care,'" Manderson told commissioners. The unfortunate thing, she said, is that "it's much more complex than that."

The task force hopes the proposed child care retention and expansion grants will allow providers eventually to pay their staff a living wage on par with that of a kindergarten teacher.

"Right now, we're a long ways from that," Manderson said, "and we see this program as a way to help do that without it being on the backs of families."

Details of the grants will be posted on the county website. Once applicants submit their grant applications, a committee will review the applications and award funds.

The Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District will likely serve as the program's fiscal agent, responsible for collecting and distributing funds, Manderson said.

The goal is to do all of this before September, partly because that's when child care programs run out of COVID-19 funds, Manderson pointed out. "It puts a little bit of urgency around getting this moving forward," she said.

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Photos by Lydia Ely/*The Astorian*

The Astoria Nordic Heritage Park honors the Scandinavian immigrant experience.

At Nordic Heritage Park, Scandinavians celebrate a sense of place and belonging

Displays mark culture and history

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

After years of planning and fundraising, the Astoria Nordic Heritage Park opened to the public Friday morning with a celebratory dedication.

The park off Marine Drive downtown, completed for \$1.5 million, was inspired by the Astoria Scandinavian Heritage Association to honor the city's rich history of Nordic immigration.

Hundreds of people attended the dedication, which was held before the start of the annual Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival. The event featured the Nordic Viking Scandia Dancers and lur and flag anthem performances. Karl Marlantes, the author of "Deep River," a novel that described the Finnish immigrant experience along the Columbia River, was the keynote speaker.

"We're hoping this becomes a source of community pride," Janet Bowler, the vice pres-

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The park features a gateway arch.



The Nordic Viking Scandia Dancers performed at the dedication.

A shortage of sexual assault nurse examiners leaves a critical gap in access

Many survivors are referred to Portland hospitals

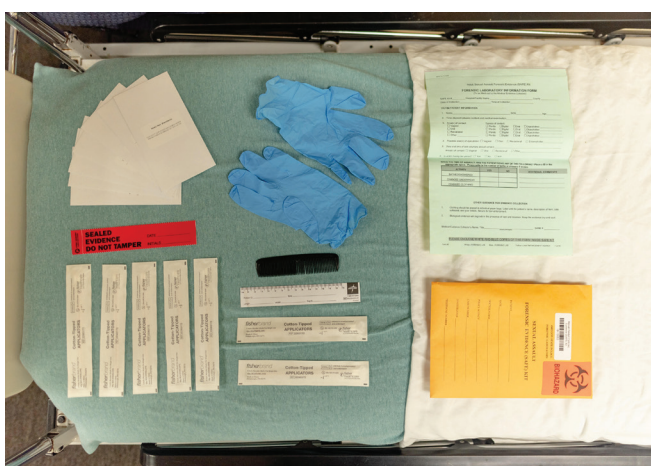
By ABBEY McDONALD
The Astorian

Most people who are sexually assaulted on the North Coast do not seek medical care afterward.

Shame, embarrassment, anxiety and not knowing what to expect are among the main deterrents. The few survivors that do go to local hospitals often have to wait hours for forensic exams.

Many are referred to hospitals in Portland instead.

"For someone who's already experienced trauma, knowing that you have to take



Lydia Ely/*The Astorian*

The contents of a sexual assault forensic evidence kit are displayed on a bed at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria.

a two-hour trip one way, and then wait for hours at a hospital to have an exam done and then find your way back here, it's really discouraging," said Jessica Klein, the deputy director at The Harbor, an advocacy center in Astoria for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Few people opt to make the trip.

"The rest of the survivors typically just turn and walk out and they leave the hospital without receiving any care," she said, "which is really unfortunate because even if someone doesn't get the forensic exam, there's still

other services that are available to them."

According to advocates, law enforcement and medical experts on the North Coast, the medical response to sexual assault does not adequately meet the needs of survivors, a critical gap in access that can compound trauma.

A survey last year by The Harbor found that 83% of survivors who participated did not receive any medical care after their assault and only 15% reported their assault to law enforcement. Thirty percent did not know medical services were an option, while 16% cited a lack of transportation.

Insufficient funding, burnout and limited opportunities for training have led to a persistent shortage of sexual assault nurse examiners, who are needed to treat survivors and collect evidence.

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Port reaches agreement with seafood company

New development coming to Pier 1

By ETHAN MYERS
The Astorian

The Port of Astoria is taking the first steps toward implementing the vision of a new waterfront master plan.

The Port Commission voted unanimously on Tuesday to approve a memorandum of understanding with Astoria Crab & Fish Co. to work toward development on Pier 1. The group is a subsidiary of Pacific Dream Seafoods, a wholesale distributor that operates a seafood processing and storage facility in Anacortes,

Washington. While the exact plans for the space have yet to be solidified, Matt McGrath, the Port's deputy director, said the agreement is intended to get the ball rolling with development on Pier 1.

"The goal is to create a facility that is a community landmark for Pier 1, for Astoria, that can be utilized by both Astoria Crab & Fish Co., local fishermen, tourists coming off the cruise lines and then locals — for coming down and enjoying some form of

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