

OPINION



the Astorian

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A park for the community

New York Times bestselling author Karl Marlantes spoke at the dedication of Astoria Nordic Heritage Park on June 17 and identified Astoria as a river town rather than a coastal town.

Astoria's identity is uniquely and strongly defined by its history. In the early 20th century, 35% of Astoria's citizens self-identified as Scandinavian. Most were of Finnish heritage, followed by Norwegians, Swedes, Danes and a few Icelanders. Their values and influences helped determine the character of our community that continues to this day.



JANET BOWLER

The nonprofit Astoria Scandinavian Heritage Association spent seven years fundraising and developing plans for Astoria's newest city park located between 15th and 16th streets on Marine Drive at the east end of downtown. The \$1.5 million park was built during a pandemic with funding from over 460 private donors, corporate and foundation gifts and the support of the Oregon Cultural Trust and Oregon Heritage Commission.

The heritage association gifted the park to the city and its citizens but will continue to maintain park features with support from the Rotary Club.

Astoria Nordic Heritage Park has a storyline that begins at the Riverwalk. The grand entrance ramp symbolizes the immigrants departing their native lands and saying their last goodbyes. Many saw their homeland or family left behind for the last time. The icons on the ramp railing are important items that immigrants brought with them or remembered from their homeland.

The arrival plaza meets a need expressed in the city's parks master plan for more public gathering spaces. The concrete steamer trunks on the plaza represent the immigrants' meager belongings as they arrived in a new country. The Nordic flags and midsummer pole reflect the pride in traditions the immigrants preserved from their homelands.



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The Astoria Nordic Heritage Park opened to the public on June 17.

The gateway arch portrays the immigrants' intent to work hard and become productive citizens in the new land. Ten interpretive panels developed with intense community input tell this story with many personal examples from Astoria families. Boulders and six distinctive troll figures hidden in the park encourage children of all ages to play and spend time in the park.

The heritage association realizes that immigration issues are ongoing and still relevant today. Poverty, famine, war and politics are still reasons to leave one's homeland and seek refuge elsewhere. The makeup of the park encourages visitors to reflect on these issues as they stroll the meditative path leading west and regard the scenic views of the Columbia River and the busy waterfront.

The community is invited to visit the park frequently to take special photos under the arch and to visit at night when the park is lit up. Come when it rains and listen to water running down the stairs in the storm drains designed to sound like a waterfall.

This past weekend, thousands of visitors attended the hugely successful 55th

annual Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival. They dined on Norwegian lefse, Finnish rice pudding and prune tarts, Danish meatballs with red cabbage and Swedish gingersnaps.

The arena at the county fairgrounds was full and visitors sang and danced to the international hit tunes of the Swedish band ABBA performed by ARRIVAL, Canada's tribute to ABBA. Dancers danced in authentic Nordic folk wear and accordion bands and a Swedish nyckelharpa band entertained. Lines were long, but visitors were mostly cheerful and patient and enjoyed socializing again after a long pandemic lockdown.

The festival is a reunion of sorts enjoyed by all ages. About half of the visitors were first-timers at the festival and many will make it a tradition to return in future years. Astoria is known for this authentic three-day midsummer celebration that happens one weekend a year. With the creation of Astoria Nordic Heritage Park, the significance of the Nordic influence on the local region can be celebrated year-round.

The heritage association thanks all who have supported this community effort to

build the park – the large and small donors; the designers, from local artist Roger McKay, who outlined the original idea, to the West Studio of Seattle, that drew up the final plans; the specialty vendors who created the arch, granite features, railings, concrete trunks and trolls, and interpretive and decorative panels; and Rickenbach Construction Inc. and all its subcontractors who demonstrated pride and commitment to quality workmanship.

Astoria Nordic Heritage Park is for locals as well as visitors. Read the 292 donor plaque inscriptions to realize the strong community support that created it. Visit frequently and spend time in the park. Come on summer weekends when park committee members might be on location to chat and answer questions.

Reflect on your own heritage and share it with your family members. Astoria Nordic Heritage Park was built by the community for the community. We are proud to share.

Janet Bowler is the vice president of the Astoria Scandinavian Heritage Association and the vice chair of the Astoria Nordic Heritage Park Committee.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pay tribute

I arrived in Seaside for the Miss Oregon pageant, as I have done for more than a decade, eager for breakfast at Patty's Wicker Cafe. Imagine my surprise to find it under renovation, and no longer serving dry wit and coffee at 6 a.m.!

I just wanted to take a moment and pay tribute to a member of your community who was as original as the Oregon Coast itself, and who worked through her life to bring happiness and homemade food to the community.

She told me her real name once upon a time, but it was never an issue to just call her by the name of the cafe she made a bright light in the gray dawn.

Thank you, Patty! You will be missed.
CLINT KASTER
Portland

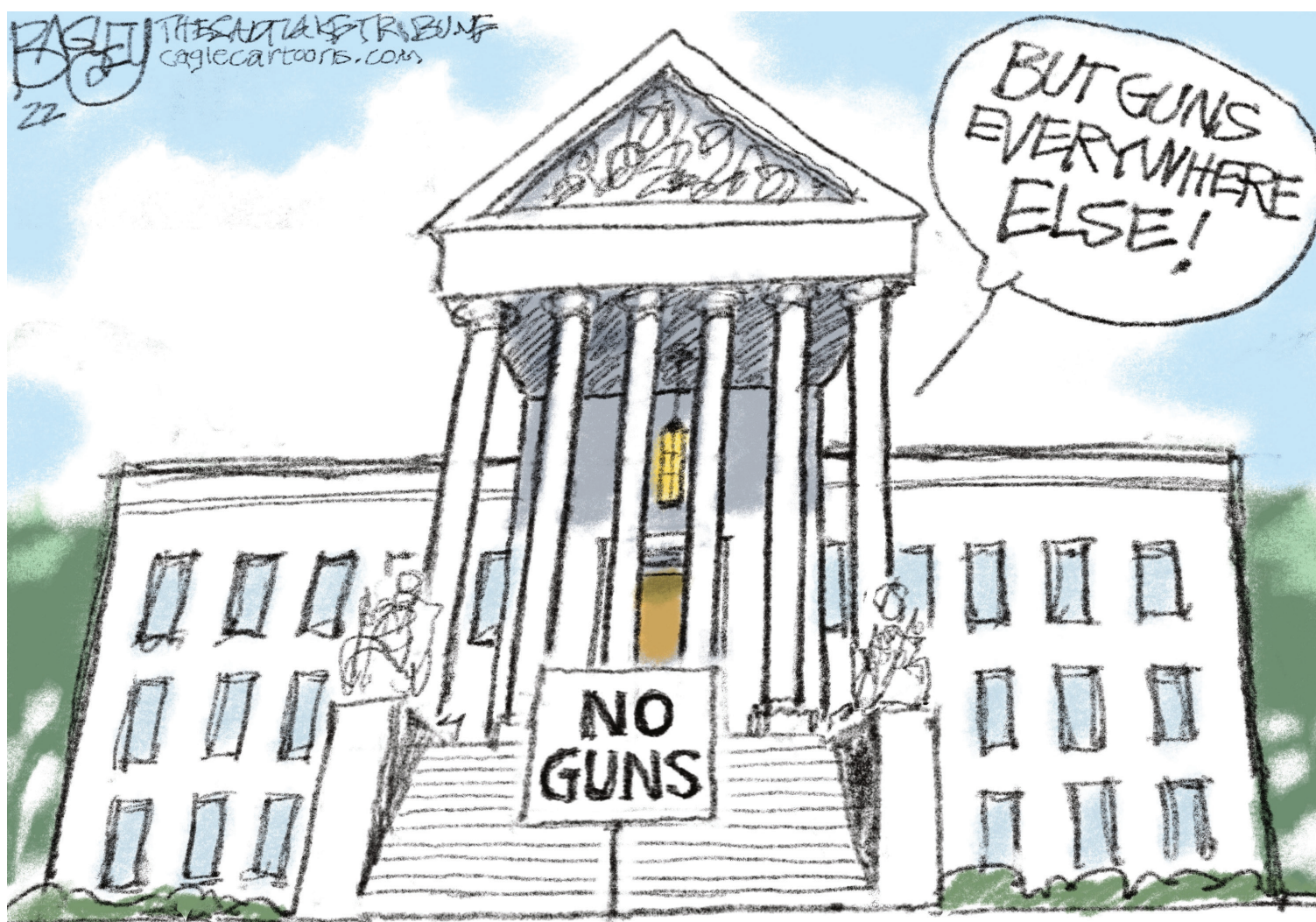
Obfuscating

Gillnets have been outlawed in most other states, and many other countries. The debate over gillnetting is not about recreational angling versus commercial fishing. Nor is it about rural versus urban communities. It is simply about the tool — a gillnet, which is incapable of effectively targeting hatchery fish, while minimizing damage to endangered salmon and steelhead.

Perhaps nothing exemplifies how poor of a harvest tool a gillnet is than what happened in April on the lower Columbia River. Operating in off-channel areas, using self-proclaimed "honed ways to target hatchery and net-pen salmon," fisheries managers rescinded several fishing periods because the gillnets caught too many endangered, wild salmon!

Gillnetting continues in the main stem lower Columbia River because gillnetters and their lobby have been successful in obfuscating the issues. As an example, they conflate gillnetting with commercial fishing, when actually the gillnet fishery is a minuscule subset of the seafood industry's economic contributions to our coastal communities.

Fortunately, salmon management is heading in the right direction. Over the past several years, most gillnet harvest has been limited to off-channel areas. Additionally, the Washington Legislature recently approved \$14.4 million to buy out the nontrivial gillnet fleet. This new direction is good for our coastal communities, and for everyone in the Pacific Northwest.



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

Most importantly, it is good for our precious salmon and steelhead.

NELLO PICINICH
Executive director, Coastal Conservation Association
Vancouver, Washington

A new beginning

With a full page of letters to the editor, The Astorian of May 19 put a

strong emphasis on community. I view this as a positive post-pandemic effort to rally our citizens in efforts to come back to normal.

Then I survey the status of the organization I know best: Exploring New Concepts of Retirement Education (ENCORE). We aim to resume the vigorous and broad program offerings that our organization is known for.

Yes, the numbers of our membership

have declined. However, our area's senior education organization is standing strong. Although COVID-19 in the last two years has required a severe reduction in person-to-person classes, we have continued, steady enrollment in our remote offerings.

A strong attraction among aspects provided by our organization is social interaction. Several dozen couples who have come to the North Coast recently have been deprived of the contacts normally facilitated by ENCORE because we had to curtail group festivities and social events.

But our leadership is standing tall. We are alive and well. We are looking forward to a vigorous resumption of normalcy, even if it is a "new normal."

We applaud the educational efforts made by Insight for the Education of Oysterville, Washington, that will inform the public through diverse lectures.

ENCORE aims to restart the vigorous and broad programs that our organization is known for.

ERHARD GROSS
Astoria