

Elevator at apartment complex for seniors still down

A June power outage caused the disruption

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The elevator at Owens-Adair, an affordable housing complex for seniors and people with disabilities, is still down after it failed during a power outage in early June.

Residents of the four-story, 46-unit complex near downtown have been waiting for repairs to be made to the sole elevator since June 7, when a power out-

age affected more than 7,400 Astoria area customers.

The Northwest Oregon Housing Authority, which owns the building, could not locate the controller needed to restore service because of the age of the equipment and a new part needed to be fabricated.

Jim Evans, the housing authority's interim director, had expected to receive the part by the end of June, but it has not arrived.

"The required parts are on order and we are checking in with the vendor daily," he said in an email. "We do not have an

estimated time of delivery at this time."

To help ease the challenges associated with the elevator outage, Evans said someone is posted in the building for about four hours a day to help residents up and down the stairs, carry groceries, deliver mail and packages and carry laundry to and from the laundry room.

The housing authority has offered to reimburse delivery fees for groceries and medications. The agency is also working with Clatsop Community Action to provide outreach to residents with mobility impairments.

Residents with mobility issues have also been offered first-floor apartments, but Evans said no one has requested to move.

Evans said the housing authority has borrowed a stair lift from Columbia County, but he is not aware of anyone who has asked to use the lift.

Residents at the building have told The Astorian that the support has been helpful, but many have expressed concerns about accessing medical appointments and other necessities.

In April, the housing authority unveiled a plan to double the

size of the apartment complex and update the existing building.

A new, four-story, 50-unit apartment project called the Owens-Adair Annex would mirror the building and likely serve low-income seniors and people with disabilities earning 30% to 50% of the area median income.

The housing authority applied for state funding and expects to learn whether the application has been approved by August.

If the project is awarded government funding this year, construction could begin by the summer of 2023 and the project could be completed by 2024.

Fire: 'I could have lost my life'

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They found a tall ladder, which Bates climbed to reach the flames. He sprayed the fire until it eventually extinguished.

"I'm like, 'Thank God the fire's out.' Pretty big rush," Bates said. "And then it just sparks back up."

Womelsdors grabbed a nearby hose and handed it to Bates, who doused the rest of the fire. When the fire department showed up, Bates had successfully put out the fire for the second time.

Bates said he helped his neighbor rather than wait for the fire department because he didn't want Boman's house to burn down or anyone to get hurt. "It's the right thing to do," he said.

If Bates and Womelsdors weren't there, Boman might not have escaped. He might not have heard the fire over his TV, and the flames could have easily spread to the rest of the house.

The weather was hot and dry that day, and the roof is cedar. "The whole house is made out of cedar, so it's very

volatile to fire," Boman said.

In a Facebook post, the Astoria Fire Department thanked Bates for taking swift action that "likely saved thousands of dollars to the home."

Boman is still figuring out how to reward his neighbor for his good deed, since Bates won't accept any gifts.

"I could have lost my life," Boman said. "Who knows if I would have been overcome with smoke or something like that, and my house is still here because of him."

Peden: A fascinating job filled with new and different information

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going to be every day, I don't know if I can handle this," Peden recalled.

She could handle it. She stayed. And the police department became Peden's second career.

Peden had already polished off more than two decades in banks and credit unions. A Knappa High School graduate, she met her husband in Astoria while he was in the U.S. Coast Guard. Their family moved around the country, from Alabama to Alaska, for his transfers before returning to the North Coast.

One day, Peden, a crime drama geek, saw an opening at the police department. "I'm like, 'Oh, I'm going to apply for that.'"

Peden worked under four chiefs — Rob Deupree, Pete Curzon, Brad Johnston and Geoff Spalding. Her last day was Thursday. Stacy Kelly stepped into the chief role on Friday.

Peden has seen the department evolve, adapt to digital technology, get more equipment, such as tasers and body cameras for officers and mobile data terminals for their vehicles. The checklist that comes with newly hired officers — from ordering uniforms to signing them up in software programs that track their progress — has grown from a few items to a few pages.

Early on, she worked as the evidence custodian, processing items seized in crimes — sending them to a

crime lab, holding them for safe keeping, or returning them to their owners.

In 2001, she started supervising the department's records and finances, including managing grants. She initiated and helped compile the grant application that in 2011 brought the city \$1.5 million from the Oregon Department of Emergency Management for the seismic rehab of the Public Safety Building, which houses the city's police and fire departments and dispatch center on 30th Street.

The upgrade is designed to help the city's emergency response survive a megquake and tsunami. "If we ever have a tsunami, we will be the little castle surrounded by a moat," she said.

It's been a fascinating job filled with new and different information, she said. This includes glimpses into human darkness and depravity.

Of all the case evidence — all the weaponry and rape kits and money and drugs — that passed through the department in Peden's time, the piece that stands out is the baby bottle that someone had converted into a meth pipe. For a while, the department showed the specimen to students in its Citizen Police Academy.

"That's gotta be one of the weirdest and most interesting things I've seen," she said. Evil, yes. "But, then again, boy, that's ingenious, to think that you

could do that."

Among the toughest parts of the job, she said, is seeing the children who come in after facing domestic violence. "You can just see how lost they are the look on their face, you know," she said. "They just don't know what to do."

The department keeps stuffed animals on hand. "It's amazing what a difference it makes for them if they can have something to cuddle up to like this" — she demonstrated — "when they're out there and their mom's in tears, and they don't know what's going on."

Law enforcement has suffered a reputational blow because of notorious examples of abuse — the 2020 murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis most notably — and it has become harder to attract candidates to the field. News consumers are seeing only a partial and often tainted view of the profession rather than trying to understand the full picture, she believes.

Peden remembers a time when an opening would attract scores of applicants. Now Astoria is struggling to find five candidates for an officer position. Here, as elsewhere, officer, dispatch and records positions go unfilled for long periods, she observed.

"It amazes me that there isn't more of an interest in this kind of thing," she said. "And I guess it's because I love it so much. I find it interesting every day."

Rating: Program no longer in a shortfall

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they score between 0 to 60.

The authority received notice last week confirming its status as a "standard performer" after receiving a score of 74.

Jim Evans, the housing authority's interim director, said the authority is no longer under a corrective action plan. Evans is a director at Quadel, a Washington, D.C., based management and consulting firm that was hired in 2020 to manage the authority's housing choice voucher program. He was appointed as interim director later that year.

"The team has worked very hard to make sure that the voucher program is in full compliance with HUD's regulations," Evans said in an email. "We know there is more work to be done."

With the continued sup-

port of the housing authority's board and Quadel, he said the voucher program is "well positioned to provide housing assistance to the communities of Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties."

In 2020, Evans and Nina Reed, the board's chairwoman, attributed the disarray of the voucher program to staff turnover and inconsistent management, which resulted in a lack of capacity to do the job in a way that met HUD's expectations.

The federal agency gave the housing authority recommendations to help come into compliance with federal regulatory requirements, which mainly focused on documentation, record keeping and timeliness in reporting information.

The program was also experiencing a financial shortfall, and the agency

was advised by HUD to stop issuing new vouchers until funding stabilized.

The program, which is no longer in a shortfall, has been slowly issuing vouchers for just over a year.

Evans said that everyone that had been previously selected off the waiting list, but had to wait for a voucher, has been served. The housing authority began to issue vouchers to new people on the waiting list in May.

As of Friday, there were 1,663 applicants on the waiting list in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties.

In June, Elissa Gertler, the planning and development director for Oregon Metro, was appointed as the housing authority's new executive director.

Gertler will start on July 11. Evans will continue to work with the authority as a consultant.



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Tourists hit the beach over the Fourth of July weekend.

Lifeguards: Fire district has spent years to rebuild water rescue program

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year after year, they decided to pursue a partnership with the city to try to prevent more incidents.

In early June, fire district personnel rescued someone who

was stranded on a rock in the water.

In June 2021, an 11-year-old Portland girl died after being swept out to sea off Cannon Beach. In June 2020, a fire district rescue swimmer saved a

19-year-old woman from the water.

The fire district has spent the past several years working to rebuild the water rescue program.

Reckmann said the district has typically relied on mutual

aid from more developed water rescue teams at Seaside and Nehalem Bay. Now, he said, the fire district can take the lead instead of providing a support role.

Reckmann said the inci-

dent last month on the rock was the first time they could lead a rescue.

"That felt really good that we're getting that direction," he said. "That's how it's supposed to work."