

# Waisanen: A longtime board member at Columbia Memorial Hospital

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of Rhodesian Ridgeback, Great Dane and boxer — slept underfoot.

Her office decorations show glimpses of her personality, like a vibrant, intricate orange-and-pink quilt she made that occupies one wall.

Instead of 12-hour days at the mill, she chooses when to come into work. It's given her more time to get involved in every corner of the community.

She's an active member of Peace First Lutheran Church and sings in the choir. She considers herself the "chief minister of mischief," bringing energy to their gatherings.

Working in finance has shifted her perspective on budgeting, leading her to make significant financial contributions to the community.

When the Performing Arts Center at Clatsop Community College was at risk of closing, she bought it in 2020 through Trinity LLC. The community space on 16th Street — formerly Trinity Lutheran Church — was preserved for Partners for the PAC as the Charlene Larsen Center for the Performing Arts.

"There were a couple times where they were pursuing that and it looked like the building would end up (becoming) a restaurant, a brewery, a school, who knows. And it really is a huge community center," she said. "It's a big part of our community, both from the perspective of providing performances that are affordable for local people, and also providing an opportunity for local people to be engaged."

The name change was a surprise to Larsen, the president of Partners for the PAC, who had worked to keep it open. She didn't know Waisanen had honored her until the opening ceremony.

"The two of us are standing there on the entryway, and we're asked to unroll the banner. And then it has my name all over it. Well, what kind of friend does that, you know?" she said. "Who does that in their lifetime?"

The two met when Larsen's church, First Lutheran, merged with Emmanuel Lutheran in 2004, where Waisanen attended. They bonded over their love of music, perfor-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Constance Waisanen is a financial adviser with Thrivent.

mance and community events.

Larsen described Waisanen as a "no nonsense, get 'er done kinda gal. And a friend through thick and thin. You can always count on her in the good times and the bad times."

Waisanen was also involved in launching the Clatsop County chapter of 100 Women Who Care. The group meets once a quarter and members pick a local nonprofit to donate \$100 each to for a total goal of \$10,000.

Perhaps the most time-consuming of her community involvement, Waisanen is a longtime board member at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria and was formerly board president.

"That's been 15 years of significant expansion," she said, including new services and clinics in Warrenton and Seaside.

"That uses my engineering, business side of my brain, which is really fun."

The position involves about 20 hours of volunteer work a month, but she finds the investment valuable. "Visualize this community without our hospital," she said.

Waisanen said she's especially proud the Lutheran-affiliated hospital offers cancer treatment locally and has lessened the shortage of primary care providers in the region.

She said she plans to stay on the board for a few more years to see current projects through to completion.

Waisanen contributed \$100,000 to the hospital's expansion project in May. She said the decision to make the donation came from watching her parents volunteer growing up. Her dad was the chairman on their local hospital's board in Minnesota, too.

"I was raised with just a really strong value that for those to whom a lot has been given, a lot is expected," she said. "I am a financial adviser so I can see the numbers. I've got enough money to live the lifestyle that I want to live. I mean, I don't have any interest in staying at Hilton hotels all over the world or taking cruises or buying a yacht or any of those frivolities ..."

"... I just felt like I would rather give my money away now, than when I'm dead. And so why not now?"

Heather Seppa, the market region manager for Columbia and Willamette at Columbia Bank, serves with Waisanen on the hospital board. "I have appreciated her leadership on the board, her well thought-out ideas and most importantly, her friendship," she said in an email. "She brings her experience as an engineer and her financial expertise to our board."

"She is an astute businesswoman and a very talented artist! I feel inspired to work alongside her."

## A granddaughter of Finnish immigrants

Waisanen has worked on Habitat for Humanity projects in several countries on five continents. She hopes to do more in the future when coronavirus pandemic restrictions allow.

Her perspective on charity, she said, also comes from being a granddaughter of Finnish immigrants.

In 2021, she was the junior court chaperone at the Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival. Her grandson was crown bearer.

Every year, she volunteers her home to the bands performing. The most memorable moments for her have been seeing her grandchildren learn about their heritage and jam along to living-room sessions.

"I always take out the globe and have them show the kids where they're from," she said. "Where's our house? Where's their house? They're from the other side of the world."

When she's not volunteering, working or gardening, Waisanen hosts "grandma camp" for her grandchildren, where she teaches them about science and the importance of a good adventure.

# Camp: 'Our lands were taken away from us, our resources were taken away from us'

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"Our lands were taken away from us, our resources were taken away from us ...," Abing said. "That's one reason why I shared that website with you."

Abing brought a book that translates

English to Chinuk Wawa, the Chinook language, to show the children the language is not dead despite few people speaking it.

Wesley Maier, one of the campers, said he can relate to some of what Abing said about the Chinook Nation because he is Navajo. He said he feels sad that there aren't many people

who speak Chinuk Wawa because he worries the Navajo language is dying.

He liked hearing about how the Chinook do not hunt pelicans, because it reminds him of his own culture, where he cannot touch or look at snakes to avoid an evil spirit and bad luck.

Another boy told Abing his parents said he is part Native American, but he didn't know where exactly he was from.

"It's important that you reach out and find that identity, keep that identity and be proud of that identity because it has a connection," Abing said.

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