

# OPINION



# the Astorian

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## GUEST COLUMN

# On journalism and anniversaries

I'm closing out July the same way I started, with a column about the late political columnist Ron Blankenbaker.

This column, however, centers around my clumsiness as a fledgling political reporter.

I tell this true tale today in hopes it produces a chuckle or two, giving you a few moments of mental relief from the oppressive heat that grips much of Oregon.



**DICK HUGHES**

Besides, we journalists should take our work seriously but not fall into taking ourselves too seriously.

So let us begin.

It was March 1983.

A Statesman Journal trio – columnist Blankenbaker, photographer Ron Cooper and I – flew from Salem to Klamath Falls in a little chartered airplane to cover President Ronald Reagan's brief visit to the Weyerhaeuser mill there.

Gannett owns the Statesman Journal, and my assignment included reporting nationally for Gannett's print and broadcast media. In retrospect, my sole qualification for being chosen probably was my cub-reporter willingness to do whatever was needed, including bypassing my wedding anniversary for this trip.

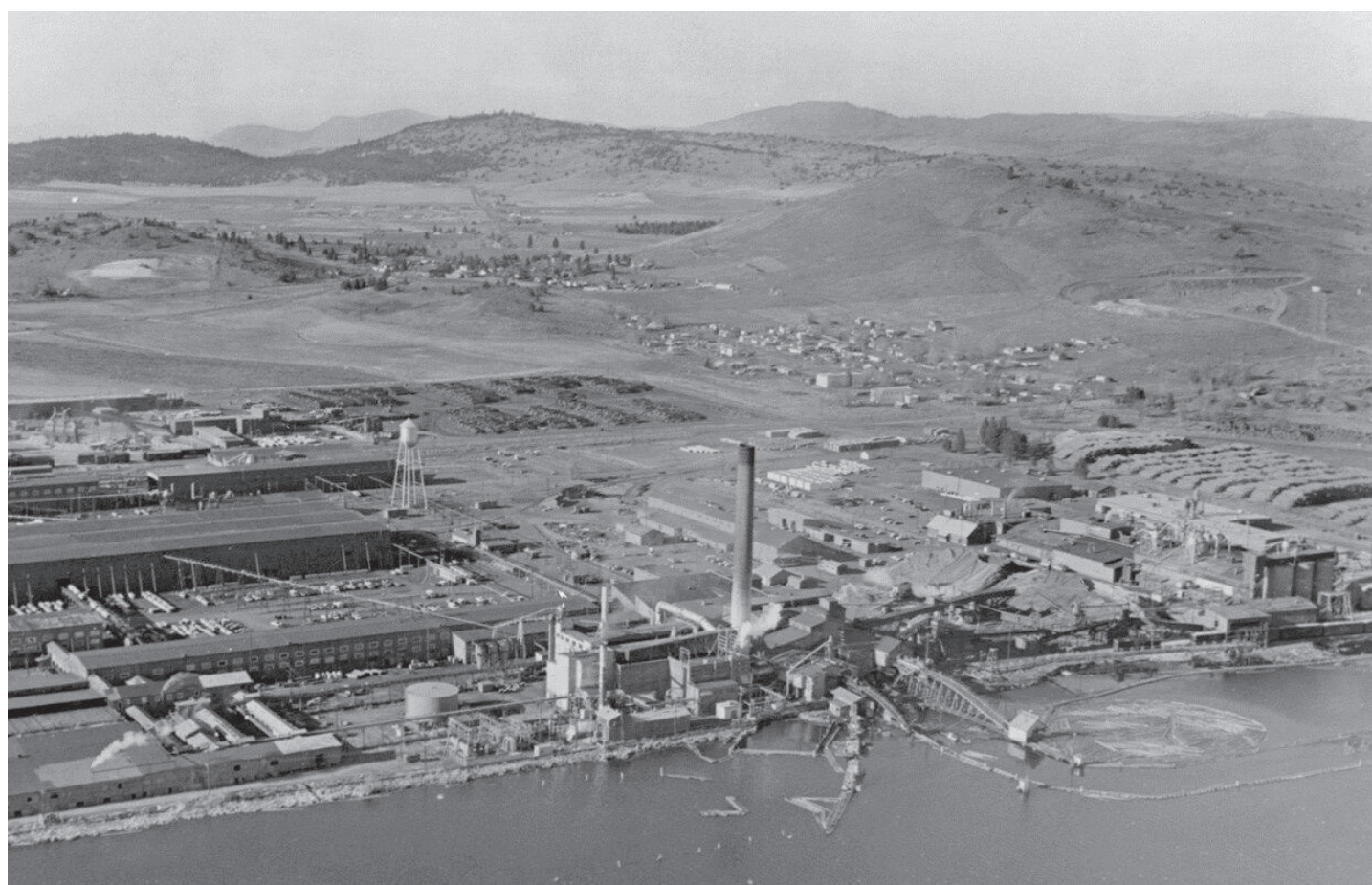
We arrived a day early to report on local preparations for the presidential visit.

Blankenbaker and I shared a motel room and what passed as a portable computer. He got first dibs. After we finished our separate interviews around town, I showed him how to write his column on the balky machine: Connect to the newsroom in Salem by placing the telephone receiver into the two cups. Type, but not faster than the cassette tape allows. Watch the tiny screen, which shows only a few words. Be prepared to start over. And over.

Once finished, he and Cooper headed to a steakhouse for dinner. Then it was my turn to use the computer and write my story. Heading back to the motel, they thought to stop at a Wendy's restaurant and get dinner for me.

Blankenbaker called to ask what I wanted.

"A cheeseburger," I said, annoyed that they got a steak meal but I ...



The Weyerhaeuser mill southwest of Klamath Falls.

Klamath County Museum

"Don't you want two cheeseburgers?" he responded. "It's on the company."

The next morning, Cooper was stationed at Kingsley Field to cover Reagan's arrival and departure. That meant I also had photo duty while reporting on Reagan's meeting with the wood products executives. I staked out a position alone in the press area, not realizing the phone at that spot was faintly marked "CBS."

Suddenly, the national press corps exploded into the room, fresh from Reagan's tour of the mill itself, which I could not attend. I was shoved from my carefully chosen prime spot.

I found myself relegated to the back of the room where Reagan was meeting with the timber folk. As they talked, I scribbled notes by hand and shot photos, while also holding a bulky tape recorder to catch every word Reagan uttered. This was the president, after all.

Then ... the ... recorder ... started ... burping ... loudly ...

Ergh. Ergh. Ergh.

Everyone stared at me.

The reporters.

The Secret Service.

The industry reps.

The president.

Juggling camera gear, notebooks and all, I managed to turn off the offending recorder.

Once the meeting was over, I rushed – or so I thought – to write my story. But the national press was long gone by the time I reached the Gannett News Service editor on duty.

He was incensed. I was too slow! I chose the wrong angle for the story! Why, like The Associated Press, had I not led with Reagan's brief response during the mill tour to a shouted question about the embattled Environmental Protection Agency director?

Well, I, uh, wasn't on the mill tour. Still, flying back to Salem, I felt like a journalist failure.

But I gave our readers an honest accounting of the president's visit:

"KLAMATH FALLS — President Reagan used a lumber mill here Saturday to pronounce the economy on the mend, even in Oregon's wood products industry.

"Reagan, who scolded the nation's television networks earlier in the week for ignoring 'good news,' practiced what he has been preaching. ..."

My day brightened when I got back to the newsroom from Salem's airport. My wife had just dropped off a bottle of bubbly and a note celebrating our sixth anniversary.

Journalists' spouses put up with a lot. For us, it's 45 years and counting. And chuckling.

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Breaks my heart

As one with many years behind me, it breaks my heart to see anti-Semitic messages being distributed in our state, and in Tillamook County. If we are to continue as a democracy, and a place where we can all live together and celebrate our diversity, messages which promote hatred have no place. We must be better than that.

I'm proud that our Democrat candidates for state Senate and House, Melissa Busch and Logan Laity, immediately spoke directly, and with strength, against the ideas expressed in those flyers. We are, indeed, fortunate that these two intelligent adults are eager and prepared to take on the challenges of public office in these complex times. I encourage you to join me in supporting them in the coming election. If you have never voted before, register and vote!

It is indeed a time when we need to draw upon our reserves of self control, and practice kindness and what wisdom we can muster. Our democracy and future demand our best.

JAN MITCHELL  
Astoria

### Fallen short

I attended the July 25 Seaside City Council meeting to support my neighbor, Frank "Corey" Buck, in his appeal of the conditional use permit issued to his next door neighbor for a vacation rental dwelling.

During the public comment portion of the meeting, four of us spoke about the interactions we've had with the people who are renting those VRDs, and the negative impact they've had on our lives, our neighborhoods and the infrastructure, such as the increased demand for electricity, water and waste disposal. The issue regarding the multitude of illegal vacation rentals in the area was also addressed.

Unfortunately, the only takeaway for the councilors was the matter of the illegal vacation rentals. Not the negative impact that the licensed VRDs are having on our quality of life, which is slowly deteriorating. They went ahead and denied Buck's appeal, and approved the permit for the



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## 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

neighbor, after all. To say I was disappointed would be an understatement. It's like they didn't hear a word we said.

Our city councilors have fallen short of their responsibilities to those they rep-

resent and serve. It should be people first, and money second. Not the other way around.

MARTI WAJC  
Seaside

## Bright new faces

This fall, we have two bright new faces to represent us in the Oregon House and Senate. With open seats in both houses on the North Coast, I urge your consideration for Melissa Busch, for Oregon Senate District 16, and Logan Laity, for Oregon House District 32.

Both of these folks are eminently qualified, and are equally enthusiastic about these jobs representing all of the people in our county, and not beholden to just those with conservative money interests.

The fall elections are not that far off. Find out for yourself the impressive abilities, and enthusiasm, both Busch and Laity hold. Remember, voting is power! Utilize it! Don't squander it!

BOB WESTERBERG  
Astoria