

Old Town Inn gets new management team

John and Sharon Birdwell cop to being “young 70-some-things” and claim to have retired two times before. So why step into the manager's job at the 40-room Old Town Inn in Florence?

“We love Florence,” says Sharon. “For its size it has so much to offer. For example, the Florence Events Center has ballet, opera and an indoor garage sale,” said John. “And there's not a bad restaurant in town. I think we've tried every one so far.”

Before retiring the first time, Sharon was a commercial charter pilot and John was a contractor and commercial fisherman. Tired of being retired, they went into property management for major chain hotels, working for Best Western, Holiday Inn, Red Lion, Motel 6, and Days Inn properties.

“We've worked at many hotel companies since 2003, but the Hoaglands (owners Gary and Loretta Hoagland of Hoagland Properties) are the most decent, generous people we've ever worked for. Theirs is not a high-pressure style like those of the big brand-name hotels where we've worked before. They listen to employee's ideas and are willing to implement them.

“They go out of their way to invest in their properties, and their people, unlike other companies we've worked for in the past.”

While the couple still maintains a home at Crooked River in Central Oregon, they have fully adopted Florence as their home.

“We have traveled a lot and stopped in Florence many times, and have stayed at The Old Town Inn,” said Sharon. “Florence was so friendly. We loved Old Town and the Antique District, there are so many great restaurants, and the weather was not as bad as people from outside the area say it is.”

“We have the best crew we've ever managed in our 14



Old Town Inn managers John and Sharon Birdwell (courtesy photo)

years in the hospitality business,” said John. “These kids care. Success in this business begins and ends with house-keeping, and our crew is outstanding.”

The Birdwells regularly led previous teams into the top 20 of the 6,000 Best Western properties in the US.

Housekeepers are rewarded every time the word “clean” appears on a guest comment card. The Birdwells will not release a room for use until it has been thoroughly inspected, even to the extent of staff getting down on their hands and knees with a flashlight to check under beds and chairs, and behind dressers and armoires.

A recent check of TripAdvisor, the world's largest travel website, shows The Old Town Inn as the top-rated of all Florence-area lodgings and in the top 20 of 222 lodgings on the Oregon Coast. Traveler's reviews regularly include words like “clean,” “immaculate,” “friendly,” “great bargain for the price,” “surprising find,” and “helpful staff.”

“We get guests from all over the US and from around the world,” says John. Adds Sharon, “We try to serve like a big-time hotel concierge, help-

ing guests find all the great stops for families or business travelers on the coast.”

“We are willing to research everything down to what each local restaurant has on special each evening. We will print maps, menus, and tide charts; make restaurant reservations; coordinate dune buggy, horseback, or airplane rides; and even organize golf foursomes,” John said.

About 18 months ago, Hoagland Properties, owners of The Old Town Inn and The River House Inn in Florence invested nearly three-quarters of a million dollars in makeovers for the two properties. The Old Town Inn's 40 rooms received numerous aesthetic and structural improvements including new beds, bedding, televisions, lounge chairs, and wall art, as well as professionally refurbished armoires, tables and desks.

The River House Inn received all new furnishings such as beds, bedding, armoires, granite countertops, tables, desks, lounge chairs, and televisions in its 40 rooms.

Both properties received new interior and exterior paint and sound-deadening floor coverings.

Traditional, organic basket exhibit in Newport

The Oregon Coast Council for the Arts is presenting works by Tillamook County artist Kathleen Kanas in the Oregon Coast Visual Artists Showcase (COVAS) at the Newport Visual Arts Center.

Kanas includes traditional and organic basketry in her exhibit, “Natural Fiber,” and is featured in an artist video documenting her work and process.

Kanas has been plying, plaiting and coiling natural fibers for more than 50 years.

Born and raised in Portland, she spent memorable times in the Pacific Northwest outdoors. These experiences developed her explorative nature, allowing use of a variety of materials that resulted in an array of styles.

Mostly self-taught, Kanas has taken workshops from well-known traditional Lummi weavers such as Frances James, Bruce Miller and Anna Jefferson, as well as Margaret Matthewson.

Kanas has resided in Manzanita, Ore., throughout her 25 years in elementary education, and she has devoted her extra time to discovering new materials and techniques that make her baskets special.

From early arts and crafts fairs to eventually opening and operating the 4th Street Studio and Gallery in Manzanita, Kanas continues to highlight the beauty and versatility of natural fibers found in life.

From spring through October, Kanas builds up her supply of materials. Near her home landscape she harvests akibia and wisteria vines, New Zealand flax and dracena leaves, and neighbors have helped by dropping off pruned Manzanita branches.

When the winds are westerly, a walk on Manzanita Beach can result in a batch of bull kelp or an interesting piece of driftwood that can be incorporated into her designs.

At low tide, nearby Nehalem Bay also offers up spruce or cedar roots that have made it downstream. Having traveled south and east in Oregon, she has collected western red cedar bark wild cherry bark, and bear grass in the Cascade Mountains' foothills; willow, cattail and tule along the Blitzen River; and Ponderosa pine needles near Bend, Ore.

Much of what Kanas collects requires a



A natural fiber basket made from kelp and created by Kathleen Kanas is now on display at the Newport Visual Arts Center (courtesy photo)

cleansing wash to remove dirt and critters, a wipe-down and drying-out period; she then sorts, and bundles or coils the material into manageable amounts and stores them until needed.

When ready to weave, the plant fibers need to become pliable again by soaking or moistening, the difference being in the density of the fiber.

Awards and recognition have followed Kanas and her basketry. In 2009, she was a featured artist on Oregon Public Broadcastings' “Art Beat.” In 1988, she was included in “Basic Weave,” a juried national exhibition in Athens, Ohio.

She has regularly shown in juried exhibitions such as the Beaverton Arts Showcase and the “Celebration of Creativity” exhibit, also located in Beaverton, Oregon. In 1986, she received the first place, mixed media award in the Kenai Art Guild's 20th Annual Juried Art Show in Kenai, Alaska.

The Covas Showcase is open from noon to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.

For more information, call 541-265-6569 or email vac@coastarts.org.

Health care in retirement doubtful

WASHINGTON, DC — AARP has released a new survey that says more than half of working Americans over age 50 (55 percent) don't believe they will have enough money for health care as they reach the age they expect to retire.

While Medicare only covers about half of health costs, 4-in-10 surveyed (38 percent) say they haven't saved anything at all for such expenses even though multiple studies show that these costs often reach more than \$200,000 for a retired couple.

AARP also found that among workers age 50 and older, most (57 percent) say they plan to work past the age of 65. Although AARP found that 68 percent believe they should begin saving at age 35 or younger, only 28 percent began saving at that age.

AARP's recently launched free online Health Care Costs Calculator, a major addition to its Ready for Retirement suite of planning tools, could help families and individuals of all ages plan for health savings.

The calculator is available to all for free at www.aarp.org/hccc.

“Our survey shows that Americans haven't planned enough for health expenses in retirement,” said AARP Vice President for Financial Security Debbie Banda. “Even though these costs can have a significant impact on retirement savings, families and individuals often struggle to save what they need because they are paying other necessary

expenses or helping to support other family members or loved ones.

“We hope that we can help people of all ages get a better handle on these expenses with AARP's free Health Care Costs Calculator.”

The Health Care Costs Calculator estimates health costs in retirement by utilizing a database that includes \$136 billion in costs from actual health care claims. Users can select from 82 medical conditions to estimate how much they may need to spend on out-of-pocket health care costs.

The calculator also assumes that individuals will be eligible for and select Medicare Parts A, B and D. After estimating costs with the calculator, users can create a customizable action plan to help save for health care in retirement and make lifestyle changes that could help reduce their out of pocket costs.

For example, if a person chooses “get to a healthier

weight” as a goal, the tool will show how that action can lower their predicted costs, as well as offer possible next steps for pursuing that goal.

“When faced with future health costs, many people are either overwhelmed or overconfident,” added Banda. “Thinking that your health care will be paid for by Medicare alone or avoiding health care planning altogether are not the right solutions. The more you know and plan for you and your family's health care, the better off you will be in the long run.”

The Health Care Costs Calculator requires no registration and collects no personal data on any user. To learn more about the tool visit www.aarp.org/hccc.

For the 2014 survey Planning for Health Care Costs in Retirement: A 2014 Survey of 50-plus Workers, telephone interviews were conducted by Woelfel Research, an independent research company.

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