

Siuslaw News
 P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

125TH ANNIVERSARY FLASHBACK

1890 | THE WEST ❖ FLORENCE TIMES ❖ THE SIUSLAW OAR ❖ THE SIUSLAW NEWS ❖ SIUSLAW NEWS | 2015

This year marks Siuslaw News' quasiquintennial, our 125th anniversary, a remarkable achievement for any business in a small community like Florence. To commemorate this milestone, throughout the year we'll feature some of the town's history as originally published in the newspaper, including historic articles and photos from more than a century ago. —Editor

Florence inspired Kesey

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Ken Kesey, a key figure in American literature and this year's grand marshal of the Rhododendron Festival, stopped by Arlene Lee's Bookstore on Bay Street last Saturday to autograph copies of his book "Sometimes a Great Notion."

The stop was unscheduled, heralded only by a small sign outside the store.

A group of about 20 people filtered into the store to get autographs and hear the author espouse his philosophy on writing. One bearded young man had come from the midwest just to see and hear Kesey.

Just when some were beginning to believe he might not show up, Kesey popped into the store.

After introductions, he seated himself behind a table and began autographing copies of his book.

Kesey has a rather unique way of autographing his books. He leafs through the pages and

chooses six words at random, linking them together in a sentence that is both sense and nonsense.

"It's the speech rhythm, the way language flows," said Kesey.

He explained that the words make no sense, yet the sentence sounds as if it does.

"We are losing our speech rhythms," said Kesey. "Our kids will have speech rhythms like Big Bird (a television character)."

As he swigged from a metal container filled with gin and tonic, Kesey explained, "'Sometimes a Great Notion' was an attempt to break up our speech patterns. A lot of us in the '60s were doing it."

He cited musical lyrics by John Lennon and Bob Dylan as examples of a writer's attempts to break up speech rhythms.

"English teachers now are suffering from the wrenching of the language in the '60s," he said.

Kesey, 43, said this is the first Rhododendron Festival he has attended in the past 15 years. He said that he used to come to the festivals when

he was younger.

He said he envies Florence for its festival. Pleasant Hill, where he lives, has no festival.

"The only thing like it is the Pendleton Roundup. Everyone has an equal chance to come participate," he said.

Kesey said he lived in a cabin on Mercer Lake in the early '60s while working in his brother's creamery. He spoke of drinking and playing billiards on Bay Street as music by Bob Dylan drifted across the street from the Beachcomber Inn. He spoke of exploring the old Sanburn house, located on an island in the Siuslaw River near Cushman.

A painting of the house had been the backdrop at the Rhododendron Festival Pageant the day before he visited.

"The house stands for resilience and steadfastness in the forces of nature," he said.

"My brother and I chased a bear out of the living room of that house," Kesey said.

He explained that the house and the bear more or less served for the inspiration of the

Stamper, the main characters of his book.

"That old bear was a lot like Hank Stamper," Kesey said. He also gives credit to this area for another inspiration: "A lot of the speech rhythms in my books come from here."

He said that fishermen and loggers provided him with most of the speech rhythms.

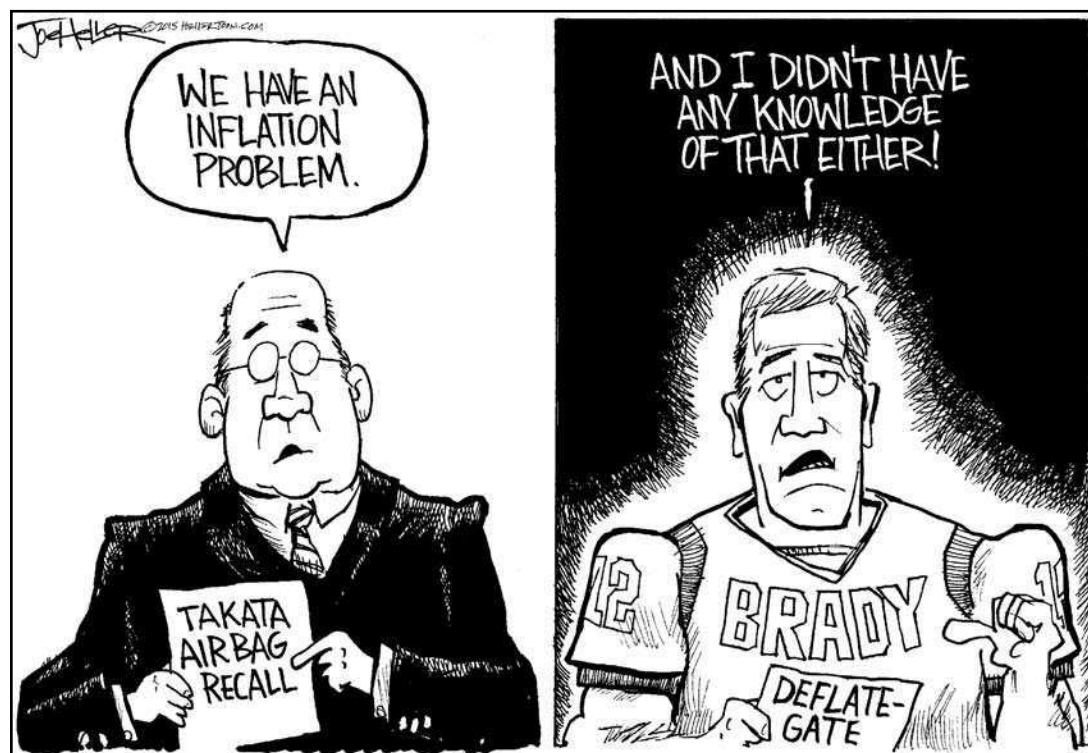
Now, he is working on a movie version of his book, "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test," the story of a cross country trip made by Kesey and some friends in 1964.

He said he shot some of the footage himself, and that part of the work has already been edited. The film is currently stalled in production, and it may be some time before the public will be able to view the movie.

"The Demon Box" is the title of Kesey's latest literary endeavor.

"I'm doing a lot of writing, but it hasn't been put together in a cohesive unit," he said.

Kesey said the work is a collection of plays and stories which have been written over a long period of time. ❖



VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

I would like to address a comment made by Al Pearn in a letter of support for candidates running for the Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue board ("Vote Carnahan, Phillips," May 16).

While I fully support Mr. Pearn's right to publically support the candidates of his choice, I feel it is important that when making public statements about our fire district that factual information is provided.

He stated that during recent months 18 of our 36 volunteer firefighters have resigned. The truth of the matter is that we currently have 33 volunteer firefighters on our roster, and since December we have lost four. Three have moved out of the area and one is on a leave of absence.

We have a recruit academy scheduled for June 6 and have eight new prospective volunteers we hope

GUEST VIEWPOINT
 BY JIM LANGBORG
 FIRE CHIEF, SIUSLAW VALLEY FIRE AND RESCUE

to train and bring on board.

Like most volunteer fire departments, we struggle to recruit and retain volunteers. Our records show that over the past six years our district has averaged the recruitment of 16 volunteer firefighters per year. Unfortunately, during this same time period, we have averaged a loss of 20 volunteers per year.

Why the disproportion? Many move or find that the demands of being a volunteer firefighter are more than they can fit into an already busy life. Being a volunteer firefighter is like no other volunteer job. The time commitment and physical demands are tremendous.

The challenge of recruiting and retaining quality volunteers is not unique to our district. It's also a problem in the state of Oregon and throughout our nation.

Our volunteer firefighters are our greatest asset and we rely on them to provide service to our community. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is a top priority for our district and I have taken many steps to address this challenge.

Of most significance, I have budgeted for a part-time volunteer coordinator to be funded at 20 hours per week. In the past, the district has funded this position at four hours per week.

I also have submitted a grant to FEMA to fund a full-time volunteer coordinator that if approved would not only support SVFR, but would also provide service to Mapleton and Swisshome/Deadwood fire districts. The volunteer coordinator's primary responsibility is to focus on recruiting, training and taking care of our volunteers.

In closing, I would like to remind our public of what your volunteer firefighters do for you. They selflessly give of their time and regularly put themselves in harm's way to serve you.

They get up in the middle of night while you're asleep to respond to your emergency needs, but they still show up for work in the morning just like you.

Please join me in appreciating and thanking the volunteers we have for all that they do for us.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous and anonymous letters as well as poetry will not be published.

All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

Write to:
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