

**Siuslaw News**  
P.O. Box 10  
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# Opinion

## EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE  
For the Siuslaw News

### Holiday heroes



It's Christmas morning and there's much to be done. There are meals to serve, rooms to clean, dishes to wash, gas tanks to fill, fires to put out, phones to answer, items to ring up and patients requiring immediate medical attention.

Somebody's gotta do it. While we were still snug in our beds with visions of sugar plums dancing in our heads, some creatures began stirring around town, making their lists and checking them twice.

While we ate ourselves silly and made merry, these holiday heroes merrily made their way to hospitals and hotels, mini marts and supermarkets, assisted living centers and emergency dispatch centers, restaurants and resorts, covering the holiday shift so co-workers could spend it with their families.

At 7 a.m. Florence resembles a ghost town with empty parking lots and Highway 101 void of traffic. Yet good cheer prevails among these holiday workers manning their often demanding public stations.

"I'm having a great time," says Dustin, a cashier at 7-11. "There's been a real jovial spirit and people have been really gracious. For me, every day's a holiday. Working Christmas is no big deal."

Some cashiers have been on duty since 6 a.m., ready to ring up last-minute purchases — more tape to wrap gifts, another jar of gravy or dessert for a holiday gathering. While many worked for the extra buck, most volunteered so others could have the day off.

By 9 a.m. the pace quickens at Driftwood Shores Resort. Housekeepers clean rooms while front desk manager Debbie Fleeman

helps guests. An 18-year resort veteran, she has worked most holidays.

"I really love people and want our guests to enjoy the holidays," she says. "If I can be a part of that, then it brings joy to my heart."

Over at the Surfside Restaurant, servers set tables and cooks hover over sizzling hot grills, preparing for one of their busiest days of the year. From no-shows to kitchen snafus, food service can pose a daunting task on the holidays. Yet everyone maintains a holiday spirit in spite of it all.

"We'll serve about 250 people today and our job is to make them happy," says Katie Burch, front of the house manager. "I don't mind it at all."

Server Cindy Kwiatkowski has been working Christmas for several years now.

"Despite the burning feet, there's a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day, knowing we gave everyone a good time," she says.

There's no shortage of holiday spirit at the Elks Lodge, where an army of volunteers gears up for the Herculean task of preparing and serving 850 meals at its annual Community Appreciation Dinner.

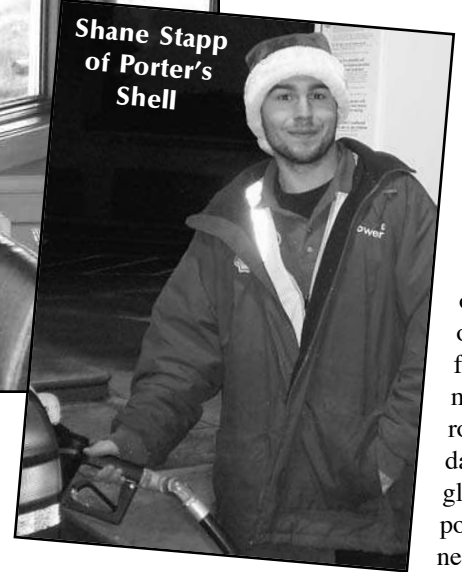
"It's so gratifying," says Elks spokesman Howard Ziebell. "It gives you a feeling like you've never had before."

As 326 diners fill the vast hall in one seating, the Lodge looks like a loaves-and-fishes scene from some epic Hollywood Biblical flick. By some small miracle, 75 volunteers will serve 850 meals in just three hours.

**Katie Burch**  
of Surfside Restaurant  
at Driftwood Shores



**Beth DeGuire**  
of Three Rivers  
Casino Resort



**Shane Stapp**  
of Porter's  
Shell

PHOTOS BY CATHERINE ROURKE

"I'm elated to be part of something that really matters and makes a difference in our community," says co-chair

and head cook Julie Brown, who arrived at 4 a.m. along with other volunteers. The Lodge is bursting with joy as happy faces and peals of laughter flood the room.

Meanwhile, it's another day of 24-7 emergency and on-call response for police, firefighter, ambulance and medical crews across town.

Pharmacist Marsha Day holds the fort this holiday like she has for 25 years at PeaceHealth Peace Harbor Medical Center, where dozens of hospital staff and on-call personnel will cover three shifts.

"I don't think I've ever had one off and it's mostly been by choice," she says. "It's integral to me that my co-workers enjoy Christmas with their families."

The non-retail pharmacy serves emergency department outpatients as well as hospital patients, keeping

Marsha busy on the holidays.

"It still feels like I'm at home since we're one big hospital family here," she notes.

Then there's Kathryn Haworth, a registered nurse who volunteered to work a 24-hour shift at PeaceHealth Home Health and Hospice.

"I wanted to be available because I know how busy all the other nurses are," she says. "I've been a nurse for 50 years and I love every minute of what I do. I can celebrate Christmas any day and would rather celebrate my patients and co-workers."

By mid-afternoon, a bevy of slot attendants, security guards, food service workers and gaming personnel flit about Three Rivers Casino Resort. Line cook Beth DeGuire has been prepping salads and desserts at World Market Buffet since 11 a.m., and will continue until about 9 p.m. She's another holiday hero who volunteered so a co-worker could spend Christmas with her 1-year-old daughter.

"I think it's only fair for people with kids to have the holiday off,"

Beth said. "Making people happy is my top priority on any day of the year."

By nightfall, temperatures plummet close to freezing. Over at Porter's Shell, cashier Ron Mason, a father of three, says he's happy to work on Christmas. Outside,

gas attendant Shane Stapp works the pump in a Santa hat, filling tanks and braving the cold until midnight with a smile.

Where would our city be without these wonderful people who make our world go round on the holidays? They fill our glasses and tanks, pour cups of kindness and rush to our aid, many doing it for minimum wage and some for no wage at all.

Here's to all the extraordinary holiday heroes who rose on Christmas morning or worked a chilly night to serve us and will do so again on the New Year — people like Brian Davis of River Cities Taxi who drove passengers to and from the Elks Lodge at no charge, the medical personnel and church ministers, the pet-sitters, the dishwashers, janitors and other "unknown soldiers" and invisible elves.

Florence thanks you for your good cheer, remarkable resilience and spirit of giving.

Happy holidays!

*Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning writer, journalist and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. She may be contacted at CJReditor@gmail.com.*

## NEIGHBORS



### Long hiatus — Part II

BOB JACKSON  
NEIGHBORHOOD CORRESPONDENT  
For the Siuslaw News

Fleeting images caught by the mind's eye are often badly skewed by our imagination. And so has it been with the occasional appearance of the Friends of Florence cancer bus, en route or returning from treatment, which always left me with a feeling of sadness for the unfortunate souls confined inside. This misconception was to change dramatically.

When I stepped aboard for my first journey to Eugene, I was confronted by a busload of happy, smiling faces, and warmly greeted as if we were old friends. Without a notepad I was unable to record their names; however, one of them made

it easy for me. She was acting as a caregiver, escorting a gentleman in a wheelchair, plus aiding anyone else needing assistance.

"Think camera," she said with a wide smile, "replace the 'c' with a 't,' and you have my name — Tamera!"

I had a lively conversation with an extremely attractive young lady across from me, her large, luminous eyes glowed with good humor. Her forehead appeared large and slick as a billiard ball because of a complete absence of hair, including eyelashes. We joked about it and she laughingly remarked that what she missed the most was losing her nose hair.

"Without nose hair," she said, "there is nothing to stop nasal drip, and it runs off my chin like a snot-nosed little kid. It is embarrassing!"

Time passed quickly on the comfortable bus, and as we turned off onto Country Club Road we were impressed with the neighborhood of impeccably landscaped professional buildings.

Willamette Valley Cancer Institute had none of the harsh austere appearance of a medical facility. From the very beginning, everything was warm and friendly. We were ushered into a waiting room that was complete with hot coffee and tea.

I had barely settled in, when a tall smiling young man appeared like in that old TV show, and loudly announced "come on down." And with that, he led me down a long hallway to a waiting hard-backed chair.

Everywhere there were more and more of the ominous warning signs: "Danger — Radiation!"

After removing my upper clothing, I was given a warm blanket, which they much too quickly removed and led me into a room and onto a cold table, where mysterious lines were drawn upon my chest with an ink pen in the neighborhood of my cancerous tumor. Other locations were precisely marked and referred to as "Tattoos."

At some point after being jostled by pillows and wedged into an exact position, the medical people left the room, and I was at the mercy of the unfathomable workings of the radiation procedure. Absolutely none of which I understood.

What happened next was so bizarre it defies description. As I lay bare-chested with my hands clasped high above my head, a large, thin,

plate-shaped disc with blinking lights slowly emerged from beneath my resting place. It hovered there, blinking and humming, then disappeared, as another one came out from under the other side of the slab and repeated the humming and clicking sounds. Like something right out of a science fiction magazine.

It was a brief interlude, and then the attendants reappeared. I was given another warm blanket and escorted from the scene. This procedure was repeated for all four weeks of treatment.

With two sessions to go, I was told that I had enough and could stop. It was a big relief, as I was feeling worse every week.

I was forewarned about the cumulative after effects of the radiation. I had no idea of how really bad it would become in the weeks ahead. More to come.

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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.

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