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# Siuslaw News

126TH YEAR | ISSUE NO. 30

SERVING WESTERN LANE COUNTY SINCE 1890

FLORENCE, OREGON

## 20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

# Making a SPLASH!

More than 750 people 'dance' with sea lions for Florence Events Center's Splash Off!

**F**lorence Events Center (FEC) is celebrating its 20th year with Dancing with Sea Lions, a public art program that will feature 20 hand-decorated fiberglass sea lions from Reedsport to Newport and locations throughout Florence.

On April 8, the FEC held an artist reception for the Dancing with Sea Lions artists, committee members, sponsors, underwriters and the Friends of the FEC before the free Splash Off! event on April 9. About 750 people viewed the sea lions during the two days.

Jennifer Connor, FEC marketing specialist and project coordinator, loved that the project

makes art accessible. "I keep going back to our original theme, that the arts have a ripple effect on the community. Art reaches out to all ages, and this project will reach out to all ages too," Connor said.

FEC Director Kevin Rhodes opened the artist reception, where all 20 full-sized sea lions filled the flat floor of the events center. "Thank you for joining us for the 20-year anniversary of the Florence Events Center. It's been quite an incredible time," he said.

Rhodes said the FEC continues to host local and regional events. By the end of this year, the tally will total 8,000 events.

See **FEC 9A**



PHOTOS BY CHANTELLE MEYER/SIUSLAW NEWS



JACK DAVIS/SIUSLAW NEWS

Top, artist Kassy Keppol and her husband Danial stand with "Diver's Story." Far left, FEC Director Kevin Rhodes, Project Coordinator Jennifer Connor and Friends of the FEC President Margaret McDiarmid pose with "Porter Performs," by artist Colleen Goodwin-Chronister. Above and at left, spectators check out the art.

# Pepperoaks Park reopens with new upgrades

City secures grants to improve accessibility and play equipment

BY CHANTELLE MEYER  
Siuslaw News

**S**lides, swings and climbing structures are all part of the reopened Pepperoaks Park, located in the 34th Place cul-de-sac.

The City of Florence and Mayor Joe Henry held a ceremony April 8 to open the park after upgrades.

More than 20 families and their children, volunteers and city officials attended the reopening.

Henry thanked Public Works staff for securing grants for the new play equipment, including a new play structure, two slides, a climbing structure, a swingset, wood fiber fall surfacing and a handicap accessible ramp. He also thanked volunteers from Oregon Pacific Bank.

"It was certainly a worthwhile project and one that was on its list of 50 things to do for our community," Henry said.

Mike Webb, Oregon Pacific Bank vice president commercial relationship officer, said, "We made a pledge internally to give back to our community. The city identified a need for volunteers, so we helped out."

Ellen Huntingdon, bank marketing coordinator, said the bank is creating a culture of volunteerism. Employees are encouraged to take four hours out of their work time every month to volunteer.

"We were spurred to do acts of kindness by our 35th anniversary in 2014," Huntingdon said. "We're trying to keep active in volunteer activities."

According to Webb, 10 bank volunteers helped set up and level the play equipment in March after Public Works drilled holes. Their help left the park



ready for concrete and the final layer of wood fiber.

At the park, Henry also thanked park neighbors and other community members for their volunteer time and energy to get the park finished.

Then, he was the first down the slide. "That is just awesome," he said.

**Oregon Pacific Bank volunteers helped Public Works install the new play structures at Pepperoaks Park. At right, neighborhood youth jumped at the chance to try the new equipment.**



PHOTOS BY CHANTELLE MEYER/SIUSLAW NEWS

# Florence named 'most beautiful' town in America

BY CHANTELLE MEYER  
Siuslaw News

Expedia, an online travel website, has ranked Florence first among the top 30 beautiful towns in the United States.

Expedia staff writer Chloe Mulliner published "The 30 Most Beautiful Towns in America" on April 8.

"While it's impossible to tell you which destination is the prettiest in the land, we did rank 30 of the most beautiful towns in America," she wrote.

Mulliner's article spoke of the attractions, landscape and charm around each town on her list.

In the No. 1 spot, she referred to Florence as "an attractive waterfront town at the mouth of the Siuslaw River ... surrounded by scenic vistas."

Mulliner drew comparisons to J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth — in reference to the Hobbit Trail — pointed out area forests and greenery, the rugged coastline, sand dunes, hiking, Sea Lion Caves and more.

The top 10 on Mulliner's list featured locations in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, South Carolina, Washington and West Virginia.

The Expedia article about Florence comes on the tail of being voted "People's Choice" for best Oregon coast getaway by The Oregonian earlier this year.