

Siuslaw News
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Opinion

FLORENCE FLASHBACK

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FIREWORKS, WEEKEND EVENTS LIGHT UP FLORENCE

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When the smell of burning sparklers and the bursting flashes of fireworks subsided Monday, July 4, tired business owners, local residents and tourists indicated that the small community of Florence once again staged a successful Independence Day Festival.

“People have been commenting on how amazing it is that a small community like Florence can put on such a spectacular fireworks display,” said Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Secretary Becky Ruede.

Area motels, businesses and attendance at various events seemed to agree with chamber statistics that measure favorably with past Fourth of July weekends.

The Port of Siuslaw’s annual barbecue, with the help of port officials and members of the Florence Yacht Club, Triangle Lake Booster Club and the chamber, filled more than 1,000 plates with sticky chicken, beef ribs, corn on the cob, cole slaw and baked beans.

All proceeds, after expenses, which included four portable toilets — much to the relief of the large crowd that strolled Old Town — will be donated to the chamber’s fireworks fund.

Donations are the chamber’s major source of funding for the Fourth of July fireworks. This year saw 330 fireworks, as well as additional insurance.

“Both tourists and local residents enjoy an exciting display free of charge because we get great support from donating businesses and individuals,” said Tom Grove, one of the event organizers.

The Florence Area Chamber of Commerce annually sponsors the fireworks display. Recent years saw the relocation of the display from the sand dunes to the Siuslaw River. The fireworks are now set off from a barge anchored mid-river across from the Port of Siuslaw’s dock and marina. The use of the barge is donated by Ocean Way Barge and Tug.

An indication of success was a strong turnout of participants and spectators who lined Maple Street in Old Town for the fourth annual World Championship Stilt Walking Contest.

Forty-five contestants signed up and more than 30 actually competed while supportive crowds cheered on their favorites.

Kiwanian Steve Olienyk coached one stilt walker the whole way.

Area businesses also confirmed the positive results of the holiday weekend. An informal survey by the Siuslaw News indicated that business was good, slightly above expectations and a little better than past years.

One of the Oregon coast’s biggest attractions, Sea Lion Caves experienced a 10 percent increase from the same period of time last year.

“It was a good weekend,” said Sea Lion Caves Manager Hod Johnson. “Looks like it will be a very good summer.” ❖



SIUSLAW NEWS FILE PHOTO

July 4, 1988: Like bombs bursting in air, fireworks explode above the Florence waterfront Monday night.

Improving Lane County’s financial stability

The Oregon Secretary of State’s Office recently announced that it has removed Lane County from its watch list of “high-risk” counties for the first time since it began reviewing the financial health of Oregon’s 36 counties in 2012.

The announcement, combined with Lane County’s high bond rating, low debt and strong financial management practices, provides an objective verification of the work Lane County is doing to responsibly manage limited taxpayer resources and invest in critical services that make our community safe, healthy and vibrant.

We readily acknowledge the scarcity of resources in Lane County, created by the steady decline in federal timber receipts and the recent end of federal Secure Rural Schools funding, as well as one of the lowest county property tax rates in the state. In fact, over the past decade federal funding to Lane County has declined by 91 percent.

Rather than focusing on what we can’t do, Lane County is responding to steep federal funding declines by focusing on what we can do: creating long-term financial stability through a structurally balanced budget and enhancing critical services for our residents.

The recent unanimous adoption of next year’s Lane County budget is another positive indicator of the county’s future outlook. A multi-million dollar structural budget gap has been substantially reduced with no layoffs and no reductions in critical services to residents.

Significant strides are being made by reducing employee health insurance costs, reducing vehicle and equipment costs and working to lower interest rate costs to taxpayers by using one-time resources to reduce debt. As a result of

these targeted efforts, Lane County has realized a significant reduction in health insurance claims and multi-million dollar annual budget savings.

While we continue these cost-saving efforts, we also recognize our obligation to taxpayers to invest in the fundamental services that make our community safer, healthier and more vibrant. One example of this is completion of phase one of the Board of Commissioner’s 10-Year Public Safety Plan to maintain services, such as 24-hour sheriff’s patrols, criminal prosecution, parole and probation, youth services and human services.

Looking ahead, several new targeted investments will enhance the public safety system. Building upon the great work of the District Attorney’s Office in prosecuting over 800 additional felonies over the past year, we are adding two new positions that will allow for the prosecution of 400 more cases per year.

We are also enhancing mental health services that specifically engage individuals in the corrections system in on-going treatment, as well as connections to community based services upon release. Investments in a new community crisis center, CAHOOTS and crisis respite housing are aimed at addressing the needs of individuals who are frequent utilizers of crisis, jail and emergency services.

The goal of enhancing these services is to reduce the number of individuals continuously

cycling through the corrections system and connect those individuals with proven treatment services that break the cycle of crime.

The 2013 voter-approved jail levy has had a significant impact on improving public safety in our community. Currently, there are 317 jail beds available for local offenders in Lane County, 62 more beds than required by the county’s promise to voters. The Sheriff’s Office continues to ensure that the most violent offenders remain in custody as long as required by the courts. Capacity-based releases have dropped by 65 percent and no Measure 11 or violent offenders have been released pre-trial due to capacity issues.

Independent audits have found that the county has complied with all requirements of the levy. Fiscal responsibility in managing taxpayer resources has resulted in lower than anticipated jail expenses in the first two years of the levy, and several jail revenue sources have exceeded amounts projected prior to voter approval of the levy. These factors have led Lane County to reduce the amount of property taxes collected from taxpayers for the jail levy over the next two years.

While many of our core public safety services remain underfunded and additional state and federal support is needed, we are focused on creating long-term stability and enhancing services for the community.

The Secretary of State’s removal of Lane

County from the watch list of “high risk” counties in Oregon verifies that Lane County’s financial stability is improving. As always, we are thankful for the support and engagement of residents throughout Lane County and are committed to solving the challenges ahead.

Commissioner Faye Stewart represents East Lane County and is currently the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners. County Administrator Steve Mokrohisky was appointed by the Board of Commissioners in 2014 and serves as the chief administrator for Lane County.

GUEST VIEWPOINT

BY FAYE STEWART, LANE COUNTY COMMISSIONER,
 & STEVE MOKROHISKY, LANE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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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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