

**Siuslaw News**  
**P.O. Box 10**  
**Florence, OR 97439**

# Opinion

## EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE  
 For the Siuslaw News

### Gayle Waiss



**I**ndefatigable. That sums up the spirit and essence of 2015 Florence First Citizen Gayle Waiss. But the long-time youth services librarian and community volunteer shuns any praises and never imagined receiving accolades for her efforts.

In fact, she would rather help kids spell such words instead of using them to describe her.

"It's just what I do every day," Waiss said. "Kids and literacy are my lifelong passions."

An assistant director of the Siuslaw Public Library District for the past 20 years, Waiss said she was stunned when she was nominated last year. Presented as part of the annual Siuslaw Awards, the First Citizen distinction honors individuals who demonstrate selfless involvement to community service.

"I was humbled and speechless when the announcement came," Waiss said. "People don't volunteer for notoriety but because we truly love helping others."

That dedication has built a long roster of volunteer board posts, including six years at Rotary, another six at Habitat for Humanity, plus 10 years at the Friends of South Coast Kids Foundation.

Waiss has also served for the past three years as the volunteer execu-

tive director of the Western Lane Community Foundation, as well as a board member for an additional six years, with a mission to improve quality of life through philanthropic activity.

The nonprofit organization administers charitable funds to benefit residents in western Lane County through education, culture, medicine, science and social and civic services.

While Waiss has focused her leadership on making a difference for youths in Florence and Mapleton, the work really began in Montana more than half a century ago.

Growing up in Great Falls, Mont., Waiss learned about selfless service at a young age when she became the "eyes and ears" for two family members.

After her dad lost his sight in an accident, she carefully followed his instructions for plumbing, painting and repairs around the house while also serving as an interpreter for her deaf brother.

"Those family circumstances truly got me to where I am today," she said. "It made me very expressive and taught me to listen, think outside the box and view things from different perspectives."

It also made Waiss a lifelong volunteer. At age 14, she became a Cub Scout leader for deaf and blind kids



PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE  
**Gayle Waiss devotes her life to kids and literacy as the Youth Services Librarian and Assistant Director of the Siuslaw Public Library District.**

and coached a basketball team for deaf girls. Next, she assisted Theatre of Silence, a group of deaf students who perform shows across the West using sign language.

Armed with a scholarship, a loan and two jobs, Waiss worked her way through college, earning an education degree in just three years. She married right after graduation and taught grades K through 8.

"Teaching middle school was my favorite," she said. "I don't always behave my age, so I could relate to the kids."

While raising three of her own,

life took a turn in 1997 when her husband's job brought the family to Florence. Waiss found it offered the ideal community for her young daughters, encouraging them to pursue extracurricular activities such as sports, choir and the school band.

"My kids were my greatest challenge and my greatest reward," she said. "They've made as much of a difference in my life as I did in theirs."

Waiss also volunteered at the schools to help children with everything from math and reading to crafts and track.

"These activities bring out the best in people," she said. "They also develop great work ethics. School isn't just about achieving A's in academics."

Waiss started working at the Siuslaw Public Library District circulation desk and then found herself in collection development. That's when she decided to pursue a master's in library science.

"Librarians have such a unique profession; we can find anything," Waiss said. "I love my job, whether reading to toddlers, helping kids select a book or hosting the summer reading program. I make an impact on young lives every day."

In addition to her role at the library and as a wife, mother and volunteer, Waiss paid her way through school, bought a home and built a business with her husband at the Beachcomber.

In the evenings and on weekends, she helped run the family business, turning it into a community hub to make a difference by hosting scholarship fundraisers and bicycle giveaways for kids' causes.

Where does she get her energy?

"I've always been this way," she said with a laugh. "I work hard, play hard and sleep hard. I attribute it to my passion for kids and the community. But I'm not a one-woman show and couldn't have done it without the support of my family, friends and work staff. Florence gave me the opportunity to blossom."

What's next for Florence's 2015 First Citizen?

"What matters most in life is making a difference, whether for kids, dogs or the environment," she said. "Volunteering is about paying it forward. I'll never stop doing what I love. The work keeps going for kids, my family and for Florence. I just prefer to save the limelight for those under five."

*Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning journalist, author and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance.*

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## LETTERS

### DEEPEST GRATITUDE

The recent Women's March in Florence was a wonderful collaborative event. We would like to express our gratitude to David and Rosemary Lauria for graciously allowing us to gather at the Class Act Theatre (CAT). We want to thank Ron Preisler on the City Council for opening

the FEC to us when the tremendous response of marchers exceeded the capacity of the CAT.

We want to acknowledge Chief Tom Turner of the Florence police force for helping the marchers cross Highway 101. Thank you, also, to Siuslaw News for giving us excellent coverage.

A group of dedicated women distributed information to let people know Florence was going to be represented among the marchers of the world. We had a great team: Denise Weatherwax, Ruth Baumrucker, Sarah Budaki and Patty Godwin.

We could not have organized this wonderful event without Rand and Kathryn Dawson, who guided us through the basics on how to organize. Stu and Joann Henderson contributed many of the beautiful signs we carried. The program presented excellent speakers in Annie Schmidt, who added her MC magic; Tres Eberhard, who spoke on women's reproductive rights; Bob Teter of SOS gave an eye-opening view of homelessness; April Dumas, who spoke on the need to live within an inclusive social structure in order to combat prejudice; and John Raymonda, who spoke on economic justice and a living wage.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to all these amazing people for making this such a successful and positive event.

*Nin Bebeau*  
 Women's March organizer  
 Florence

### IN JUXTAPOSITION

Dear Siuslaw News, I love your style! Thank you ever so much for the excellent coverage of third-grade election.

I applaud teacher Dolly Green for her enthusiasm for teaching as it should be done. I also applaud the students for their energy and involvement in learning the election process.

Your "Where to Write" addition to the paper is one more step closer to helping people become involved in the government that affects their lives and property — you gave us the "easy button" for access to our government officials.

I would like to suggest one more permanent addition to the page. Please highlight the First Amendment as part of the "Where to Write" box. This would be a permanent reminder that Congress cannot restrict the press or rights of individuals to speak freely; that the people have the right to assemble peaceably and petition their government; and that it forbids the promotion of one religion over another while protecting the practice of religion.

We have been hearing the term "fascism" when describing the direction of some members of Congress.

In juxtaposition to our U.S. Constitution, I am including "The 14 Characteristics of Fascism." (below)

This list is an antithesis to our form of government and people should be aware of what determines a fascist government.

Thank you!

*Karen Mahoney*  
 Florence

**(Editor's note:** The "14 Characteristics of Fascism" is from the article "Fascism Anyone?" written by political scientist Dr. Laurence W. Britt. It first appeared in the magazine *Free Inquiry* March 31, 2003, and was based on studying the fascist regimes of Hitler

(Germany), Mussolini (Italy), Franco (Spain), Suharto (Indonesia) and Pinochet (Chile). Dr. Britt found they all had the following 14 common elements.)

### The 14 Characteristics of Fascism

- 1) Powerful and continuing Nationalism
- 2) Disdain for the recognition of Human Rights
- 3) Identification of enemies and scapegoats used as a unifying cause
- 4) Supremacy of the military
- 5) Rampant sexism
- 6) Control of — or discrediting of — mass media.
- 7) Obsession with national security
- 8) Religion and government become intertwined
- 9) Corporate power is protected and even expanded
- 10) Labor power is suppressed
- 11) Disdain for intellectuals, the Arts and forms of creative expression.
- 12) Rampant cronyism and corruption
- 13) Obsession with crime and punishment
- 14) Fraudulent elections

### The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

## 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 or poetry will not be published.

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

Write to:  
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