

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

# Opinion

## EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE  
For the Siuslaw News

### Don and Pat Stewart



Working on his feet all day as the former owner-manager of local markets never stopped Don Stewart from stepping up to lend somebody a hand. Nor did running around as a working mom with three boys deter his wife, Pat, from going the extra mile to help others.

Together, the couple has devoted more than 50 years to numerous local causes.

"In a grocery store, you're never sitting on your rear," Don said.

"We've always worked and love being busy," Pat added.

"Volunteering keeps us active, meeting new people and enjoying new experiences."

But it was when they retired more than a dozen years ago that they dramatically expanded their charitable efforts. In 2007, the couple received a Florence First Citizen of the Year award for their combined volunteer endeavors.

"Florence is such a generous community full of so many people who just keep on giving," Don said.

"And it's amazing how the town is run by volunteers," said Pat. "These big hearts are everywhere you look."

As the scholarship chair and board secretary of Western Lane Community Foundation, Pat and her fellow volunteers recently awarded \$38,000 in college and vocational education scholarships to 23 local high school students.

The foundation also manages grant funding for area nonprofits.

"These endowments are established by a multitude of communitywide donors through the foundation," Pat explained. "It's about local people helping local people."

While that may sound like enough volunteering to keep her busy, Pat's heart-felt outreach doesn't end there. She delivers Meals on Wheels every Wednesday and serves as a deacon at New Life Lutheran Church.

A former human resources administrator at Peace Harbor Medical Center who continued working part-time after retirement, Pat has committed 35 years to the hospital. In tandem with her full-time job, she was a founding member of the local Soroptimists, treasurer for SEAcost Entertainment, membership chair of Friends of the Library and a Food Share volunteer for several years.

Pat also conducted fundraising for the Hospital Auxiliary and served as a longtime board member of Habitat for Humanity.

Meanwhile, her husband kept busy beyond stocking the shelves. Don has been a member of Rotary Florence for 49 years, serving as its president from 1974-75, and remains active on the foundation board to this day. After retiring in 2005, he began helping Habitat for

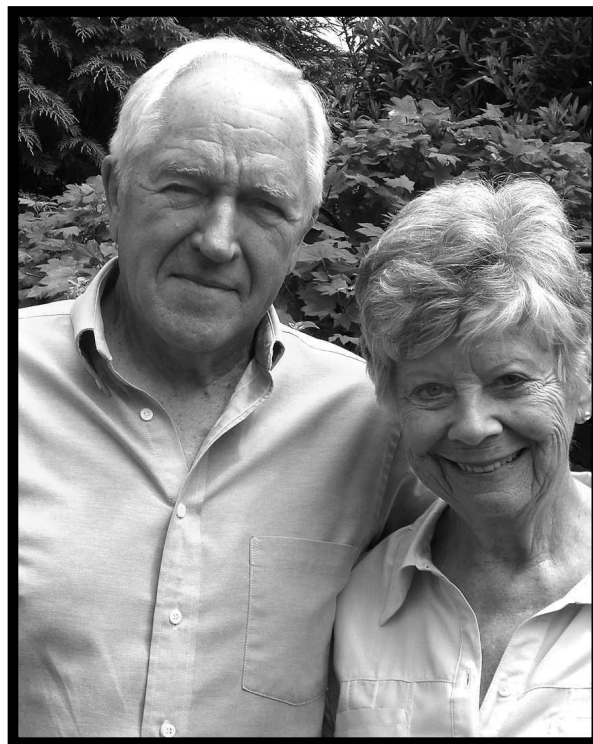


PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

**Don and Pat Stewart have devoted more than 50 years of volunteering service to the Florence community.**

Humanity, eventually serving as its president for two years.

But Don didn't just sit on boards. Instead, he hammered, painted, installed roofs and laid concrete for Habitat construction projects as well.

"I've been working with Habitat for as long as they would have me," Don said with a laugh.

"When I first started there, we were building house number 10. This year we finished house number 28."

But just like his wife, one volunteer project isn't enough for Don. He delivered Meals on Wheels, sat on the Dunes City Planning Commission, devoted six years to

the Food Share board and another six years on the Habitat board while serving eight years on the Lane County Boundary Commission — a position appointed by the governor.

How did the full-time working parents find the time for so much volunteering?

"I saw volunteering as the time we spent sitting on the bleachers at school functions when the kids were young," Don said. "We always made time for our children, so once they're grown, you just channel that time into community projects."

"You don't figure it out; you just do it because you love it," Pat said. "It feels so good when you deliver a meal or give in some way. I get so much more back than I give."

As Oregon natives, Don and Pat have roots deeply planted in community spirit. Don began his retail grocery career as a box boy in 1956 and met Pat in high school that same year. After serving in the Navy at Okinawa, he married Pat and became an assistant manager for an IGA market in Corvallis before transferring as manager of its Florence store in 1962.

Don eventually bought the business and ran it with a partner before purchasing the Heceta Market, which he ran for 23 years.

"I never felt like an outsider here," said Don, noting that Florence at the time bustled as a

fishing and logging town. "It was a wonderful and accepting place."

For Pat, "it was the other end of the world for a girl from Portland."

With a background as a legal secretary, she worked for a local insurance company as well as the Chamber of Commerce before becoming executive secretary to the administrator and board at Western Lane Hospital.

Her position then evolved into human resources administration when the new hospital opened in 1990.

"I've been here for 55 years and love it," she said. "I'm really just a small-town girl."

Now more than a dozen years past retirement with nine grandchildren, the Stewarts have no plans of slowing down.

"There's nothing better than giving to people in need," Don said. "When you see the gratitude in the families and the positive changes in the children we house at Habitat, it is so rewarding."

Pat echoes the same sense of deep satisfaction that volunteering bestows.

"Paying it forward and giving it away is the most wonderful thing," she said. "Gratitude for everything is the key to a good life."

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

## LETTERS

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. 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, argumentative and anonymous letters or poetry, or letters from outside our readership area will not be published.

Send letters to:  
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### NO PARTISAN PERSPECTIVE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In America's current hyper partisan environment, where one's "Blue vs. Red" perspective often trumps reality, it seems historic fact, basic economics or scientific knowledge are conveniently overlooked when necessary.

These partisan "realities" explain why many Americans seem willing to disregard their own observations and common sense when they conflict with their sociopolitical beliefs.

The debate over climate change is one example of this. While most scientists and 190 of 192 of the world's governments support the CO2-related Global Warming conclusions of the Paris Climate Accord, there are those who are climate change deniers simply because of partisanship. This even occurs in the rural midwest, where some of the very same deniers of climate change have witnessed its effect first hand.

For example, the Gulf Coast of the Mississippi Delta, where some of the fastest rising sea levels anywhere are observed — almost 6 inches since 2005.

Yet, residents of this same area, when interviewed, exhibit one of the highest rates of climate change denial — with many responding that this phenomenon is a "hoax."

It's going to be hard to overlook climate change from under water.

—Jeffrey Shear  
Florence

### PUBLIC DISCOURSE AT A NEW LOW

Regarding the recent letter "Toxic Rhetoric Leads To Real Violence" (June 28), it seems to me the writer misunderstands the role of a free press in a democratic republic.

Its purpose is to report — and comment as opinion — on those in power to keep them accountable to the public. The press's responsibility is not to act as cheerleaders or propagandists; that is the role of the press in author-

itarian countries.

Also, if I were in the writer's position, I would think twice before accusing the newspaper and "the left" of toxic rhetoric after my candidate built his political image on what I see as vile smears that brought civil discourse down to a new low.

— Rollin Olson  
Florence

### 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.

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