

Wings & Wheels weekend



PHOTOS BY JARED ANDERSON AND MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

Power from 1A

"This is Kaylee's seventh and final year of organizing the Power of Florence," Shannon said. "Seventh-grader Ava Glowacki will officially be taking over the Power of Florence next year. They are working together as a team again this year, and the work will continue."

Instilling the spirit of caring in the community is one of the main benefits of the Power of Florence, according to Mayor Joe Henry.

"From the efforts of an amazing young person and with the support of her family, the Power of Florence

has grown from an ambitious idea to a real force in the City of Florence," Henry stated. "I am very proud of Kaylee and Ava Glowacki and her family. ... I am also proud and thankful for all the volunteers and the support of business and organizations in the community. This is the spirit that makes Florence the premier coastal city that is."

The spirit the mayor refers to has been important to the many 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations in town that have been the beneficiaries of Power of Florence efforts.

One example of this is the food pantry at Florence Food Share, which has collected and distributed

more than 14,000 pounds of food from events directly tied to the Power of One.

Also during this time, groups have undertaken 79 civic projects and raised more than \$42,000 in cash donations, which have then been distributed directly to local nonprofit organizations.

Siuslaw School District Superintendent Andy Grzeskowiak said he believes that the movement started by Graham exemplifies the spirit of giving and concern for those less fortunate.

"Kaylee is one of the most genuine and sincere people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Her organization and direction of the

Power of Florence community service events is done in the best spirit of volunteerism. It is a grassroots effort to benefit the community and serve others," he said.

Kaylee has also been influential in other ways in the school district and in the community. She started the Kindness Club, which gives younger students the framework and the opportunity to get involved helping others by, primarily, being nice.

"This is not a 'filler' on a resume," Grzeskowiak said. "The Power of Florence is a concept and practice that Kaylee truly believes in and stands behind. You would be hard pressed to find another com-

munity organizer, of any age, that could put together an event like Kaylee has and keep it vital for 7 years."

This year's Power of Florence is shaping up to be another opportunity for community members to make a difference in the lives of others while knowing that they contributed to this growing Florence tradition.

According to the Grahams, Power of Florence will start July 15 with a free pancake breakfast hosted by Florence Unite Methodist Church. Next will be the Power Walk through Old Town with Mayor Henry complete with a Florence Police escort.

Other events include Oregon Coast Humane Society's Hamburger and Hotdog BBQ, Van Fans Pie and Ice Cream Social, a kitten adoption, the Lions Club Free Health Screening, Scotch broom removal with the U.S. Forest Service, park clean-ups, Stuff the Van with pet food and more.

Events will take place in Historic Old Town and areas in and around Florence. Several combined events will take place at the Grocery Outlet parking lot, 2066 Highway 101.

For more information or to get involved in this year's Power of Florence events, go to www.PowerofFlorence.org.

240

HOURS

Is your family prepared?

If an emergency happens in your community, it may take emergency workers some time to reach you. You should be prepared to take care of yourself and your family for a minimum of 240 hours.

Get your emergency kit started with these essentials:

- Pen and paper
- Money
- Address and phone numbers
- Work gloves
- Basic tools

This message brought to you by the West Lane Emergency Operations Group. www.wleog.org

IDENTIFY • PREPARE • SURVIVE

Helping from 1A

In fact, some feel they went through the same thing.

Kristi Unruh, who lives down the street from Helping Hands' proposed site, used to have a thriving motel in Washington and a successful contracting business. Then the recession hit and they almost lost everything. Banks would not help them.

"It just sucked the wind out of everybody," Unruh said.

During her difficult period, Unruh believed she worked hard to climb her way out to a better circumstance. She feels others should do the same. In fact, in her opinion, it's the only humane — and permanent — solution to the problem.

"Are we helping them? I mean yes, we need to give them food. But they smoke and they have pets. We need to get them in a home, get them working somewhere back on their feet," Unruh said. "How many young people are we just going to watch go down this path? It's hard. What are they going to do for the rest of their lives? It scares me."

Jim Erwin, a Helping Hands volunteer, believes reality is more complex. Sudden economic downturns aren't the only catalysts for homelessness and poverty:

"I know this physicist who had been all over the world. At the time

she was making about \$72 an hour. Then she got bit by a mosquito which gave her some kind of disease. There was no cure for it and it's slowly killing her.

"She'll eventually go to a blank look and pass away."

Erwin said the woman lost her job because she could not do it anymore. In addition, because the lady worked all over the world, she only qualified for \$720 a month in Social Security.

"Your heart just breaks sometimes," said Erwin.

While the physicist's descent into poverty was slow and painful, Lawson's came as a quick shot to the gut.

"I'm homeless because of one hole in the wall," she said, explaining how her son had a fit and punched a hole in the wall. It caught the attention of the managers.

"They threatened to call 911 because he was just throwing a fit. People want you to paint a rosy picture, but no family is perfect," she said.

Lawson said, as a result, she and her son were evicted. Lawson's financial situation was dire. She was living off of social security, which was tight.

The job market was even tighter. She had savings but lost them prior to the eviction.

"I never thought we'd be in this situation. I never thought for a moment that I'd be homeless. Did I ever think I would ever be using Helping Hands? No. In the blink of an eye, things can change," she said.

Despite all of this, Lawson was able to catch a break, finding a home for her and her son.

"Because of the house, I feel like a weight was lifted. I want my son to focus on school. He's going to be 17 and we want to make it all bet-

ter."

Children needing the care of Helping Hands is not a rare occurrence.

On the day of Lawson's interview, two families with three children each dined at the church — impeccably dressed and smiling while they finished the last bite of their frosted chocolate cake.

But other children don't come in.

"Kids who come through here, they don't go to school," said Lawson. "They're in crisis and the parents can't get them to come in here. And they need it the most. But they're so scared to come in here because someone will see them."

The fears about this are visceral. Lawson said she feels that if the children are recognized, the parents could be blamed for neglect, and the children could be sent off to foster care.

"I got a kid and I'm scared to tell anybody I'm homeless because they can take him away. As a parent I feel like such a dirtbag," she said.

Children are at the heart of why so many residents oppose the relocation to Highway 101, or any other neighborhood for that matter.

"They say they're not going to be around except for certain hours to feed them, but they're going to be hanging around," Unruh said. "The school buses come. They drop the kids off twice a day. At lunch time, and again at 3 and 3:30 p.m." Lawson has a different view.

While she worked hard to protect her son during her trials, she believes others don't. She has witnessed poverty-stricken parents with drug addictions neglecting their children.

"Their kids have soiled clothes. They're out there hunting for drugs, leaving their kids in the car. I'm sorry but I have no empathy for them," she said.

The fear is, if these individuals cannot keep their own children protected, how are they going to treat those of others?

The statistics don't back up these fears, however. In fact, those who are homeless generally end up being the victim, not the perpetrator, in crimes.

A 2012 study performed by the National Coalition for the Homeless stated that between the years of 1999 and 2010, there have been 1,200 reported acts of violence committed by housed individuals against the homeless, ranging from beatings, rapes and even a reported case of decapitation.

As for families, a 2016 study from the Family & Youth Services Bureau found that in just one day in 2015, more than 31,500 adults and children were forced into temporary housing because of domestic violence in the home.

The causes of homelessness, drug addiction and poverty are vast and incalculable. Helping Hands sees a vision for themselves that would work to combat this.

They have already worked to provide hundreds of clients help with Social Security benefits, clothing and temporary housing. This assistance has been given to anyone who asks, whether they live in a permanent home or not.

For the future, Helping Hands sees itself growing its capabilities to include tutoring and mentoring — working hand-in-hand with other local organizations to build a robust network to help those in need.

Poverty and homelessness will always be a part of Florence, whether there is a Helping Hands or not.

The question for many in the community is whether striving to build up those who are in need could simultaneously tear down other aspects of the community worked so hard to build.

While the community of Florence decides the fate of Helping Hands and continues to struggle with the larger ramifications of these issues, Lawson sits in the eating area.

She has a smile across her face, talking of the day after when she will again have a roof over her head.

She pauses and looks outside the window to others in her situation; sitting on the front steps, smoking cigarettes, conversing, laughing.

She'll always come to Helping Hands, she says.

To eat. To volunteer. To give away blankets. To help any way she can because, she feels, the program saved her life.

"I understand where [the businesses] are coming from," she said. "I just don't know what the answer is."

Florence City Council will hear an appeal from Helping Hands Coalition during the July 31 Florence City Council meeting, 5:30 p.m. at Florence City Hall, 250 Highway 101.

COAST RADIO OUR TOWN

Our Town: Celebrating America

This month on Coast Radio's Our Town, We take a look at what it means to be an American. Listening to local residents with a small town perspective. We will also hear from 2 young ladies making a difference through volunteering with Power of Florence, and we will have a conversation with one of the eldest citizens in Florence, 104 ½ year old Essie Murphy.

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