

Millennials from 1A

"I love clothes. I love antiques. I love to dance. There are lots of things I love and am passionate about and would want to pursue," Sapp said.

It's that wide array of passion that partially holds her back from leaving town. Living in a loft on her parent's property, she's still trying to figure which one of those passions she's going to follow. What she does know is that her whole heart is invested in Florence.

Geraldine Lucio has been here for three years as the proud owner of the Old Town Barber Shop. The 30-year-old tries to work a full five days a week, but after a number of years of burning the candle at both ends to get her business off the ground, she's skipping a few days here and there to head out to sea.

"My new experience is tuna and halibut fishing," she said. "I didn't do that until this year, as I did salmon before. It's a blast."

Lucio lives on a boat, attended trade school to become a barber and says she loves the area.

The three — Lolic, Sapp and Lucio — have diverse backgrounds, living situations, employment status and hopes for the future, but they do have one thing in common: They're all millennials living in Florence.

Millennials are typically defined as adults between the ages of 18 to 35, with technological advancements and poverty from the Great Recession of 2009 defining their career choices.

Millennials aren't the first thing that come to mind when the Siuslaw region is discussed. With a median age of 57, Florence is the Oregon coast's "retirement community."

Because of that, the millennial population in the region is often ignored. While they own businesses, volunteer in the community and form a major part of the workforce, they're somewhat silent in community leadership positions.

The area's major leisure activities are often geared toward older audiences while "retirement" infrastructure can make it difficult for millennials to connect to each other beyond small social networks.

In fact, millennials interviewed for this article had no idea how many were actually in the city.

"I feel like I know 20 or 30 people who are around my age," Lucio said. "I have way more

friends above 50. Where are you, millennials?"

While they may not be as organized as other age cohorts in the region, their numbers are significant.

According to the 2016 U.S. Census Bureau, there were almost 600 millennials living within Florence city limits. It may seem like a small number, particularly with a population of 8,348.

But the numbers are growing, and many appear to be coming from out of town.

In 2016, there were 103 18- to 21-year-olds living in Florence, which may reflect youth that have yet to move on to cities after graduating high school.

But that number jumps in the 25- to 29-year age range, with 172 counted.

While reasons for that increase are unclear, anecdotal evidence suggests that millennials are actively looking to move to communities like Florence.

And they're not just moving into the city limits.

A report by Leland Consulting Group, which was issued by the Florence Urban Renewal Agency (FURA) in November 2015, looked at the immediate area outside of the city limits and found that the total millennial population was closer to 1,000.

The area that FURA examined, called the Urban Growth Boundary, only included the Heceta Beach area. It didn't include areas farther north, like Mercer Lake or Yachats, nor the Upriver communities to the east or the Dunes City area to the south, suggesting that this strong economic base is even larger than previously imagined.

And more may be coming.

One of the major misconceptions of millennials is that they're primarily city dwellers, hip urbanites who prefer public transportation and live their entire existence online and in coffee bars.

While there is some truth to the lifestyle, it's not what millen-

nials say they want.

In a 2015 survey by the National Association of Homebuilders, only 10 percent of the cohort actually wanted to live in the center of a city. 66 percent wanted to live in the suburbs, and 24 percent wanted to live in rural area, like the Siuslaw region.

And they may be coming sooner than rather than later.

In 2015, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reported that, from 2004 to 2007, an average of 50,000 adults aged 25 to 34 left both New York and Los Angeles annually to non-urban areas.

But between 2010 and 2013, right in the throes of the Great Recession, fewer than 23,000 young adults left New York annually, and only 12,000 left Los Angeles. The theory went, millennials stayed because they loved the city.

But mounting evidence suggests they were forced to remain in the cities because of debt.

In 2016, financial website The College Investor estimated that millennials had a positive net worth of \$20,236 in 2003. In 2016, it was negative \$33,984.

One of the largest reasons for this is education. In 2016, the average student loan debt was \$37,172, according to the same report. In 2003, it was only \$18,271.

With the mounting debt of college and the high unemployment of the Great Recession, the cohort couldn't risk moving to a smaller community and losing their jobs.

"I'm scared," said one woman in the WSJ article who wanted to leave New York for Louisiana. "There aren't jobs (in my field) in New Orleans. If there are, they're already taken."

Lolic echoed that sentiment when he talked about his own niche profession.

"Even in a community like Eugene, if you're focused on city planning like most of my friends are, there's just a limited amount of organizations that are going to provide that type of work," he said. "There's the City of

Florence, then you have Eugene and then Lane County. That's it. There really isn't another type of government entity that offers that."

If given the opportunity, his friends would like to move to Florence. Two found jobs in other coastal towns, one in Bandon, the other in Newport.

As the economy strengthens and millennials look to go beyond city limits, areas like Siuslaw are becoming increasingly attractive.

"I'm a huge outdoorsman," Lolic said. "I love fishing, camping and hiking. There was a great opportunity here with a great position, and I really wanted to live in a rural location. I lived in Chicago for 22 years and decided I wanted a change. I loved being out on the coast and all these great amenities."

Lucio had similar reasons. Moving here from Austin, Texas, she said she looked up and down the coast for a place to open a barbershop because she "just needed a change of pace from the big city."

"I feel like the beauty here in

Oregon is just massive," she said. "It's like a deep beauty of ocean and trees and lakes and rivers. I love the outdoors."

For Sapp, the power of the Siuslaw is deeply felt on an almost spiritual level.

"I fall in love with it more every year, even though I know I won't be here forever," she said. "It's a beautiful community. The area itself and the land is phenomenal. I love it so much. I feel very tied to this place and the land."

But the beauty of the landscape is secondary to the style of life Florence brings, particularly in a world of constant technological evolution.

"Things are accelerating at a ridiculous speed," Sapp said. "It's dizzying and distracting. People now live very busy, full lives just by default. There's so much happening at all times. Even when you go to the bathroom, you pull out the phone and fill your head with information."

"In the evenings, when you go home, you turn on the TV. And if you don't have a TV, you have a cell phone or a computer. There is

an information overload that is robbing us of peace. And that reality is so common that people don't know how to live without the noise."

Florence, Sapp believed, is a way to quell the noise.

"You have the option of setting the information aside," she said. "Setting the noise aside, and being able to appreciate the beauty around you. You always know that the old guys are going to be down at the coffee shop. That your friends are going to be around."

"I really appreciate being around older generations for their perspective and their peace and guidance and wisdom, as it has always been, but especially now. We need that. We need that roundedness. We need that slowing down."

For the next two weeks, the Siuslaw News will be looking at millennials in the Siuslaw region, why they're here, where they live, how they work, what they do for fun, and the sometimes painful misconceptions that older generations make about them.



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