



SPECIAL EDITION INSIDE

Siuslaw News

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SERVING WESTERN LANE COUNTY SINCE 1890

FLORENCE, OREGON

Armed robber hits Mapleton market

Man pepper sprays manager, steals money at gunpoint

The Riverside Market in Mapleton was robbed at gunpoint at approximately 8:20 p.m. on Dec. 30.

By MARK BRENNAN
Siuslaw News

Store Manager Vedpal Kaushik was in the process of closing the store when an armed robber entered, confronted him, and demanded, "All the money, all the money now or I will shoot you!"

Kaushik had just finished delivering a liquor order to a neighboring establishment, Frank's Place, and was preparing to close out the store's till when he became aware of someone coming up to him.

The robber was wearing a bandanna and gloves and spoke with a recognizable Hispanic accent, according to Kaushik.

"I was sitting at my desk and he came into my office and pointed a gun at me and made me give him the money in the till," he said. "I told him not to shoot; I would give him the money."

Afterwards, the man pushed Kaushik down and told him to get on the floor.

"I looked up at him, and he sprayed pepper spray in my eyes and mouth, maybe so I could not follow him and see what kind of car he was driving," Kaushik said.

According to Kaushik, the man's face was hidden and he didn't say many words — "like a professional," he noted.

See **ROBBERY 6A**

Major deployment to California fires ends

Siuslaw Valley firefighters, equipment provide assistance on worst ever California fire

By MARK BRENNAN
Siuslaw News

Seven firefighters from Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue (SVFR) recently returned home from an extended deployment in California.

The firefighters were part of efforts directed at controlling the largest wildfire in modern California history, the Thomas Fire, in addition to smaller scale incidents at the Creek and Lilac fires.

Two crews from SVFR were deployed to assist in the suppression efforts, along with a Type 1 Structural Engine and a Type 6 Brush Engine.

All seven men made it home safely just before Christmas after having spent two weeks with more than 7,000 other firefighters battling the California blazes.

Captain Jeff Larson was one of the senior members to respond to the call-out from the Oregon State Fire Marshal. He recounted the events that led to the deployment.

"Our Ops Chief called me in and said we were going to California. So, we sat down, brainstormed, went down our list and figured out who was qualified to respond. We pulled in Kyle and Colten and told them to get ready to go," Larson said. "We had 30 minutes to go to our houses and pack



MARK BRENNAN/SIUSLAW NEWS

From left, SVFR firefighters Levi Green, P.J. Crescioni, Captain Andy Gray, Shannon Curry, Kyle Orozco, Captain Jeff Larson and Colten Griswold return from a major deployment to the Thomas Fire.

and then head back to the station. Then we headed to the South Lane Fire Department in Cottage Grove and met there with other members of Task Force Oregon and then we all drove to the Thomas fire and checked in."

Firefighter P.J. Crescioni was part of Larson's team and was surprised to be making such a long trip to help fight a fire.

"I never thought I'd be driving a fire truck all the way to LA," he said. "It was a 22-23 hour drive, and we took turns. We had three different drivers and we drove straight through."

Larson's team reported to the main staging area for responders and immediately realized the amount of people involved in the suppression was significant.

"It was a huge camp. There were more than 7,000 people working on that fire," he said.

Originally, the camp was staged in Ventura County, but later moved south to San Diego County.

According to Larson, "Time management is the hardest part of these deployments. You work a 12-hour shift, but it runs longer because there is a lot of other stuff to do. We have to get our rigs fueled up and get our gear ready. Then we have to get some food and a shower and set up our tent, but they had a great set up for us and the food was really good."

See **FIREFIGHTERS 6A**

RIISING TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

— IS COASTAL LIVING IN JEOPARDY? PART VII —

From 2015 to the present, Florence pursues development of businesses, partnerships

By CHANTELE MEYER
Siuslaw News

In Part VI, Siuslaw News looked at local businesses and how local residents view jobs and the workforce. Now, in Part VII, read about efforts locally, regionally and statewide to promote Oregon's economy.

"The state of our city is excellent because of the many difficult decisions and investments all of us have made in our community over the years," Florence Mayor Joe Henry said in his first State of the City address in 2015. "Our future remains bright if we accept the challenges ahead and rise to meet them."

In the three years that the current Florence City Council has worked together, the City of Florence has made economic development a key factor in the city's goals.

Henry has lived in Florence for 18 years. In that time, he has owned a mortgage company and dive shop and traveled extensively with his wife, Pam. He also began to notice something about the city.

"Things just weren't happening. There was no growth," he said.

Henry was too late to make it on the ballot, but he conducted a write-in campaign and got elected to the Florence City Council. However, the council had a hard time working together, and Henry "didn't see eye to eye" with then-mayor Nola Xavier. So he decided to run for

mayor.

"The majority spoke when I was elected because I think people wanted to see some change," Henry said.

Movement, then, is why Henry joined the council, and why, in February 2015, he declared proudly, "Look at us now, a city in motion."

In that first year, Florence City Council took on seven main goals for its Five-Year Work Plan: deliver efficient and cost-effective city services; expand and diversify the Florence economy; improve the city's livability and quality of life; sustain the city's strong financial position; strengthen and improve organization; improve the city's communication program and strengthen citizen trust; and improve the community's safety and perception of safety.

"This council, we work together as a team," Henry said. "Even though we have some widely varying political views, we have fought really hard to keep political agendas out."

Early in their term, councilors approved the hiring of City Manager Erin Reynolds to lead city staff. Soon after, the city brought on Interim Finance Director Andy Parks and hired Police Chief Tom Turner.

"We've kind of been a city on hold for several years, with maintenance and parks and a number of other things, and now there is a whole new level of excitement in all our departments," Henry said. "I haven't done anything but provided a little guidance from my long career in business management and

motivating and creating high-performance teams. That's really why we have Erin and her staff."

By June 2015, a new Public Art Committee and Economic Development Committee were active after the council worked with city staff to create committees with purpose.

"Both these committees will have some impact on economic development. That's one of our major goals in 2015 and going forward," Henry said. "It's a long-term goal to create economic development in the City of Florence — to support and expand existing businesses and to recruit, develop and support new businesses that might come to town to provide living wage jobs."

Many of Florence's committees go hand-in-hand with economic development, including Florence Urban Renewal Agency and the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce's Downtown Revitalization Team.

And the city kept moving. From road improvements to strengthened intergovernmental relationships, city staff continued to "place Florence on the map," even increasing its social media presence.

"We must first create an economic development strategy and then sustain and improve that effort once created," said Reynolds in a July 2015 update of the council's goals.

In turn, Henry said that the city could see a definite improvement in interactions with city staff due, largely, to Reynolds.

"I'm sure everyone in the community has seen the improvement, positive attitude and amount of work that is getting done by the city staff, and I think that's a reflection on her leadership," Henry said.

In that September, Florence began work to attract developers to the area, from government partnerships to more regional solutions.

"You have to be working on all fronts, looking at all stages," Reynolds said. "That was probably our biggest hurdle. We had to first plant before we could start showing our harvest."

At that time, Henry said he hoped to "attract some entities or companies that can create jobs that provide a living wage. That will allow people to buy a home, stay here and raise a family."

Some of those struggles are ongoing — but some of their solutions remain the same.

The next month, Florence partnered with Eugene-based RAIN (Regional Accelerator and Innovation Network) to bring support to tech-based and traded sector entrepreneurs. This resource would be completely new to the area.

"They're going to help us and show us how to do it," Reynolds said. "I think we can go out and make this work. If we can get one business going because of it,

it's great."

Henry agreed.

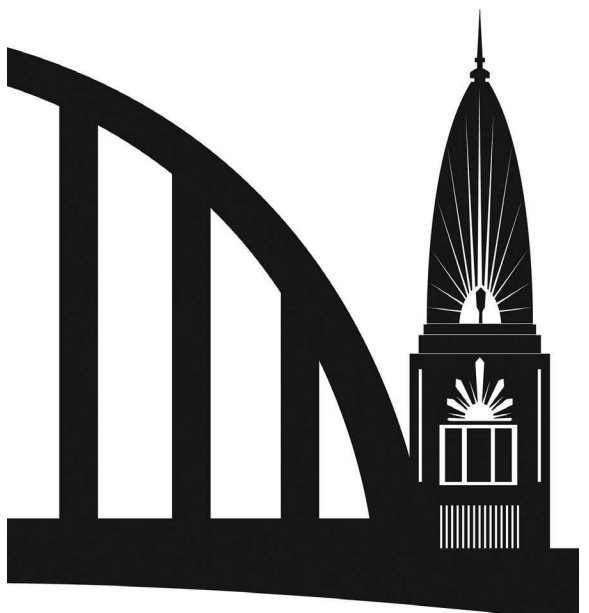
"What might work really well in Florence is that start-up, encouraging atmosphere for entrepreneurs and people who are innovative," he said. "What we have as a resource are the mentors."

Florence also began to expand its use of the slogan "Oregon's Premier Coastal Community."

According to Reynolds, this name defines Florence because it was successful in bringing in tourism to replace the resource-based economy of fishing and timber.

"(Our economy) won't be like it was before," she said. "And there are talents and resources left over that add to who we are today and what can work well here. ... You have to create the environment that the mayor has by saying, 'Hey, we're here and we're open to business.'"

See **DEVELOPMENT 6A**



INSIDE	Classifieds	B6	Opinion	A4
	Community	A3	Records	A2
	Kid Scoop	B5	Sports	B
	Year in Review	C	Weather Data	A2

THIS WEEK'S WEATHER
Full Forecast, A3

TODAY 55 44	THURSDAY 55 46	FRIDAY 54 44	SATURDAY 50 42
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