Region

from 1A

"He'd been applying all over, but all the companies in town just weren't hiring," Campbell continued. "He had to write a letter that went to the board. They had a lot of meetings. Everybody within 200 miles within where we live said, 'Oh you need a job, come work here.' But nobody ever came through until he wrote this letter to the board and said, 'Look, I tried but no one in town wants me. They need employees, but they don't want me. I'm trying my best.'"

Vanduch eventually found a plumbing job in Eugene, but that brought its own issues.

"He was working for a company in Eugene, and I just had a baby. He would leave at 4:30 in the morning and come home at 10 at night. By then I had three kids and was working four days a week at a restaurant," Campbell said. "That might have been the hardest year. You just know that you're doing it for … a better life. And that's just what kind of kept us going."

Soon, the two were able to buy their own plumbing company.

"We're localized. We own our own company and we work in Florence. We're doing all right," Campbell said. "The problem right now is that we're really, really busy. We have no employees. And we have no one who wants to stay. No one wants to work. It's impossible to find employees."

Like others in the Siuslaw region, West Lane Plumbing has a hard time finding reliable workers, even when the company has work lined up. For Campbell, it means she does the office work, but sometimes has to help on calls. She regrets this because West Lane Plumbing was able to employ two plumbers when it was just getting started, but both employees are gone now.

"Sometimes I'm setting toilets or crawling under houses or digging ditches. Between raising three kids and dealing with plumbing, my own job, the paperwork for the company, answering the phone and doing the billing … When he springs it on me, 'Oh, nobody showed up today, can you help me dig this ditch, it's got to get done.' It's like, 'Um, I have 15 loads of laundry and a sink full of dishes and 12 people to call back.' And that's the biggest struggle right now. Juggling time."

Now that the kids are growing up — they have a 17-year-old daughter, an 11-year-old son and a four-year-old son — Campbell is getting another view of the Siuslaw as the three go through school and navigate life in a small town.

"It's not like our kids are close in age and I can condense my day around them," Campbell said. "The oldest is in sports and she travels all over. And she as a job and a driver's license. The middle boy just kind of wants to take everything he touches apart, and he's often covered in grease or dirt or something. And the youngest is hilarious and super active. They kind of have me spread out in different directions."

However, she has noticed that her kids have a hard time staying interested in school.

"I loved all my teachers growing up, which is what drove me to do well. I don't feel like that's necessarily the case here. Not to say that the teachers are bad teachers. I just think that my kids are not engaged in the same way."

Campbell is not sure why her kids aren't as engaged. Perhaps it's their personalities. Perhaps it's the lack of programs at the school, cut by funding decreases. Whatever the case may be, getting her kids interested in school will lead them on a positive track for the future, Campbell believes. That may or may not include college, and may or not include the Siuslaw region.

"Parents are the best examples for kids. Neither of us went to college so they don't feel like that's important. I just don't think my kids get the concept that they can do whatever they want. You're always told that as a kid. But only now that I'm almost 40, I'm like, 'Oh, I really could have done whatever I wanted.' And I could still, probably today, if I set my mind to it."

Campbell wants her kids to at least look at options outside the area, even if they eventually move back home.

"The area definitely has its own heartbeat," she said. "Most people I talk to that have lived here move back. And I hear from everyone that they love Florence. They are moving from California or wherever and say, 'We've driven all over and we just like Florence.' Which to me is always interesting."

Its Own Heartbeat

One of those people who moved away and came back is Ellen Huntingdon, who returned to Florence after attending college abroad in Tokyo. She has since established herself as the marketing coordinator at Oregon Pacific Bank and as the chairwoman for Florence Area Chamber of Commerce's Downtown Revitalization Team (DRT).

"I think the area has changed, even in the almost five years I've been here since I finished college," Huntingdon said. "When I first came back, I saw a lot of kids who, after they graduated high school, got jobs in town, which was a great option. Then, in the last couple of years, students I went to school with have been coming back to Florence. I feel like that's almost an upward trend. The hard part is finding housing or decent jobs, which is what this is all about. There's definitely the desire for younger people to move back to Florence, we just need to make sure there's options for them to be able to live and work here."

Through her work on DRT, Huntingdon has tried to bring more focus to small businesses and the City of Florence's upcoming work to revitalize the Florence Urban Renewal District, which encompasses Old Town, Highway 101 from the Siuslaw River Bridge to Ninth Street, and Highway 126 from its intersection with Highway 101 east to Spruce Street. The main component of this is the ReVision Streetscaping Project, which is set to begin in earnest this spring.

"I'm really hopeful for the City of Florence," Huntingdon said. "We're all moving in the right direction. I think ReVision is going to be a great opportunity that is going to make Florence an even better attraction and increase the quality of living for people who are local."

Huntingdon is uniquely positioned to see areas of growth from serving on DRT and working at Oregon Pacific Bank, which has a culture that promotes volunteering and community service.

"I see a lot more young people here," she said. "I went down to do the trick-or-treating in Old Town this year, since I have a niece now, and I was amazed that there were so many young people and families with kids. The streets were just packed. Then we went down for the Christmas celebration and to see Santa. … There are definitely people in town who want to be here and enjoy living in Florence. I think people are gravitating toward places that have quality of life, rather than just having the best high-paying job.

"It would be nice if we could offer both."

Florence City Councilor Joshua Greene has worked with the city and Florence Urban Renewal on the upcoming ReVision project. He also has a small business, The Archives, which restores and markets the iconic work of photographer Milton H. Greene, who is famous for his photos of Marilyn Monroe and other stars of the Golden Age of Hollywood.

"I would like to see more small businesses in Florence like ours, quite frankly," Greene said. "I think the general reason why we don't attract younger people who do things online, which is what I really am, is we don't have that demographic here. I'm 63. I fit into the retirement scenario. But 20, 30 or 40-year-olds who want to have their business online, they want a hipper area. They're not here, and we're trying to attract those people. I believe that's the wave of the next generation."

Successes such as Siuslaw Broadband and Hyak's fiber-optic network project could make online businesses more attractive and more viable in the Siuslaw region.

"They are going to need fiber and online capability for their functionality," Greene said. "There's a call for these types of businesses, whether it's photography, graphics or gaming. All those things can be done from remote locations. I think we're going to attract those businesses here."

Huntingdon said, "The main thing to focus on for young people is getting more businesses that stay open a little later. We're already seeing that with things that Homegrown is doing, or with City Lights Cinemas. There are businesses that are catering to a younger crowd."

"As we get more and more younger people moving here, more and more services will be catering to them," Greene added. "More restaurants will have different food menus."

These elements work to make the area "hipper," as Greene said, or at least more accessible to people who keep odd hours or who want to socialize in a setting that fits their demographic.

"Now more than ever, there is a place to have small businesses here," Greene said. "Whether it's a product-driven business or a service business, I think that online is going to be a key factor, just like having a thriving highway. With the rebuild of Highway 101, I'm optimistic we're going to attract new investment and development, and Florence is going to grow up a little bit in a positive way. It's coming. I sense it coming more and more now."

Huntingdon agreed.

"I'm hopeful about the future and I think we're in a good path for growth and development," she said.

Growing Up In A Positive Way

A lot of the area's drive for future growth comes from the residents themselves. In addition, those people created the Siuslaw Vision — which came, in its entirety, out of community support and interest.

Siuslaw Vision 2025 Co-Chair Meg Spencer said, "One thing that stood out again and again within the region was the level of agreement around needing a vision. I've never been part of a visioning process like this, even from doing the strategic plan for the library. Something like this is so unusual. I think that's part of why this got so much momentum. There happened to be a lot of need, and need tends to drive action. It was a time of transition, a time of change."

The Ford Institute held an alumni celebration in 2014 to commemorate a rural leadership training it had held in the past. It reunited nonprofit and governmental leaders, volunteers and engaged community members from throughout western Lane County, who realized it was time for a shared vision to bring together the community.

"At the time, there was new leadership in town and new leadership at The Ford Institute, but there were also people who had been here and already had seen how far the region had come. I think it was just a real synergy," Spencer said.

Susy Lacer, a grant professional and Florence City Councilor, currently serves as a part-time coordinator for the Siuslaw Vision.

"There's power in the Vision. It was a grassroots effort from the beginning and remains grassroots. It is entirely community-led work," she said. "The things that are happening now are because they are important to the community members, who are willing to step up. We provide enough of a framework, a little bit of support, encouragement, validation and those things, but it's entirely community led."

This grassroots group formed from 1,200 community members realizing that the Siuslaw region needed one common, unifying theme as it moved forward into the next 10 years. Of course, there are things Florence struggles with that Dunes City doesn't; Mapleton and Siuslaw school districts have separate needs; Upriver communities like Deadwood may not have a lot in common with Old Town Florence. But the 18,000 people who make up the region have more similarities than differences, especially in regard to

See REGION 8A

"Is Coastal Living in Jeopardy?"

This series covers the current housing and employment crisis facing the Siuslaw region. Through in-depth interviews with government officials, volunteer organizations, property managers and employers, the series examines the problems facing the region, the solutions that the community is working on and what the community can do to help.

Series List

Nov. 15: SOS
Nov. 22: State of housing
Nov. 29: How we got here
Dec. 6: Time to step up
Dec. 13: Volunteer economy
Dec. 27: Jobs and workforce
Jan. 3: Economic development
Jan. 10: Education
Jan. 17: Conclusion: Life in the Siuslaw region

The series is available online at thesiuslawnews.com, or in print by request.

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FLORENCE REGIONAL ARTS ALLIANCE

Classes, Workshops & Events

NEW! Beginning Felting with Ginny Kliever
Saturday, February 17th, 1:30-4:30 pm
Learn the art of felting making a coin purse. Bring a shank button; other material provided. Pre-registration required at FRAA.

FRAA February Display in the Siuslaw Library
Bring a piece of your 2D and 3D (wired to hang) artwork to the Library on Thursday, February 1st, from 10 am - 12 noon.

Open Studio @ FRAA, Thursdays
No registration required. Drop-in, bring your materials, and create. All artistic mediums welcome.
Every Thursday, 1-4

Whimsical Hand Building Ceramics w/ Alissa Clark
Wednesdays, 3-5 pm & Thursdays, 6-8 pm
Open Lab Ceramics on Saturdays
Drop in, work at own pace. Sat 12-5 pm
All ceramics classes held at Alissa's Studio. 180 Laurel Street. Call Alissa with questions: 503-857-5222

Writers on the River - Creative Writing Workshop with Catherine Rourke
2018 Annual Writers Boot Camp
Jump start your writing for the new year!
Sat., January 20, 2018 10 am - 12 noon
All writing levels and genres, $20/ members, $25/non-members. Contact: CJReditor@gmail.com, 541-708-2120

Big Wave Poetry 1st Tuesday Open Mic
February 6th at 6:30 pm. Admission is free and refreshments will be available.

Next Art Change-Out Day
Monday, March 12th, 9-11 am
Please pick up your artwork and bring something new to help keep the art at FRAA fresh to our visitors.

Painting with John Leasure
Saturdays 9 am - 12 pm
Contact: jnleasure@hotmail.com or 541-991-2754 for details and fees.

Oil Painting with Michael Wood
Wednesdays 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm
Contact: fmwood@msn.com for fees and more information.

For more information about classes, visit fraaoregon.org. To register for these classes, please call or visit FRAA at our art center on Maple Street.

Florence Food Share would like to thank the *Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation* for granting funds toward the purchase of toilet paper and personal hygiene products for our clients. We are so grateful that Cow Creek recognized this essential need and so happy that we will be able to provide these products to our clients for the next year.

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