

Region from 7A

the Vision's six focus areas: Working People, Happy People, Educated People, Connected People, Creative People and Active People.

People from all over the region have signed up for projects, including creating a Siuslaw region parks and recreation district, supporting local workforce development, establishing safe and affordable housing options and promoting public art. Every member becomes a Vision Keeper and is encouraged to follow their own passions within the Vision.

"What I love about the Vision is that it gives you that nudge, that little bit of organizational support, that little bit of, 'Hey, yeah, we think you can do this,' that makes it actually possible for people to tackle huge, crazy things," Spencer said. "I think that a big piece of what the Vision does is giving people permission to go out and get stuff done."

The Vision Keepers have "way more goals" for 2018, according to Lacer, and the community will see results in childcare, the parks district, partnership with the city and even a new community farmer's market.

Spencer said, "I've come to think of us as a catalyst. All we are is the tiny bit of yeast at the very beginning that sort of starts that process. I think the things that are happening are happening because there's so much other than the Vision involved. It's passion, community spirit and a little bit of money from donors. All of that adds up."

And the Vision fulfills its goals. The "Working People" category looks at bringing living-wage jobs to the region. The Vision hopes to contract three paid positions for three years, thanks to a \$280,000 grant from The Ford Family Foundation.

"The people we hire are going to really step in and make that framework more solid," Spencer said. "I think bringing in grant funds to the area to support these contractors hopefully does a couple things: helping our Vision move forward, and helping us hit more of those marks."

In addition to working on the Siuslaw Vision, both Spencer and Lacer are involved with the Siuslaw Public Library District — Spencer as the library director and Lacer as the president for the board of directors. The library serves as the fiscal sponsor for

the Vision.

While the Siuslaw Vision is only in its third year, the Siuslaw Public Library has served the region for 103 years.

Lacer said, "One of the reasons we picked the region that we did for the Vision was one, it matched the library district boundaries and two, it matched the Mapleton and Siuslaw school district boundaries. I don't think that's coincidence. I think it's bringing together everybody, of all ages, from the whole area."

According to Spencer, the two branches of the library serve an average of 500 people each day.

"We bring together that many people — it's like three percent of our region's population every single day. They're getting together, mixing it all up and hopefully taking stuff out the door, hearing a program or whatever. It is a place where people of all ages, all backgrounds, all political persuasions literally walk through the door every day," she said. "To me, that is the thing that helps create community conversation and creates a 'town square.'"

According to Siuslaw Public Library statistics, 95 percent of library patrons still visit the library to check out physical books, but the library provides multiple other resources, including free internet, newspapers and magazines, genealogical research material, language learning lessons, Spanish language books, a play area and reading time for young kids and activities for older kids, as well as space for meetings, movie nights, craft times, tax prep and music jam sessions.

"What I want to do is just increase what people can walk through the door for," Spencer said. "That is an exciting challenge for sure."

One goal of the Vision is to create more community centers, whether that is through a future parks district or a dedicated building. In the meantime, the Siuslaw Public Library continues to take steps into that role.

"In the modern world, books and collection items are so fundamental, but creating community dialogue is also fundamental to what a library is meant to be and do," Spencer said. "It makes perfect sense that we're serving as the fiscal sponsor of the Vision. What has come out of the Vision has really fed into the library, and hopefully vice versa."

Lacer said that community centers are things that multiple groups have expressed interest in, from the library to the schools, and from Lane Community College to area service groups.

"Community centers are one of those things that address all six elements of the Vision," she said.

In 2017, Siuslaw Public Library was named a Catalytic Community Building Organization by The Ford Family Foundation. Twenty agencies across the state were recognized, including several cities, a chamber of commerce, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and social services — but only one library.

Lacer said, "It was kind of a different cohort for a public library to get involved with, but I think it speaks to the strength of our library, its uniqueness and the role that it plays."

Spencer agreed. "I think that has so much to do with the staff, and so much to do with our patrons. I have worked with some fantastic libraries, but I've never worked for one that is supported the way this one is," she said.

That support will continue as Spencer and the library follow through on goals set in a recent strategic plan. One of those goals is the formation of a library foundation.

According to Spencer, "The plan is to get that started by this summer, with the idea of doing some fundraising around the exciting things that people want to see. If we were to have a space that was a community center, we could triple our meeting space, and have it booked all the time. I'd love to have enough space to bring in really big exhibits, and I think the foundation will help make more of those things possible."

And the library does not just focus on Florence. Just as the Vision looks at the entire region — Glenada, Dunes City, Florence, Deadwood, Mapleton and Swishome — the Siuslaw Public Library has a thriving presence in Mapleton to serve the Upriver community.

"We are seeing crazy growth out there," Spencer said. "That has a lot to do with staff who are really working to bring the school to the library, book groups, high school interns — and we're going to start showing movies there. A lot of that is our staff members ... but it's just everything, and that's awesome."

She added, "Nowhere else Upriver do you have free internet access, or a place where you can

come five days a week and see your neighbors. It's pretty cool."

Spencer and Lacer are joined by area artist and business owner Jo Beaudreau as the Vision's second co-chair. Together, the women bring excitement and energy for the new year.

"I think the fact that we share the river and share the library helps tie us all together," Spencer said.

Lacer agreed, saying, "It's a pretty cool time to live in the Siuslaw region."

Tied Together

The City of Florence has spent much of the last three years looking at ways to increase economic stability in western Lane County. One of those efforts was through the Housing and Economic Opportunities Project (HEOP), a group looking into necessary changes to Florence City Code to allow for accessory dwelling units and infill of residential zones, as well as looking at key areas to market to outside development.

Jesse Dolin is the city's economic development catalyst. He works with area businesses, encourages startups and attends many meetings a month with Florence's partners in economic development.

"Part of my learning is just making sense of all the organizations, understanding what they do and how we can best work together," Dolin said. "We need to all come together and understand what everyone is doing so we're not replicating our efforts and so we're sharing the best practices that are out there."

Dolin serves on several boards across the region, but, more importantly to him, he makes connections with people.

"It's really all about relationships and connecting with all our regional partners and beyond," he said, describing the various groups as puzzle pieces that work together within Lane County, the South Coast Development District, the Coastal Caucus and the State of Oregon. "In general, there is a great synergy among our partners, with the tribes and with the port. There's a renewed spirit, like a renaissance of Florence. We're really optimistic for 2018 to bring more opportunities."

New economic opportunities are coming because of the amount of work put in by city and county staff, but also from a community hungry to invite the world to "Come See What We See" — one of the taglines for Florence Area Chamber of Commerce.

Area residents know the joys of living on the Oregon coast, with its temperate climate, positive quality of life, numerous recreation activities and friendly, giving people. As certain demographics struggle with finding housing or jobs, the focus moves to community organizations that can help provide services, such as Siuslaw Outreach Services, food shares in Florence and Mapleton and the Friends of Florence cancer bus. People also volunteer, taking their time, resources and money and plugging them directly back into the community. They get involved with the Florence Master Recyclers, work a shift at the Oregon Coast Humane Society Thrift Store, join a group such as PEO Chapter FQ, Kiwanis Club of Florence, Soroptimist International and Florence Oregon Rotary, serve on a board of directors or city committee, support youth and find countless ways to support their neighbors.

For Campbell, she continues to make the choice to stay in Florence; where her husband and children have a home; where West Lane Plumbing takes in business; and where she can work doing a job she loves.

"It's a small town so everyone you know, knows someone else. Friends are pretty easy to make right away," she said. "When I moved here, it was a comfort zone because it wasn't overwhelming. It was a small town and it was pretty close knit. And it still seems that way today."

In the past 20 years, Campbell did go on to college, at Lane Community College Florence Center. She made her own opportunities, both with the business she shares with Vanduch and by staying for 10 years at Waterfront Depot.

"I love people. At work, I feel like I'm on a stage — I'm there to please. It's my job," she said. "I love the service industry and the whole combination of working with the kitchen and having connections with them and making customers happy on the floor. It's really kind of an orchestra to make sure everything is effective. I love it. I can't say the same for everyone I've ever worked with. In fact, I don't think I've ever met another waitress that loves it as much as me. But whether you like it or not, it's a great job to either sustain your life or get you from one place to another."

She said that working families such as hers or people in her economic bracket "keep this town afloat," but that people at higher incomes might not see it that way.

"There's definitely two sides of Florence. If you don't know the other one, whether it's the low income or the high income, you might not experience it because you have no reason to," she said. "I honestly feel like I'm better off than some of the people I went to school with. Yeah, I'm a waitress and it took me years to accept that this is my career, but I like it."

She has faced her frustration with feeling like there aren't options for her children by volunteering with the Siuslaw Youth Soccer Association to provide more recreation activities for area students and has enrolled her children in Children's Repertory of Oregon Workshops (CROW).

See **REGION 9A**



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