

Florence prepares to ‘Rhody Rendezvous’ at the 111th annual Rhody Fest

The 111th annual Florence Rhododendron Festival takes place from May 17 to 20, with preliminary events happening all week.

“Rhody Rendezvous,” this year’s theme, is intended to evoke a feeling of coming to Florence for an exciting gathering with friends and family and having a great time in Oregon’s Coastal Playground, according to Bettina Hannigan, executive director of the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce.

“It’s our 111th year, making us about a year older than the Portland Rose Festival but a little younger than Pasadena’s Tournament of Roses in California,” Hannigan said. “After that many years, we’re pretty sure that several generations of Oregonians and other visitors have rendezvoused around our rhodies many times.”

The Davis Shows Northwest Carnival opens on Wednesday afternoon at the Port of Siuslaw parking lot in Historic Old Town Florence; the Rhododendron Court coronation takes place Thursday evening at the Florence Events Center; and the town begins filling with rhody enthusiasts on Friday.

Saturday features the 5K Rhody Run and Walk; the 26th annual Rhody Classic Car Show ‘n’ Shine from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in the Grocery Outlet parking lot; the Junior Parade and Kiwanis Kids Games at noon, and the Coast Radio Classic Car Cruise from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. through Old Town. The Rhododendron Festival Grand Floral Parade is at noon on Sunday.

Rhody Days also includes a vendor’s fair in Old Town, a spectacular rhododendron show along with live music, art and other festivities at the Florence Events Center, and Three Rivers Casino Resort will host the



SIUSLAW NEWS FILE PHOTO

Florence’s Grand Floral Parade on Sunday, May 20, still has openings for marching bands, businesses, nonprofits and more to participate. Contact the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce for more info.

annual Let It Ride motorcycle show and other events.

“We’re looking to this year’s parade entrants to really step up again and rock the rhodies,” says Hannigan. “It’s one of the oldest floral festival parades in the west and we want every entry to have as many rhodies as possible.”

There are still a few openings for commercial and nonprofit groups, marching bands, music groups, vehicle clubs, animals and more to join the parade, which runs south on Highway 101 and through Old Town.

Applications for parade entries are available at FlorenceChamber.

com/rhody-festival, at the Chamber’s Visitor’s Center at 290 Highway 101 and by contacting events@FlorenceChamber.com. The entry fee is \$20.

The parade begins at noon on Sunday, May 20, at 27th Street and Highway 101.

The chamber is also recruiting volunteers, ages nine to 17, to carry banners ahead of parade entries for the chamber’s underwriters and distinguished sponsors. Each youth volunteer will receive a ticket to the Davis Shows Carnival on Sunday after the parade.

Volunteer applications, as well as the official Rhododendron Festival

poster and schedule of events, are available at FlorenceChamber.com/rhody-festival.

Discounted one-day unlimited ride passes are also available at the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center and online at FlorenceChamber.com/rhody-festival through 1 p.m. Wednesday, May 16.

Early birds save between \$6 and \$7 per person per day by purchasing tickets in advance. The regular price for an all-day pass is \$20.

Each year during the Thursday night kick-off event at the Florence

Events Center, officials crown Queen Rhododendra and The King of the Coast as the event’s official ambassadors.

Seven Siuslaw High School students make up the Senior Court this year. Princesses are Thelma Gentry, Lainey Goss, Alex Saindon, Andrea Sanchez and Denielle VanWinkle. The two princes are Trent Reavis and Colby Waters. The Junior Court is comprised of Mapleton third-grader Abigail Galvan and Siuslaw first-grader Aleeya Thomas, second-grader Jasmine Krause, fourth-grader Kylee Stinger and fifth-grader Brittney Adams.

Court members sell campaign-style pins for \$3 featuring the festival’s logo. Pins are available from court members, at the Visitor’s Center, and around town. Proceeds go toward scholarships for members of the court.

Pins are also good for a dollar off a bowl of chowder at participating restaurants in May. The list currently includes Beachcomber Pub, Le Bouchon Café, Bay Street Grille, ICM Restaurant, Firehouse Restaurant and Homegrown Public House.

This year’s Rhody Parade Grand Marshal is Dr. Al Brauer, named Florence’s first-ever First Citizen in 1967.

Hannigan said, “There’s always so much to do in and around Florence, and the Rhododendron Festival adds even more fun to this place we call Oregon’s Coastal Playground.”

For a full listing of Rhody Days events, general information about the festival, parade entry forms, vendor fair applications or event schedules, check FlorenceChamber.com or contact Event Coordinator Terry Abeyta at 541-997-3128 or events@florencechamber.com.

Threat

from 1A

“But we got that young man some help. From everything I know, that young man is a very good person. A very good man. A contributing member of society.”

Still, the incident was not reported to the public.

“If it has to be put out, it would have to be a critical threat,” Pitcher said. “It would have to be something that we have no control over. Like the one when I was a sergeant, we had that situation under control. We got people involved. We had a safety plan. We got that kids some help. We did not put that out to everyone. The ones you have to tell the

public about are if it’s a possible credible threat, and you don’t have a handle on the possible suspect. You have no safety plan. You have no way to enact a safety plan. Absent those, because we’re talking about young kids, I think you have to be very careful about what you put out to the public.”

While there are legal reasons regarding children’s privacy that often prevent officials from telling the public about threats, the safety of the child’s future is also at stake.

“You can’t put everything a 14-year-old kids says out there as gospel and make them have to pay the price for that for the rest of their lives for an immature, childish comment that

was bound to be a non-credible threat,” Pitcher said. “Even if you don’t put a name to the person, is there enough information that people are going to know who this individual is?”

This complication can be particularly prevalent in small schools like Mapleton.

“Not only do we have to protect our students here at school, but also the information that goes out about our students,” O’Mara explained. “We’re such a small community. It’s easy to figure out which students are involved. And so, we have to use our judgement on when we release information and when we don’t, and what that information includes. And sometimes that’s hard to understand, especially

from the outside when it involves a threat like that.”

But sometimes an incident like a threat can go beyond the bounds of the school.

“And then people are thinking that the threat is there, so why didn’t we tell anyone? Then the rumor mill takes over,” said Grzeskowiak.

He added, “Most times it’s just kids saying something to get a rise out of someone else. If there is a direct threat, the people that need to be notified are always notified. If there is something direct towards the school, we let the parents know. But if kids are saying something to get somebody’s goat, there would be discipline for that. We wouldn’t notify the public if a kid told a horri-

ble joke. That would be giving credibility to something that was not credible to begin with.”

While more information regarding the incident has not been released, what is known is that it was not credible enough for students, school faculty and families to be fearful.

“It’s sad that you don’t just to get to come to school and be a student, that that fear has to creep in your mind,” O’Mara said. “It’s sad that students need to report on things like this. And it’s sad that students say things like this. And it has to be taken at face value every time. And that’s what we do.

“We will take every threat at

face value and investigate it immediately, because our main job is to keep kids safe.”

And to keep students safe, everyone has to be involved.

To that point, O’Mara believed all those involved worked admirably during the incident.

“Kids did what they were supposed to do,” O’Mara said. “They heard something, and they told an adult. It worked. Kids saw the reaction. They saw what we did. They were here on campus and saw the importance we put on it, how we handled it. The kids are great. We’re really lucky. We have some amazing students up here that care about each other, our school and our community.”

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