

## Local author recounts history of Roanoke Island

Author and long-time local resident Harold Titus will appear Saturday, July 7, at 2 p.m. in the Siuslaw Public Library's Bromley Room to speak about England's attempt and failure in 1585-1586 and 1587-1590 to establish a colony on Roanoke Island (inside North Carolina's Outer Bank).

Titus will read passages from his new historical novel, "Alsoomse and Wanchese," answer related questions and autograph copies of his book.

The beginning of the novel is September 1583, 10 months before the English appear at Roanoke Island.

Seventeen-year-old Alsoomse desires freedom to doubt, discover and aspire without Algonquian tribal hindrance. She pushes continuously against tribal convention, the imposed role of women and the dictatorial authority of men, rulers and priests.

Nineteen-year-old Wanchese's

short-temper and quest to prove himself worthy of his deceased father's expectations lead him several times into dangerous conflict with one of his tribal ruler's essential subordinates and, against hostile tribesmen, into life and death combat.

Titus graduated from UCLA with a bachelor's degree in history. He taught intermediate school English, American history, and a drama elective many years in Orinda, Calif. He coached many of the school's boys' and girls' sports teams.

Titus is also the author of "Crossing the River," a historical novel about the experiences of English and American participants in the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, clashes that mark the beginning of the American Revolution.

VAN from page 1A

"No, I wish I had," the man replied. Instead, he had just received chemotherapy and was suffering from the effects of the process.

According to the American Cancer Society, the immediate after effects of chemotherapy can cause nausea, vomiting and confusion. The effects often last for a short time, but sometimes can linger for days.

"Some people, you can't tell they have cancer and they're going in for treatment," Mealer said. "For others, it's very painful and they get very sick. It runs the gamut."

Whatever a person's reaction to treatment, driving directly afterward can be a challenge.

The police asked the man in front of Sacred Health if they could help in some way, to which the man asked for a ride to the edge of Eugene. He lived on the coast and needed a good spot on the highway to hitch a ride to his home on the coast.

It was at this moment that Smith realized the hardships of many coastal residents to drive to the coast for treatment.

"If you're fighting cancer, the last thing you need to worry about is how you're going to get back and forth," Mealer said.

The average round trip from Florence to Springfield is 125 miles.

"That's every day, five days a week," said Mealer. "Are you going to have to rent an apartment in Springfield to stay? Just the gas charges alone would be astronomical."

The Friends of Florence buses fill up their gas tanks every two days, with expenses ranging upwards of \$1,000 a month, depending on fuel costs.

"Radiation treatment is usually a daily thing," Mealer noted. "For some treatments, it can take up to 45 days."

And those 45-day cycles are rarely one-and-done treat-

ments. Generally, each course of chemotherapy consists for four to six cycles, with each cycle costing thousands of dollars, according to the American Cancer Society. Some estimates peg an eight-week cycle costing \$30,000.

Adding in the additional cost of transportation can break an already precarious financial situation. To help coastal residents soften the economic burden of cancer, the Smiths looked for a way to provide free transportation to inland medical centers.

The Smiths helped to create a steering committee, consisting of Smith, Tom Grove and Taylor Young, which found a used bus for \$6,000. Oregon Pacific Bank gave them a no-interest loan to purchase it. Within 26 days, the loan was paid off by donations from the community and a \$2,000 gift from Smith's sister, Francis.

In 1985, the bus began making its first trips to Sacred Heart, and by 1986, the program became an official 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Since then, the program has transported approximately 45,000 patients, traversing a total of 1.5 million miles.

As the Friends of Florence program has grown over the years, so too has the community within it. It has grown beyond just a mode of transportation into an emotional support network for those with cancer.

"I can tell you, it's like a little community on that bus," Mealer said. "Everybody is checking in on each other, how they're doing. The people are very tight knit."

Once a patient's cycle is over, the community of riders usually celebrate the end of the process.

"It's like graduation," Mealer said. "There were two ladies who were finishing up at the same time and on the last day, they brought picnic stuff. They had a party on the bus on the

way back. They had snacks and food, it was crazy."

The program strives to always maintain a fleet of two well-maintained buses, though it wasn't always that way.

"It's a lot better than what we first started driving," Mealer said. "The buses we had pretty much rode like a school bus. You bounced around in back. Now, these are really nice buses. ... These have RV suspensions and are fully air conditioned. They have seatbelts and are comfortable rides."

But the group is in constant need of drivers, all of whom are volunteers.

"Normally, we try and have drivers only go once a month," Mealer said. "But we have people who take off for the winter, and we have people who age out."

Driving the bus can be a bit nerve-racking for some, considering the precious cargo inside.

"Especially when we're training new drivers," Mealer said. "We train to drive defensively. We drive cautiously. We drive speed limits. We don't take any chances. But it's probably not for everybody who want to do that."

But Mealer said that driving the bus itself is easy, akin to maneuvering an RV.

"I've trained people that have never driven anything bigger than a Subaru," he explained. "It's easy to learn to drive these buses. You just have to realize it's a lot longer than a Subaru."

As for the drivers themselves, the reasons they volunteer run the gamut.

"Either they're cancer survivors themselves, or they have family members who are cancer survivors," Mealer said. "I've had some drivers who come in just because they want something to do. We have drivers that have been driving for years, and they enjoy doing it. It's a worthy cause."

Beyond drivers, the program is also in constant need of financial support.

While Friends of Florence receives donations from the American Cancer Society and Oregon Neurology, the program is largely dependent on individual donations, much of which comes from fundraisers such as a yearly ice cream social put on by the Van Vans, a Friends group that supports the organization. The next one is on Saturday, July 21, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Florence Events Center, 715 Quince St.

Tickets are \$8 and include homemade pie, cake or cobbler plus BJ's Ice Cream.

There will be music by Jeff Lovejoy.

Donations to Friends of Florence help pay for gas, new vans and maintenance on the vehicles, which can be frequent.

"We have insurance to offset the costs, but there are still deductibles," Mealer explained. "Right now, we're taking a bus in because there was a rock in the windshield on the driver's side, so we're going to have to replace the windshield. It can get expensive."

Despite the costs and time involved, Mealer believes that the program is vital for the Siuslaw region.

"We've been around for a long time and it is a worthy cause for people that need the service," Mealer said. "People are happy to do it, and we're happy to provide it."

To donate or volunteer for the Friends, contact Tom Grove at 541-997-8629 or Dan Clements at 541-902-0883, or stop by the annual Van Fans Ice Cream Social.

A new event, Octo-Fur-Fest, an extension of the annual Wiener Dog Races, will also fundraise for the Friends of Florence. That event is being planned by the Siuslaw News and the Florence Events Center.

For more information, or to get involved, contact Jenna Bartlett at 541-902-3524 or [jbartlett@thesiuslawnews.com](mailto:jbartlett@thesiuslawnews.com).

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