

WHALE from page 9A

The long running animated show "The Simpsons" tackled the tale in 2010, with members of the town using dynamite to blast a massive blue whale.

"Backup everybody, but not too much, you're definitely gonna want to see this," Police Chief Wiggum tells a group of onlookers in the episode.

After the explosion, Wiggum says, "So clean, how part of it just disappears like that."

Then the guts started falling. A car is taken out. An old man walking with a cane is flattened.

A clip of "The Simpsons" episode is on YouTube.

"Based on a true story, seriously," is the first comment. Then comes the comments on Florence, and how close it is to Springfield, which has its own special meaning to the show's fans. Simpsons creator Matt Groening, who grew up in Oregon, named the animated town after Eugene's sister city. In fact, there's an unofficial tour of Springfield that's based on "The Simpsons."

Saturday Night Live took a deep dive into the whale guts in 2014 with a parody of the film "Beach Blanket Bingo." The skit, called "Bikini Beach Party," has a pair of young surfer lovers named Gadget, played by Charlize Theron, and Darren, played by cast member Taran Killam, who attempt to share their first summer kiss by a beached whale.

Killam asked to play a song on his ukulele before they shared their kiss.

"Okay, but a short one," Theron said. "It smells very bad here."

As Killam began to sing, the whale exploded, bloody intestines coming from the side and above.

"Oh my God!" Theron screamed as Killam cried, "I'm blind with whale guts!"

They take cover by another beached whale, which also explodes.

There's music on the website as well, most notably from indie-darling Sufjan Stevens, who was recently nominated for an Academy Award for his song, "Mystery of Love." Another Stevens song, "Exploding Whale," uses the incident as a way to describe a big mistake.

"The thing I most regret is having to repress what I'm feeling, while expressing delight as a myth," the lyrics state. "Embrace the epic fail of my exploding whale."

The term "exploding whale" is sometimes used as a phrase describing an idea that seemed good at the time but ends in disaster.

saster.

There're even obituaries posted on Thornton, who passed away in 2013.

"Man Behind Oregon's Famous Exploding Whale Dies," reads a National Public Radio (NPR) story.

"One of the most common questions I get is, 'Why do you do this?'" Steve Hackstadt wrote as to why he maintains the exploding whale website. "To put it simply, I think this is one of the greatest things to happen in the history of humankind. Ok, that may be a slight exaggeration, but there is truly something special about this event. Not only is it a unique and quirky aspect of Oregon culture, it contains a more universal element. To me, it is less about one man's mistake (because it could be any one of us in a similar situation) and more about how we as humans so often think we have all the answers. Yet, so often we don't. If we acknowledged that fact more often, accepted our limitations and had a good laugh at them once in a while, I think the world would be a better place."

The exploding what has certainly brought a smile to the face of many worldwide fans, but in Florence, the excitement has yet to really catch on.

"Whale-Go-Boom Day"

"This is what the world knows Florence about, and I think the we should embrace it," Gunderson said. He has found people getting a kick out of the shirts he's been selling, which come in various forms. The mainstay of design is a round logo with an exploding whale, surrounded by the phrase "I Love Florence — Nov. 12, 1970."

One sweater had the logo in color, another in black in white. One shirt has specks of red covering its entirety.

"The happiest moment of the week was when this young person looked at the shirt, and you could just see total puzzlement on his face," Gunderson said. "And then he instantly got it, and he was so happy. Yay! It makes sense to at least one other person."

The main reason for the shirts is to raise money to give as a prize for Florence and Mapleton high school students who participate in the annual

Fresh Impressions art show. Gunderson has already sold \$500 worth of shirts, and since then he has seen a groundswell in interest and support for the exploding whale.

Okonski, who had spent the weekend creating an online video commercial for the shirt, agreed.

"We were at Jerry's Place yesterday, and we said, 'Happy Whale-Go-Boom-Day,'" he said. "It just sparked a huge conversation with everyone in the bar. 'It's been 48 years already?'"

Okonski, Gunderson and Beaudreau hope to keep the exploding whale train going. In fact, Gunderson was just able to purchase a go-cart that can be dressed up as an exploding whale float.

"We're going to build a dead whale float for the next Rhododendron Festival," Gunderson said.

As for other plans for the 50th anniversary in 2020, "We have two years to figure that out," he said.

Raia and Spangler were pretty happy with how their performance worked out, and don't really see a future for it.

"I'm not going further than this," Raia said. "If we do a crappy recurring exploding whale interpretative dance every year, it takes away the specialness of it. It's just going to get boring. But I hope that other stuff like this happens."

Spangler brought up other cultural phenomena in the Siuslaw region that rarely get celebrated.

While Eugene commemorates famed author Ken Kesey with Kesey Square, it's a lesser known fact that Kesey wrote his seminal work "Sometimes a Great Notion" while living in the Siuslaw region.

"The Siuslaw is Wakonda," Spangler said of the fictional town portrayed in the book. "That's not embarrassing. I wish that stuff was more known."

And then there's the global phenomenon of Frank Herbert's science fiction series "Dune." In fact, the genesis of the series began when Herbert traveled to Florence to write about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's effort to stabilize sand dunes with European beach grasses. That led to the multipart "Dune" series, which has since gone on to

inspire a television series, a film by David Lynch and is now being made into a series of motion pictures by the Academy Award nominated director of "Blade Runner 2049" and "Arrival."

The Siuslaw Public Library holds a collection of first edition work by Herbert, donated specifically because of the area's history with the series.

"Why there isn't a science fiction convention here every year is beyond me," Gunderson said. "Why isn't there a sandworm sculpture three stories high in the sand dunes area? People would freak out over stuff like that."

Beaudreau, who besides owning BeauxArts Fine Art Materials serves on the City of Florence Public Arts Committee and the Siuslaw Vision 2025, added, "It would bring a lot of economic development."

But to get that, there needs to be a groundswell of ideas. Shirts, parade floats and interpretive dances are only the beginning.

"People have to do something like this, it has to start somewhere," Spangler said. "I don't know why there aren't more fun, crazy things here. There needs to be more going on. It doesn't have to be so crazy, because people come here to retire. I understand that a big part of the community feels that their peacefulness has been taken from them. But there's space for everything. We could do some really fun stuff."

To view more photos of the reenactment, the commercial for the shirts and the original KATU broadcast, visit thesiuslawnews.com.

To purchase exploding whale shirts and memorabilia, visit www.etsy.com/ca/shop/whalegoboom or stop by BeauxArts, 2285 Highway 101 in Florence.

Avoid spreading the flu

It's flu season, which means the familiar drill: If you get sick, stay home from work. But what if you have a big meeting or an important deadline?

"Most people know they should stay home, but still find reasons to go into work," said Liz Hill, SAIF's Total Worker Health* adviser. "Not only does this expose your co-workers to an illness, it also makes it a lot harder for your body to recover."

Hill suggests managers can help set expectations during flu season. This includes:

- Encouraging workers to use their sick leave. Oregon law requires employers with 10 or more employees to provide 40 hours of paid leave per year.
- Making it easy for workers

to wash their hands. Consider having alcohol-based hand sanitizer available on worksites where handwashing facilities are not available.

• Planning for flu season. When employees are out, extra work can fall to other staff members—increasing their likelihood of getting sick or injured. Have a contingency plan for being short on employees.

Most importantly, managers should lead by example.

"It sometimes seems managers are the least likely to take a sick day," said Hill. "Remember, you are setting the tone for the whole team—if you get sick, stay home."

For more info on flu prevention at work, visit saif.com/flu.

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