

**REVIEW from page 1A**

**Rhody Rendezvous**

The 111th annual Rhododendron Festival from May 16 to 20 featured the theme “Rhody Rendezvous” — a playful way to honor the groups who have made Rhody Days their meeting spots for decades. This includes Davis Shows Northwest’s Amusement Carnival, part of the festival since 1950, and local motorcycle groups, who began attending in the 1970s. In addition, Florence’s first First Citizen Al Brauer (circa 1967) was named grand marshal of the Grand Floral Parade, which featured 100 entrants.

On May 17, the Rhododendron Court crowned Siuslaw High School seniors Lainey Goss and Trent Reavis as the 2018 Queen Rhododendra and King of the Coast. They were joined throughout the festivities by the rest of the Court, Prince Colby Waters, first runner-up Princess Denielle VanWinkle and princesses Thelma Gentry, Alex Saindon and Andrea Sanchez-Hernandez, along with the Junior Princess Court, Aleeya Thomas, Jasmine Krause, Abigail Galvan-Mendez, Kylee Stinger and Britney Adams.

“Rhody Rendezvous’ was a good theme for this year, and for every Rhody Days,” said Florence Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bettina Hannigan. “People really do come from all over for our festival, which continues to bring people together year after year.”

**SVFR Changes Leadership**

Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue (SVFR) experienced a challenging year in 2018 as Chief Director Jim Langborg tendered his resignation in August in the midst of concerns of a looming fiscal shortfall.

The district’s directors were surprised by financial information provided by

SVFR Office Manager Dina McClure during an August board meeting which warned of a \$500,000 shortfall in revenue. The announcement from Langborg that he has accepted a job at a fire district in California was even more surprising to those in attendance. Langborg said he would stay on for 60 days and leave the department in October.

McClure explained that the shortfall came about due to a combination of overdue reimbursements from supporting California fire suppression efforts, later than expected arrival of tax allocations from Lane County and accounting errors made by McClure and her predecessor.

The reaction to the report seemed to stun the directors, as previous reports had given no indication that SVFR was facing a revenue shortfall of this size.

Director John Carnahan, himself a longtime supporter and former employee of the district, expressed disbelief over the whole situation.

“For over 60 years, this department has never borrowed money,” he said. “It makes me absolutely sick that we are in this position, and the things that led up to it. I think we need to take some action and I would like to discuss this in executive session.”

As of this writing the district has not encountered the need to access additional funding to meet its financial obligations.

The process of finding a replacement for Langborg began immediately, with two members of the SVFR board working with two members from Western Lane Ambulance District (WLAD) board to decide on the best way to move forward. The two districts share administration under an intergovernmental agreement.

The board representatives decided to engage the services of the Special District Asso-

ciation of Oregon (SDAO), which recommended a number of potential candidates for the position of interim fire chief. The committee interviewed three of the candidates, settling on Steve Abel as their choice to succeed Langborg.

Able has spent the majority of his life as a firefighter, starting out as a volunteer firefighter in Alaska before pursuing a career in the broader field of fire services after serving in the U.S. Coast Guard in the early 1970s.

Able officially began his tenure as leader of SVFR on Oct. 10. He has a contract to serve as SVFR’s interim chief director through June 2019.

“When a resident of Florence calls 911, they expect well trained professionals to respond,” he said. “They want them to know what they are doing and to do it right the first time. When someone calls 911, they don’t care if it’s a career firefighter or a volunteer, they want a well-trained, proper response with the proper equipment.”

**Major Structure Fires Mark 2018**

While Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue (SVFR) faced a number of challenges behind the scenes, area firefighters continued to train for and respond to a variety of calls.

In the field SVFR had a number of major fires to deal with, most notably, a blaze that caused serious damage to one of the oldest businesses in Florence, Sand Dunes Frontier.

An electrical issue started a fire in a service building at the popular location for renting ATVs. The fire destroyed the main office and, while business at Sand Dunes was halted for two days, the staff was able to recover in time to host previously scheduled tours by the weekend.

A less encouraging story was the takeaway from a structure fire at the La Bula

Restaurant on Highway 101. The fire completely engulfed the structure and an investigation into the source of the blaze by the State Fire Marshall was listed as unknown after initially being considered suspicious in origin. The building has since been demolished.

**Florence Celebrates 125 Years**

The City of Florence closed Bay Street on July 27 to commemorate 125 years as a recognized city.

Although Florence was founded in May 1893, City Project Manager Megan

Messmer said, “Hopefully the weather will be much nicer in July.” Despite light clouds, the attendees ate BJ’s Ice Cream and dances to music from the Pressure Point Band, based in Portland, Ore.

In addition to Historic Old Town businesses who remained open for the event, local organizations such as Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue, Florence Public Works, Florence Police Department, U.S. Coast Guard Station Siuslaw River and the Oregon Coast Military Museum brought displays to the event.

Other participants included Siuslaw Public Library,

Siuslaw Vision 2025, the Florence chamber and community groups.

“We’re encouraging everybody to come out on a Friday night ... to enjoy our community and tie into our history,” Messmer said.

The event ran concurrently with the Oregon Mayors Association Summer Conference, held July 26 to 28 at the Florence Events Center and Driftwood Shores Resort.

Just 11 days after the Block Party, Florence Police Department held the National Night Out at Miller Park.

See REVIEW page 8A

**COAST RADIO OUR TOWN**

**THIS MONTH ON OUR TOWN:**

- **KCST News Director, George Henry & Siuslaw News Editor, Ned Hickson look back at the top news stories of the year.**
- **Interim Fire Chief Steve Abel and SVFR and WLAD board presidents Ron Green and Rick Yecny will discuss the next step in hiring a new permanent Chief**
- **Kim Pruitt talks about efforts to bring the Vietnam Veteran's Wall to Florence**
- **Megan Messmer Talks about upcoming city projects and the Winter Music Festival/Winter Arts Festival**



with host **GEORGE HENRY**

**SPONSORED BY:**

- **Holloway & Associates, CPAs**
- **Andy Baber / Edward Jones Investments**
- **PeaceHealth**
- **LCC Florence**
- **Siuslaw Public Library**
- **Archives - Photo Restoration Specialists**



**WEDNESDAY • JANUARY 2 FROM 4-6 ON KCST 106.9 FM**  
**REBROADCAST • JANUARY 3 FROM 10-NOON ON KCFM 104.1/1250 AM**



**Western Lane Ambulance**

*We're here for you 24-7.*

**The Only Emergency Medical Service & Critical Care Transport Service in Western Lane County.**

**Proud to serve the residents of Western Lane Ambulance District, those visiting the District and any others in need of medical attention.**



**Community Public Education:**

- CPR/AED
- Fall Prevention
- Life-Med Membership
- SAFE Kids
- Heart Attack React
- Stroke Prevention



**Call 541-997-9614 for more information**



**FLORENCE EVENTS CENTER**

**Always Something Happening**

541.997.1994 | 888.968.4086  
 715 QUINCE STREET | FLORENCE, OR 97439 | WWW.EVENTCENTER.ORG

- Great Performances
- Festivals
- Musicals
- Ballets
- Theatrical Productions

- Conference Meetings • Banquets
- Weddings • Receptions
- On & Off site Catering & Rentals

