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"One of the interesting things is ... Siuslaw is entirely community led," Lacer continued. "This visioning effort was not sponsored by the city, by the county or by any government agency. It was sponsored and led by community members."

Utilizing grants from The Ford Family Foundation, a steering team of seven Vision Keepers, six advisory committee members, two paid contractors and "a million wonderful community volunteers," according to Lacer, the Siuslaw Vision has accomplished several of its starting goals. These include the creation of a free, user-friendly community calendar at RiverCal.org; the second year of the Florence Farmers Market

each Tuesday from May to October; and other, smaller ways for people to engage with the Vision.

"One of the things we started recently ... are 'IPAs' — Initiative Proposal Agreements. We like to say, 'Have a beer with the Vision,'" Lacer said. "It's a way of allowing the Vision to find out what community needs there are, what specific projects community members want to work on and then how the Vision can help them work on that. It provides a little bit of structure for how both sides to accomplish what the community wants to see happen."

Community-driven efforts are at the heart of the Vision, which seeks to come alongside people's passions and equip them to accomplish

something tangible within the region. It's how the Florence Pickleball Association has gained recognition as a driver for bringing increased recreational opportunities to the city. And it's how Florence's efforts to create public art are coming to fruition.

"Art is one of our six main pillars of the Vision. It's an area where the Vision proper isn't really hands on," Lacer said. "We've got all kinds of little art projects, art efforts, going on in the community and a lot of them happen without the Vision being hands on. We still consider them part of the Vision — they are community-led efforts working to make life better for residents in our region — so we're here to support them."

The focus of the VtA Tour in Florence was on the arts as participants got the chance to go on one of four tours surrounding public and community art in the area.

Vision Keeper Jo Beaudreau said, "Today we're going to be talking a lot about the arts. Whatever your art is, whether it's cooking, poetry, writing, visual arts, theater arts, you name it, you can do that. ... Because the arts are important and what connects us together across cultures, age groups, economic backgrounds, educational backgrounds, etc. You guys already know this."

The four tours included a tour of Florence's newest mural at the intersection of Quince Street and Highway 126, the Old Town Florence Public Art Tour, the Siuslaw Public Library Art Tour and the "Too Tired to Tour" visit to Florence Regional Arts Alliance (FRAA) Art Center, where people got the chance to make art and learn about Florence's galleries and art events.

City of Florence Community and Economic Development Assistant Sarah Moerhke led the Gateway Mural Tour and hoped to give participants the chance to talk



CHANTELLE MEYER/SIUSLAW NEWS

Florence artist F. Michael Woods is restoring "Sea Life Mural," by Mark Storaasli, located on the ICM Restaurant building.

to the artists Angelina Marino and Joel Heidel of Marino-Heidel Studios, based in Portland.

"I'm going to talk about the mural that the Public Art Committee of the City of Florence has started putting up, and conflict and resolution with that process," she said.

Florence Public Art Committee Chairman Harlen Springer led the tour through Historic Old Town.

According to Vision Coordinator Stephanie Sarles, "The group was particularly interested in the Art Exposed pieces being available for sale. One participant expressed how beneficial that seems for both the Public Art Committee and the artists. Harlen emphasized that the public art in Florence doesn't follow a particular theme, but each piece is different to appeal to different artists, the community and visitors who will view the art."

Springer also said that one of Florence's most recognizable murals, "Sea Life Mural" by Mark Storaasli on the ICM Restaurant building, is being restored by local painter F. Michael Woods.

"It was fun to show the group the 'art in action,'" Sarles said.

The groups could either drive to their locations or walk, which offered an on-the-ground tour of the ReVision Florence Streetscaping Project on Highway 101.

At FRAA, Beaudreau demonstrated some of her favorite water-based art tools and allowed the attendees to doodle, paint, draw on and otherwise decorate postcards, a big part of the tour for her. She also talked about FRAA as a "community-centered art center," the 2nd Saturday Gallery Tour, demARTS and other area initiatives to unite Florence's artists.

The VtA Tour participants discussed a series of questions about connecting various art groups into the community-building process, encouraging collaboration and healing rifts.

"How do the arts bring people together?" Beaudreau asked. "There are different kinds of art, we all know that, we all have different ideas and opinions about our art. It's in the eye of the beholder. Some people may like some things and not like another."

The attendees talked about successful arts movements

in their towns, including connecting youth, combining visual arts with theater and performing arts, toning down competitive aspects and working together.

"People need to realize the world is very abundant, and there's enough for all. If I bring someone in, it might benefit you as well," one attendee said. "We need to break that kind of idea of scarcity, because we live in the richest country in the world and there's plenty for everyone, but a lot of it depends on your attitude"

Jones, who attended the FRAA tour, said that in Illinois Valley, "We plan things that are beneficial to all the groups while showcasing the different groups."

FRAA President Kristin Anderson said, "Everybody who joins FRAA knows that our goal is for them to become part of a community. If you sell something, great. We will help put your stuff on the wall and help you sell, but if you want to be rich, there's other private galleries that can help you do that."

She said the art center's goal is to be a place for artists and community members to come together, adding, "They can hang out here and be friends. Maybe that would relax some of the competition. Let's all make it together."

Sarles gave a recap of people's comments about the tours through Florence, including on Florence's mix of a city Public Art Committee coupled with artists who want creativity and grassroots methods and collaboration working hand-in-hand with city policies for meeting requirements.

"They enjoyed meeting the people involved in bringing art to the community," she said. "They also loved thinking about the impacts that art can have in a community and how art can use commonalities to bring people together. One person observed that the art gave the town a feeling of friendliness by creating inviting spaces. Another said she learned how important communication is for public arts projects."

The purpose of the VtA Tour was to be an experiential learning opportunity. Throughout the tour in Florence, VtA members talked about community building, specifically on growth and development, and related

back to the successes and challenges of each community.

"A lot of people have been talking about relationships and how important they are in this process," Jones said. "Another challenge is how to consider your own story and that being a part of the process. The emphasis on celebrating in Independence is inspiring. They actually pre-celebrate stuff, and I'm like 'That's how you do it.' That's how you get people to celebrate the start of your project."

"It's nice to see so many communities doing things and the way they do them," Beaudreau added.

The Siuslaw Vision is no longer in planning stages for its vision process; in fact, at four years in, it is looking to the future.

"It's been an interesting mix," Lacer said. "Our Vision is very ambiguous, it's fuzzy, and we're always constantly trying to wrap our arms around it to better our understanding of it, and it's always evolving. ... So where are we going next? We'd like to know, and you guys are going to help us figure that out."

The Siuslaw Vision is undergoing a strategic planning process to look at the organization, the potential necessity of changing from being a steering committee to a 501(c)(3) and other aspects for what the future could be.

"We hired a consultant to help us assess where we are, where we want to go and how we can best serve the community," Lacer said. "Right now, ... we're just a group of community members. Should we continue that way? We're also looking at sustainability, of course, just like all the rest of you in this community-building world, how to best sustain the effort, both financially and with volunteers, the human capital."

Following the tour groups, the full VtA Team reconvened at the Honeyman State Park East Woahink Meeting Hall before heading to the final event in Roseburg.

"We wanted to give them a taste of the Siuslaw Region's beautiful forest scenery and Honeyman's yurt seemed like the perfect place to reflect on their time in Florence," Sarles said. "Each person in the group had an opportunity to share briefly about insights they gained during their time in Florence or tell everyone what their favorite part of the tour was."

As VtA planned the tour, organizers wrote, "We hope everyone will be (re)energized for the work. We encourage visiting community representatives to plan to share their learnings back to their community."

During the comments, the participants praised various communities' successes.

"We learned so much from Independence. They're doing it," one person said.

"Illinois Valley has it going on," Beaudreau added.

"We think the same thing about Florence," a third person answered.

For more information on the Siuslaw Vision, visit RiverCal.org. For more information on The Ford Family Foundation and the Ford Institute for Community Building, visit www.tfff.org.

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