

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
Florence, OR 97439

Opinion

The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

"I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." —Thomas Jefferson (1800)



FILE PHOTOS BY NED HICKSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

To our visitors this weekend: Some reflections on Rhody Days



This weekend, our little coastal town of around 8,000 normally welcomes about 500 bikers and another 15,000 visitors to have a little fun and celebrate, well ... a flower.

A rhododendron, to be exact.

It's been going on for 113 years and, for four days, our town becomes an unlikely concoction of flower enthusiasts, Free Souls bikers and tourists all co-mingling over beers, carnival rides, classic cars, cotton candy and bacon-wrapped hot dogs.

I describe it to others as "Sturgis meets Mardi Gras," with a little Rose Festival thrown in (But better because, hey ... rhodies).

This year, of course, is something different.

Under the necessary restrictions and guidelines we must follow to keep our community and one another healthy and safe, the normal tapestry and grandeur of Rhododendron Days is missing for the first time since World

War II.

However, as a community, each of us carries the spirit of our beloved festival within us. On social media, folks are

new sprint record.

I spent 20 years living in Old Town across from the Port of Siuslaw boardwalk. My family grew accustomed to the arrival of the

when given an opportunity — or the right circumstance — to do so.

In the case of our annual festival, when the carnival rides go up people's guards come down. Whether a biker or banker, policeman or pirate, there is an unspoken agreement and genuine interest in having that shared experience together — and an understanding that it wouldn't work any other way.

It's everyone's willingness to participate in that little bit of "crazy" that becomes a common thread we all share for a few days each year.

As a community, we are doing what we *can* to assure this year's festival is not overlooked or forgotten as we also do what we *must* to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

I hope these few reflections will help illustrate to those visiting Florence this weekend what Rhododendron Days represents and means to our community. And also why we ask you to please respect and support the Phase One Reopening guidelines — so that, come next May, together we can once again share that common thread of some well-earned "crazy" for Rhody Days in 2021.

From the Editor's Desk *Ned Hickson*

sharing memories and photos, staging their own mini parades and participating in tomorrow's "virtual Grand Floral Parade" coordinated by the City of Florence and Florence Area Chamber of Commerce. There's also the "virtual Rhody Run" today hosted by Habitat for Humanity.

Some restaurants are even serving carnival food like corn dogs and elephant ears (I'll be calling in my order soon).

For my first 18 years here at *Siuslaw News*, I was always assigned to photograph the parade route along Bay Street, where the bikers congregate, lining their Harleys along both sides for several blocks.

I've had nightmares about tripping over a Fat Boy tire and sending a row of Harleys crashing like dominoes — and then being invited to the Olympics after setting a

Davis Shows NW Carnival and living so close that we could practically high-five riders on the Tilt-o-Whirl without leaving the porch.

The banging together of carnival rides signaled the beginning of four days of craziness that transforms our quiet community into a beautiful example of controlled chaos shared by upwards of 20,000 diverse visitors.

During this weekend, you can usually see baseball-capped Korean War veterans talking with bikers whose leathers were stitched with Vietnam War veteran patches; young families posing with owners of classic cars built decades before they were born; and "Captain Jack Sparrow" sharing a laugh with an out-of-town policeman.

It is always an example of how easily we can find a connection with others, no matter how different,



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Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Letters that are anonymous, libelous, argumentative, sarcastic or contain accusations that are unsourced or documented will not be published.

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Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) Explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

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