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"The store is for everyone," he said, inviting those who made the Facebook comments to speak with him. He messaged Prosser personally, while also giving out his phone number online to talk about the store.

"But if you're not my clientele, you're not my clientele," he added. "I don't f***ing care ... You don't open a store and have something for everyone."

He dissected Prosser's post, wondering first if it had to do with the LGBT statements.

"If the word 'queer' incites rage or a crazy discussion that you need to have with yourself, apparently, I don't think you know what [the word] means," he said.

However, the LGT-BQ signs had been up for months prior to the poster showing his support for BLM.

"If your hate is coming from the Black Lives Matter poster, then you're just a f***ing racist — Period," he said. "That sign has been in my window for 12 hours and that's what you're commenting on?"

Austen stated that it boiled down to the fact that, as a business owner, he had the right to put whatever he wanted in his window.

His video post was shared multiple times, creating a firestorm of comments. Most were in support, but some questioned his language.

"Take the high road, my friend, and do what you do best," Cindy Wobbe posted. "You have my support."

In the space of eight days in June, partisanship had erupted in Florence.

But the council remained quiet later that evening as it met via a video council meeting, leaving City Manager Erin Reynolds to speak for them.

"Damn, bro" "On behalf of our city staff and as city manager, I wanted to say a few words in light of the national events and local events, and just the general sentiment that we are all feeling," Reynolds said. "As we experience these unsettling times, I want to share with the community that I do expect a high level of professionalism of our staff as they interact with all individuals and all groups in our community. We, including myself, are here to humbly serve all members of our community in an outstanding and professional manner. So, I ask as your city manager — as members of the community — please be kind and have grace and patience when interacting with all people. We don't condone hate and instead promote loving our neighbors and visitors alike."

While well intended, the statement did little to help defuse the rising tensions. "You support an organization that advocates killing people," Bill Prosser wrote on his wife Katie's initial post about Austen. "Go see Tom Turner and tell him you think he is a killer and deserves to die."

In response, Kelsey Terry wrote, "Hey there you bigot sh** birds! Hope you can learn to go f*** yourself before your lord f***s you for yourself because you need you; you ignorant waste of f***ing breath. Anyone who speaks a goddamned whisper against Jeremy Austen will be so so f***ing f***ed. Promise."

"Damn bro," Prosser countered. "How is that helpful?" Brandie Bell asked. "No debate is solved with a f*** you. And if any heritage has a right to defend itself, it's mine. And you don't see us acting in this manner."

"If people put half the

energy attacking those who are actually the enemy, we would win," Terry replied.

On June 13, Harvey organized a counter protest to support the police while Austen, who was not engaged politically publicly before the Facebook incident, joined a growing BLM protest and invited people to create banners and signs with him.

A monetary battle began to be waged. First, it was donations to the NAACP in the name of Katie Prosser.

"Decided to use hate for something good!" Emma Renfro posted.

Then, it was funding protests themselves.

"HUGE thank you to Katie Prosser, had so many donations given in her name that we paid for all the supplies needed and extra for this Saturday's protest and every Saturday after," Austen posted on June 17.

On June 28, Nora Kent wrote *Siuslaw News* reporter Mark Brennan personally about a protest and included photos of an angry man wearing a red "Keep America Great" Trump hat and yelling at protestors, including a small group of children of color.

"It was pretty tense," she wrote. "A few of us kept our bodies between this unhinged Trump supporter and the kids. I think I was reaching for phone to call non-emergency police."

On July 4, Harvey would hold a protest in Old Town, which also had someone approach the group and scream at them for an extended period.

By this time, *Siuslaw News* had stopped publishing most stories about what had become regularly held protests. Instead, it began to focus on publishing this series, which had originally been slated to begin last February.

Then came the pandemic,

prompting the decision by editor Ned Hickson to delay the investigation's release until the virus passed.

But by June, it was clear that COVID-19 wasn't going away anytime soon.

"We dropped the ball"

On July 15, just days after Harvey organized a political rally at the gazebo in Old Town, *Siuslaw News* published a Guest Viewpoint by Greene.

"I received a series of phone calls from constituents who were very concerned, alarmed, confused, fearful and angry about a group of people that had set up various presentations in Old Town's Gazebo Park," he wrote, explaining how people in Florence had learned to work together for years despite political differences. But that changed in 2018.

"Mayor Joe Henry, Geraldine Lucio (now Prociw) and Woody Woodbury openly aligned themselves and were supported by members of our far-right community — outspoken pro-Trump supporters on social media and through Patriot Place, of which Sherry Harvey was president," he continued, then picked apart components of Harvey's July 4 booths: a pro-life booth, a Second Amendment Sanctuaries petition, etc.

"As a member of local government, we dropped the ball by allowing Sherry Harvey and her group to present themselves in the heart of our Old Town Historic District with far-right political agendas and a misplaced pro-life theme," he wrote, clarifying that his views were personal, not as a counselor.

There were parts of Greene's assertions *Siuslaw News* fact-checked, including whether or not Harvey did apply for a permit (she

had). But Greene's overall interpretation of events was incorrect; *Siuslaw News* had already begun re-reviewing investigation documents that showed tensions had clearly begun long before 2018.

Still, *Siuslaw News* published the letter with no contradictory qualifications or facts.

In response, Ralph Nichols submitted a letter on July 22, pointing out Greene's omission.

"Taking positions on political issues such as climate change, immigration enforcement, sanctuary cities, plastic bans, etc., may be great for virtue-signaling but are beyond the scope of the council," he wrote, while also omitting the many times Harvey, Prosser and others have taken steps to influence local politics and city government decisions against those things.

As with Greene's letter, *Siuslaw News* did not point this out, instead allowing dual inaccurate narratives to compete without any fact checking — which *Siuslaw News* does often do. However, at least publicly, the majority of "Editor's notes" appear reserved for conservative letter writers regarding climate change while other potentially misleading letters have been allowed to run unedited.

This inconsistency can be particularly damaging when the motives behind letters are more than mere personal opinion and are, instead, part of a coordinated effort to create a narrative disguised as random public discussion points.

Particularly when it combines Letters to the Editor and social media.

"War is coming"

On Aug. 18, just days after the city's deadline for candidates to submit applications, Councilor Ger-

aldine Prociw's resignation was read into record by the council, following her marriage and relocation to a home outside of the city limits; council members are required to live within the city.

This dramatically changed the dynamic of the Nov. 3 election. Instead of voters deciding on two city council seats, they were now in essence deciding on three — with the winners of the upcoming election working within the council to choose who will fill Prociw's seat in January. Depending on the make-up of the new council, the range of choices on who to consider for that fifth position could widen or narrow.

In October, liberal supporters were touting Jo Beaudreau, Maggie Bagon and Sally Wantz through letters to the editor — though personal politics differ widely between the three.

"Vote Bill Meyer, Dan Lofy for City Council and Joe Henry for Mayor," FLA posted Aug. 17, making up the conservative side although, as with the liberal-supported candidates, personal politics and approaches differed greatly with this group as well.

The one thing that has remained consistent in the campaign is the vitriol that has existed between the two sides since June.

Lofy, who currently sits on the city's Community and Economic Development Committee (CEDC) has been the recipient of the Chamber of Commerce Distinguished Service Award, among others.

But on July 10, Lofy posted a controversial comment on his Facebook page: "I don't give a rats ass who this offends, but I stand by it War is coming, sooner or later!"

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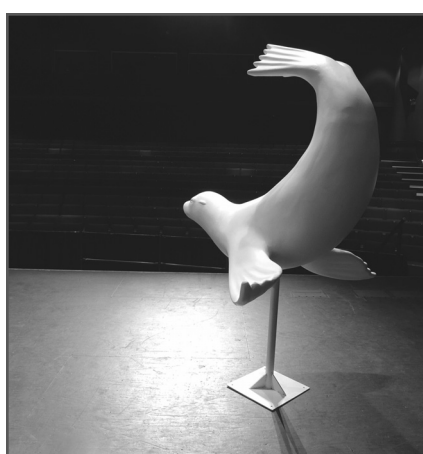


THE WEST ❖ THE SIUSLAW NEWS ❖ FLORENCE TIMES ❖ THE SIUSLAW OAR ❖ THE SIUSLAW NEWS ❖ SIUSLAW NEWS

A look back at 130 years

THIS CONCLUDES THE LOOK BACK WITH SIUSLAW NEWS

2016



"Dancing with Sea Lions"

The Florence Events Center celebrates its 20th anniversary with the "Dancing with Sea Lions" public art trail. Twenty-one artists created life-size art pieces from the fiberglass mold. The trail led from Reedsport to Newport and locations throughout Florence.

Voters pass Mapleton bond, defeat Siuslaw's (twice)

Mapleton School District voters approved a \$4 million bond measure for school improvements, while Siuslaw School District voters rejected a proposed \$36.9 million new high school in the May 17 Primary Election.

Of the four Lane County school district bond measures, Mapleton School District's \$4 million bond had the highest voter approval with nearly 63 percent in favor. The last bond measure passed by the school district expired in 1961.

Siuslaw again failed to pass the bond in 2018.

2017

Siuslaw News launches new website

The *Siuslaw News*, Florence's No. 1 resource for print and on-line news, announced a brand-new look and more functionality for its website, www.thesiuslawnews.com. The website was launched April 10.

Siuslaw News General Manager Jenna Bartlett said, "This is something we've been looking forward to for a long time. Our new website will be more user friendly and allow us to provide even more content to our readers."

Fiber comes to Florence

In a new pilot project announced this week, Siuslaw Broadband, doing business as Hyak, will install fiber optics to Florence's Pacific View Business Park and certain nearby residential and business areas.

"Siuslaw Broadband has been trying to get fiber off the ground for a while," owner Robbie Wright said. "We have been in Florence for six years, so we are in touch with the technology needs that people have."

Florence becomes U.S. Coast Guard City

The City of Florence officially became the 24th American Coast Guard City on Aug. 16 in a ceremony at Florence Events Center.

"This is a really exciting day for the City of Florence," Florence Mayor Joe Henry said. "I'm very proud and humbled by all the attention we've gotten and the support of our local Coast Guard station, not just for this recognition but for the things they do on our river and miles of coastline."

U.S. Coast Guard 13th District Commander Rear Admiral David Throop was the presiding official and dedicated Florence as the 24th Coast Guard City.

2018

New leadership for Oregon Coast Humane Society

The Oregon Coast Humane Society (OCHS) took a major step forward this year in the state-mandated recrafting of the organization's leadership team. OCHS Board President Shauna Robbers announced the hiring of a shelter manager and the organization's first executive director. Robbers said the hiring's directly address the main recommendations made by the Oregon Department of Justice (DOJ) at the end of last year, after an extensive inquiry was made into the operating practices of the OCHS.

"The DOJ just emailed me today, and they feel they are now able to close our case and we no longer have to report to them," she said.

Florence celebrates 125 Years

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

In addition to Historic Old Town businesses who remained open for the event, local organizations brought displays to the block party.

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

Just 11 days after the Block Party, Florence Police Department held the first National Night Out at Miller Park, winning the Rookie of the Year Award from the national organization.

2019

Florence City Hall reopened in February at 250 Highway 101, with major upgrades for all departments, including new Council Chambers and redesigned office spaces.

ReVision Florence Streetscaping Project began on Highway 101 in the spring and concluded in early 2020.

Florence Public Art Committee installed Marino-Heidel Studios' "Stitching Time, Weaving Cultures" mural on the Central Lincoln PUD building at the corner of Quince Street and Highway 126.

Siuslaw Watershed Council created eight short films in the "Stories of Restoring the Siuslaw" series, updated its website at siuslaw.org and social media, restored creeks and land, preserved habitat, gave away 13,000 native plants to over 100 different riparian community members and held the weeklong Watershed Camp.

SVFR and WLAD created the Western Lane Fire and EMS Authority, an organization that will employ administrative personnel from both while also allowing both boards to work more closely together.

Camp Cleawox, an overnight camp in the Girl Scouts of Oregon and Southwest Washington council, celebrated its 90th birthday on June 29.

Heceta Head Lightstation celebrated shining its light for 125 years in March.

2016

Siuslaw Youth Soccer Association established to provide soccer opportunities to local youth. Learn more at siuslawsoccer.com.

2018

Florence Farmers Market established. The market runs May to October every year. Learn more at florencefarmersmarket.org.

2020

The major news this year has been the novel coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Learn more at TheSiuslawNews.com/Coronavirus.