

CONSTRUCTION

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And what about Coiner Park?

Cottage Grove City Planner Amanda Ferguson, who also does double duty as a representative of the local Rotary club, said that the club and the City hope to be finished with a project to install new playground equipment in the park by Labor Day, though the curing of concrete that's expected to be poured this week could affect that schedule.

Last year, Rotary conducted a survey of needs in the park and enhancements that the public might like to see. Ferguson said the responses ranged from equipment for the park's youngest users to amenities for older youth. Plans include the addition of a merry-go-round, new toddler swings and a climbing net that can be used by all ages.



photo by Jon Stinnett

This fenced-off area at Coiner Park is soon to host new playground equipment.

OFFBEAT

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Finally, after moving all the spectators about a quarter-mile down the beach and away from the blast site, Thornton and his crew took cover ... and filled the sky with noise, smoke, sand and bits of dead whale.

If you search for "exploding whale" on YouTube, you'll readily find the KATU-TV story that reporter Paul Linnman and cameraman Doug Brazil filed that night. It does a spectacular job of showing the whole event: the massive explosion ("like a mighty burst of tomato juice," Linnman recalls in the book); the yells of delight turning to quivering shrieks of fear as the tiny specks visible above the crowd grow larger and it becomes clear that slabs of rotting meat, ranging in size from pinhead-size bits to refrigerator-sized chunks, are now falling out of the sky.

You'll hear possibly the most unintentionally comic part of the whole clip: A woman's motherly voice behind the cam-

era saying, "All right, Fred, you can take your hands out of your ears now ... here come pieces of ... oh my g—"

You'll also see what happened to Walt Uemenhoefer's brand-new 1971 Buick Ninety-Eight Regency. A chunk of flying whale meat the size of a coffee-table top had dropped out of the sky directly onto the roof of the big luxury car, blowing glass out in all directions and leaving its top flatter than its owner's military haircut.

"My insurance company is not gonna believe this," Uemenhoefer remarked ruefully when he saw what had happened. But he had to chuckle later on, when he remembered the sales promotion that had been going on at Dunham Oldsmobile in Eugene when he'd bought the car just a short time before. It was taglined, "GET A WHALE OF A DEAL ON A NEW OLDSMOBILE."

"Fortunately, no human was hurt as badly as the car," Linnman said in his newscast.

"However, everyone on the scene was covered with small particles of dead whale."

Uemenhoefer, by the way, is best known today as the titular "Baron" of The Baron's Den, a gun store and indoor shooting range just south of Eugene in Goshen, visible from Interstate 5 (it usually sports a big blue banner that reads "SHOOT A REAL TOMMY GUN"). He died at the age of 84 in January of this year.

In the aftermath, Thornton was spinning hard — or trying to. "It went just exactly right," he told Larry Bacon of the Eugene Register-Guard. "Except the blast funneled a hole in the sand under the whale" (thereby causing some of the whale chunks to be blown back toward the parking lot, he went on to say).

Decades later, Thornton — who also died recently, in October 2013 — was still defiantly sanguine about the whole affair. Contacted by Linnman in the mid-1990s, he refused to

ABUSE

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Roberts-Larson initially stated that the child "had fallen from a play structure and that caused the bruising," Skaggs wrote, though she later said that she had become "stressed and upset over a recent job loss" and the child would not stop screaming. Roberts-Larson then stated that she spanked the child approximately four times with her hand, later stating that she had "gone too far," according to a probable cause affidavit that Skaggs submitted to the Lane County Circuit Court. Following that interview in March, Roberts-Larson was cited for Assault III and released.

In explaining why it took so long for the suspect to be charged, Skaggs said that it took three weeks to locate Roberts-Larson, who was a transient at the time. Three weeks following her arrest, Skaggs said the District Attorney's Office requested another interview. Deputy District Attorney Erik Hasselman told the Register-Guard that the DA's office asked CGPD for another interview.

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