

'Distracted' drivers face tougher penalties beginning Sunday

Oregon's new "distracted driving" law goes into effect Oct. 1, specifically targeting those using a cell phone or other electronic device while driving.

A distracted driver crash occurs every 2 1/2 hours in Oregon, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

From 2011-15 there were 917 crashes resulting in 14 fatalities and 1,330 injuries, caused by drivers reported to have been using a cell phone at the time of the crash, according to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration. During those same years, there were 110 crashes, resulting in 166 injuries caused by drivers aged 16 to 18 who were reported to have been using a cell phone at the time of the crash. Oregon House Bill 2597 makes it illegal to drive while holding or using an electronic device such as a cell phone, tablet, GPS or laptop.

There are some exceptions – such as calling 9-1-1 to report an emergency – but drivers may need to prove this to the court if ticketed.

The new law does not apply to use of hands-free or built-in devices for those 18 or older; using the phone to summon medical help when no one else is available to make the call; emergency responders using a device in the scope of their employment.

It is not legal to use the device when stopped at a stop light, stop sign or stuck in traffic. Violations and fines associated with the new law have been increased: a first offense that doesn't contribute to a crash is a Class B Violation with a maximum fine of \$1000. A second offense (or if the first offense contributes to a crash) is a Class A violation with a maximum fine of \$2,500. A third offense within 10 years is a Class B misdemeanor and could result in a \$6,250 fine and up to one year in jail. For a first offense that does not contribute to a crash, the court may suspend the fine* if the driver completes an approved distracted driving avoidance class, and shows proof to the court, within four months. Only the fine is suspended -- the violation will still be recorded on the offender's driving record.

Plant workshop provides help with tools, dahlias

A plant workshop providing tips on winterizing your garden at 10 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 30, at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds, 92937 Walluski Loop, Astoria. Admission is free, although donations to the Clatsop County Food Bank will be accepted.

The event includes a plant sale, home and garden treasures sale, a plant division demonstration, soil pH testing, garden tool sharp-

ening, crafts and garden fun for children and advice from master gardeners. Food will be available at the concession stands.

Workshops and speakers:

- Fall/Winter Garden Prep and Growing Winter Veggies, 10:30 a.m. by Teresa Retzlaff.
- Dahlia Care and Winter Protection Methods, 12:30 p.m. by Joanie Chapel.
- Cleaning, Sharpening and Storing Garden Tools, 2 p.m. by Chuck Meyers.



Clatsop County beaches reopen Sunday to razor clamming

Razor clamming on Clatsop County beaches reopens Oct. 1 after a 16-month closure.

Clamming had been closed since July 2016 due to high levels of biotoxins found in the clams and an annual closure to protect newly set young clams that runs from July 15-Sept. 30 each year.

While other parts of the state's coast have been open to clamming, Clatsop County beaches are the most popular spot and account for 90 percent of Oregon's harvest.

Oregon Department of Agriculture tests shellfish toxins twice per month, as tides permit, to determine if ra-



zor clams and other shellfish are safe to eat. Results from ODA's two most recent tests

(Sept. 8 and 22) show clams are safe.

In summer 2016, the last time folks could go clamming, collectors had a record year, with most reaching their daily bag limit of 15 in a short time. Clammers will find different conditions now; ODFW's annual survey found significantly lower numbers of razor clams since surveys began in 2004.

Razor clam populations are cyclical and the population appears to be in a low-abundance period, following a very high-abundance period in 2015-16.

News in Brief

Low-cost flu shots available at clinic

Coastal Family Health Center is offering several flu shot clinics for the public with no appointments necessary.

Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection. Getting the vaccine now is recommended.

Cost is \$20. Clinics are 3 to 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays Oct. 4, 11 and 18.

Coastal Family Health Center is at 2158 Exchange St., Suite 304, Astoria.

High school GED classes offered

An orientation for GED, or general education development, classes is set for 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, Oct. 6, in Columbia Hall room 114 at Clatsop Community College.

The classes are open to students ages 16 and older who wish to earn a high school credential.

Fall classes started Sept. 25. Those younger than 18 must provide a "Release from Compulsory Education" form from your high school before attending classes or taking the GED tests.

GED classes are offered in English or Spanish, and Clatsop Community College also offers ESL classes and tutoring.

There is no cost for enrollment and study materials are provided.

Class offerings are available in Astoria, Clatskanie and

Seaside. Students attend an orientation before starting class and will enroll at the first class.

For more information, contact Allison deFreese at 503-338-2347.

Auditions set for local 'Scrooged'

Astor Street Opry Company holds open auditions at 6 p.m. Oct. 8 and 9 for the holiday production of "Scrooged in Astoria."

Written by Judith Niland

with music by Philip Morill, it will be directed by Bill Carr and choreographed by Chris-Lynn Taylor. Performances are weekends, Dec. 1 through 23.

The play is stylized as a 1960s holiday TV special and is loosely based on the Charles Dickens classic, "A Christmas Carol."

No previous theater or music experience is necessary for any of the small or large parts for over 26 actors and actresses age 12 and older.

Auditions are at the playhouse, 129 W. Bond St., Astoria.