

Turkish rug show coming to town

Sesame and Lilies to host Murat Tasdemir

By Erick Bengel
Cannon Beach Gazette

Murat Tasdemir, the owner and president of Tasdemir Rugs on Bainbridge Island, Wash., doesn't just move merchandise, he connects clients with "the right art," he said. "I believe that carpets are an art, and each individual carpet has a story to tell."

This personable purveyor of rugs from the Middle East and beyond will be presenting a Turkish rug trunk show May 23 and 24 at Sesame and Lilies, 183 N Hemlock St., where Tasdemir has sold rugs for the last few years.

The show will include about 200 wool and silk rugs for sale — principally Turkish, but also Persian, Russian, Indian and Pakistani — plus the collection of about 20 already available at the store. Many of the older rugs are traditional pieces woven by Turkish women for their homes and sold to Tasdemir, and most of the newer ones are designed by American artists in the Turkish fashion, he said.

Sizes usually range from 3-by-5 feet wide to 10-by-15 feet long, the prices from

about \$120 to \$12,000. A decent 7-by-10-foot rug woven between the 1940s and 1960s can cost anywhere from \$1,500 to \$8,000, he said.

Tasdemir and one of his employees will bring other Turkish and Turkish-style goods, such as scarves, textiles, silk pillows and custom jewelry, he said.

Interior decoration

Selling rugs is only one side of Tasdemir's skill set; he also does a kind of field work, venturing into the homes of prospective buyers and finding rugs that "match" their interior design. He often makes an initial visit to check out the client's home, sans rugs, then makes a second visit with several rug options.

"I am good on decorating — seeing the house and seeing the colors and seeing what will be best to put in their home," he said.

Though the trunk show is scheduled for the Saturday and Sunday of Memorial Day weekend, Tasdemir may remain in town a day or two later, just in case customers invite him over and ask him to assess their rug needs.

"If they want to come and buy what they want, if they know what they want, that's great," he said, "but I'm also there to serve, and I'm going to be there to build a connection with

clients, and I'll do what is needed to help the people."

Besides educating his customers about the rugs they intend to purchase, he seeks to educate them about the rugs they already have.

"He's the quintessential Turkish rug salesman," said Diane Speakman, who co-owns Sesame and Lilies with her husband, Jay Speakman. "He's just so full of energy, and he's just so eager to make everyone happy."

Word of mouth

A U.S. citizen since 2003, the 43-year-old Tasdemir was born in Malatya, Turkey, and at age 17 started cleaning and folding carpets for a company in Istanbul.

He took his expertise from one company to another until, in the mid-1990s, he found himself working for a company that sold to the states, and he became its overseas representative.

His first stop was in Tucson, Ariz., and he then made the rounds in Portland and, later, Bainbridge, where, after renting out a space for a few years, he opened his own rug store in 1999. That same year, he married his wife, Lisa, who owns a boutique named Lilies across the street from Tasdemir Rugs.

In his travels, Tasdemir has sold thousands of rugs, decorated thousands of homes and carried products



PHOTO COURTESY OF FACEBOOK

Murat Tasdemir, owner and president of Tasdemir Rugs, lounges in his store on Bainbridge Island, Wash. He has sold thousands of rugs and decorated thousands of homes in his career.

through the country, he said. "Name a state, and I have sold there."

Recently, in what he called his "biggest adventure," he traveled to Fairbanks, Alaska, where he sold rugs and did some interior decorating for

a group of prominent citizens.

"For me, it's very important for the right carpet to go to the right house," he said. "If they know what they have, they're going to appreciate the carpet that they have more."

For 15 years, Tasdemir's business has steadily grown, in part, because of word of mouth, a potent force in his line of work.

"I think word of mouth is very beautiful — and very powerful, too," he said.

City eyes tax increase, capital improvements

Budget from Page 1A

The City Council plans to vote on the budget at its regular June 2 meeting. If additional deliberation is needed, the council will hold a special meeting later that month.

Tax increase

With the extra \$139,000, the Chamber of Commerce would be able to hire a full-time employee. This person would help upgrade the information center's operations and assist Courtland Carrier, the chamber's executive director, with marketing, Kucera said.

Because the chamber is the town's primary economic development agency, money spent on the chamber is money spent on tourism, he said.

The issue, Kucera said, is not that Cannon Beach isn't funding its chamber well enough. The city, in fact, spends more money on its chamber than does Seaside; last year, Cannon Beach spent about \$71,000 whereas Seaside spent about \$38,000.

The issue is that Cannon Beach has a chamber-run

information center, which performs the same task as Seaside's Visitors Bureau but is funded far less — roughly \$125,000 compared to \$625,000, Kucera said.

Cannon Beach's information center sees about three times as many walk-ins annually than does Seaside's Visitors Bureau, according to Carrier. In 2014, the Cannon Beach tallied about 54,000 walk-ins to Seaside's 20,000.

"In Seaside, the city takes that on as an expense. Here, our chamber, a private organization, is doing that function for us," Kucera said, "and doing it at a very low, low cost."

The revenue the chamber receives from the tax increase would be on top of the Tourism and Arts grant, which is awarded to the chamber in varying amounts every year.

"You hear that phrase 'heads in beds' — well, that's exactly what the chamber does," Kucera said, referring to the desire of destination resort communities, like Cannon Beach, to attract as many overnight visitors as possible.

'Spending money on a problem doesn't solve the problem. There has to be accountability and a real reporting mechanism...'

Brant Kucera, city manager

Visitors and vigilance

City Councilor Wendy Higgins said that, if the tax increase is approved, there should be a way to track how the chamber and information center spend the money.

Kucera agreed: "Spending money on a problem doesn't solve the problem. There has to be accountability and a real reporting mechanism where we see success with the money that we're going to give them."

Because the chamber partially relies on money from the city's Tourism and Arts fund — an amount that fluctuates from year to year — the chamber has had an unstable revenue stream, Carrier said. The tax increase would solve that problem by tying the chamber's revenue to a stable source of income.

The budget committee should keep in mind, Kucera said, that, even with the added revenue, the information center's needs far exceed \$139,000. However, "this is a good first step to begin to address some of those needs," he said.

He added that the expected return may grow into a far greater amount down the road than initially hoped for by establishing a self-reinforcing positive feedback loop: The increase in lodging tax revenue would allow the chamber to advertise better, which means an increase in visitors, which means more tax revenue and so on.

The bottom line, Kucera said, is that the city would not have to raise the lodging tax any further to gain more revenue.

He said that a substantially large increase in lodging taxes could produce diminishing returns — that is, more people might be disinclined to rent a room in Cannon Beach. The proposed increase won't have that effect on the hospitality industry, he argued.

"I think it creates the revenue to continue to promote this town, which will ultimately benefit that sector of the economy," he said.

Capital improvements

After speaking with the department heads while preparing next year's budget, "it became very apparent to me very quickly that we have quite a bit of deferred maintenance that we need to address," Kucera said. "The time is high that we begin to address some of the capital issues that we have."

Among the proposed capital improvement projects Kucera, the city staff and the budget committee discussed are:

- The ongoing renovation of City Hall;
- Installing antennas at both the north-end and

south-end emergency cache container sites;

- Repairing and rehabilitating the surfaces of the city's downtown tennis and basketball courts;

- Reconstructing the blocks between First and Third streets to make them ADA-accessible;

- And constructing a new plaza at the west end of Second Street with benches, low lighting and a rebuilt sidewalk.

At future meetings, the budget committee will consider possible improvements to the city's water system, sewer system and RV Park.

Though the city must maintain a healthy fund balance, Kucera noted that, after a while, a city's saving too much money can begin to seem gratuitous, especially if the money isn't reinvested in the community.

"If people don't think you have a plan for the money that you keep socking away, the logical question is, 'Why are you taxing me?'" he said. "I think we need to show people, 'Here's the plan for those taxes we've been putting away.'"

Beach sign a tribute to Oregon's legacy of publicly owned beaches

Sign from Page 1A

Lackaff — who was born in Cannon Beach and has lived on the North Coast since she graduated from high school — said that, as a child, "it just never occurred to me how special it was to have a beach like this for everyone to play on," she said. "You just take things for granted until you learn about them."

A 'holy triptych'

Lackaff spoke before a group that included Mayor Sam Steidel, Cannon Beach City Councilors, Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department representatives, the city's public works department (which mounted the sign) and the parks and community services committee (which conceived the sign).

Last winter, Matt Love — the Astoria-based writer and publisher who penned the uncredited text for the sign — mentioned during a public

lecture that not a single public sign in Oregon commemorated the landmark legislation of 1967.

The parks committee, and its Twelve Days of Earth Day subcommittee, ran with the idea. The final plywood panel is headlined: "The Great Birthright: Oregon's Ocean Beaches."

"Four and a half months from conversation to dedication has got to be some kind of record," Love said. "The people of Cannon Beach moved it, and it was incredible how this happened."

Composing the copy for the sign — which Lackaff hand-wrote in ink for the original artwork — proved to be an emotional experience for Love.

"I don't think I ever would have become a writer, or an Oregonian of merit, if I hadn't had this ..." he said, gesturing toward the beach. "The access at all hours, all day and night, where you never have to pay a cent to

go. And it matters to people who don't have the money, that can't check into the motels."

Love, who has documented Oregon's legacy of publicly owned beaches, introduced the attendees to Blair Kramer, the son of the late Associated Press reporter Matt Kramer whose coverage of the Beach Bill help galvanize public support for it.

In Oswald West State Park lies a memorial to Matt Kramer and his service to Oregon journalism. That memorial, the plaque of Oswald West at the overlook of Neahkahnie Mountain and, now, the Beach Bill sign compose, in Love's mind, a "holy triptych" of Oregon's conservationist values, he said.

'The great birthright'

Courtland Carrier, executive director of the Cannon Beach Chamber of Commerce, spoke of the relationship between private and public entities.



ERICK BENDEL PHOTO

Matt Love, the Astoria writer who penned (anonymously) the text for Cannon Beach's Beach Bill interpretive sign, talks about the importance of Oregon's public beaches. The sign stands near the railing platform at the west end of Second Street.

"It may be sacrilege for me to be saying this, but, as a person who represents business, this is the greatest example of noncommercial activity that you can imagine. Were it not for (Oregon's public beaches), many of our commercial businesses would not exist," he said.

"Thank God for noncommercial activities."

City Manger Brant Kucera, spent many years working in Michigan, a state surrounded by water. Up close, the Great Lakes look very much like oceans, he said, and he always thought it was a shame that so much

of that state's lakefront is privately held.

"I think it's a really terrible thing for the public not to have access to the environment, because that's how we connect without environment, is actually being out, physically, in it," he said. "And I just think how visionary that is, for the state to ensure that people will forever be able to enjoy this."

For good measure, Love recited a quote what he considers "Oregon scripture" — the line that Oswald West uttered when he signed the 1913 bill and is now written beneath the banner of Cannon Beach's "Beach Bill" sign:

"No local selfish interest should be permitted, through politics or otherwise, to destroy or impair this great birthright of our people."

"This is the great birthright," he said, "right here behind us."