

Wendy was the bright star in many hearts

IMPRESSIONS
NANCY MCCARTHY



The Daily Astorian advertising team in 2014. From left, Brandy Stewart, Wendy Richardson, Kimberly A. Flaigg, Laura Kaim, Lisa Cadonau, Betty Smith and Holly Larkins.

It seems so right that the first time I met Wendy Richardson it was to talk to her about a community event that she was organizing.

I was a freelance writer in 2008, assigned to write a story for the Coast River Business Journal about "Where the Stars Play," a concert series held in the summer at Quatat Park in Seaside. Wendy had organized it for several years on behalf of the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District. It was designed to draw people downtown and into local businesses.

Wendy generously gave her time to share with me her enthusiasm for the event, which, she felt, benefited the community and gave mostly unknown bands some recognition and a little pocket money. We met in her small office next to Seaside Health Foods on Roosevelt Drive. She worked there as the sales representative for The Daily Astorian.

Little did we know that about three months later, I would start working in that same office as the South County reporter for The Daily Astorian and we would become fast and close friends.

WENDY'S GENEROSITY, LOVE for her community and desire to help others — even when it meant impinging on her own time or resources — are the qualities all of her friends are writing about this week on her Facebook page in her memory. Wendy died of a massive stroke Monday.

"Your friendship, generosity, kindness and wicked sense of humor have kept me afloat through sad times. You always knew the right thing to say, or when a hug was just what I needed," wrote Gretchen Fulop Darnell. "I fear Seaside will never be the same."

"The many lives you have touched, the many people who have been healed by your words! Thank you for your gift of love throughout the community," wrote Linda Smith.

"Thank you for all that you taught me, helped me through and shared with me! I am forever grateful for your love and wisdom," added Angela Fairless.

Every weekday morning for nearly seven years, until I retired last March, Wendy would come into my office for a quick chat. It would be our way of starting the day. We shared our personal trials and triumphs in those conversations and usually ended up laughing. She had many tribulations that dogged her throughout the time we worked together, problems that I'm pretty sure few people knew about because her smile and vivacity masked her stress.

In some ways, Wendy seemed naive about people, but her faith in them usually worked out. Like the time a stranger came into our office with some hard luck story. Wendy loaned the woman \$25 — money she couldn't spare at the time. The woman promised to pay her back, even though she was on her way out of town. A few months went by. But to my great surprise, the woman repaid the loan.

WENDY WAS ALWAYS SHELTERING people under her wing, especially young people. Whenever we went to lunch together, there inevitably would be a person at the restaurant — a waitress or someone we would run into — who had either lived temporarily with Wendy's family or who had gone to school with one of Wendy's three children and who Wendy had somewhat "adopted."

Family was the dominant theme that ran through Wendy's life. She dearly loved her husband, Al, and her three children, Alix, Andie and Nick. But what impressed me so much was how



Wendy Richardson's last Facebook post to her page Dec. 19: "Beautiful rainbow over the house this morning. Thanks mom."

she raised the kids to be thoughtful, creative, caring, educated adults. Two years ago, Wendy celebrated three graduations in the same month: Alix and Andie graduated from college and Nick graduated from Seaside High School. Nick is now attending Lane Community College in Eugene.

In this day, when there's so much talk about high school dropouts and the high cost of a college education, to have all three children graduating in the same month is quite a feat!

But her motherly instincts didn't end with her children. Wendy was the office "mother," too. When Seaside reporter Katherine Lacaze needed furniture for her baby, Wendy dug out her leftover furniture from her garage.

"You showed me how to sew a button onto my jacket," wrote Erick Bengel, former Cannon Beach reporter, on Wendy's Facebook page. "You shared your home-cooked meals with me. ... You counseled and consoled me during some of my darker days at the Gazette. And

I always looked forward to our talks. I can't believe I don't have those to look forward to anymore."

"I just realized I still have the jumper cables she loaned me in my back seat," former Seaside reporter Louie Opatz wrote on Facebook. "Wendy was always so generous, gregarious and loving — and all those things so selflessly. She never did — and never would have — asked for those jumper cables back."

WENDY WAS THE TRUE SPIRIT OF the Seaside community, a tireless volunteer for the high school, the Seaside Chamber of Commerce and other local organizations. She would work full days at the office, then spend evenings and weekends (and, during beach volleyball tournaments, early mornings) helping out in the community.

She taught me the true meaning of the phrase, "It takes a village. ..." She introduced me to this village of South County, to her friends and her family, and she made me feel comfortable here. There wasn't a Thanksgiving or Christmas that went by that she didn't invite me to share it with her and her family.

Maybe it is right, too, that we honor Wendy at Christmas. She and her mother ran the Christmas shop, 'Tis the Season in Cannon Beach for more than 20 years. Christmas was Wendy's favorite holiday.

She often talked about her mother, who died several years ago; Wendy missed her very much.

In a final Facebook post last weekend, Wendy showed a picture she had taken of a rainbow over the house that she and Al had moved into a few months ago. She adored the house and its location near West Lake.

The rainbow seemed to symbolize that all was well, finally, in Wendy's life, and, as always, she wanted to share the happy moment.

"Beautiful rainbow over the house this morning," Wendy wrote. "Thanks, mom."

Nancy McCarthy is the retired Daily Astorian South County reporter and former editor of the Seaside Signal and Cannon Beach Gazette.

Community pays tribute to Wendy Richardson

Longtime resident remembered for supporting family, friends, colleagues and community

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

A full house was a testament to Wendy Richardson's impact as friends, family and community members gathered for a Celebration of Life ceremony in her honor Dec. 27.

The Pacific Room at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center was packed full of people searching for closure and comfort while remembering Wendy, who passed away Dec. 21 at the age of 56 after suffering a massive stroke the day before.



Wendy Richardson in 2008.

Wendy's three brothers, Scott, Jeff and Randy Shannon, shared stories of growing up with their only sister. "She was what I call 'the princess,'" Randy Shannon said. "She was the queen, and deservedly so."

People always flocked to Wendy, drawn to her warm, infectious smile, her inviting personality and her kind, understanding heart, they said. It was not unusual for peers in school to use friendships with the brothers to have easier access to Wendy. Because she was so approachable and sincere, she had many friends, "and always will," Randy Shannon said.

"How Wendy made you feel after you were with her was truly her trademark," he said.

In letters read aloud, Wendy's children — Alix, 24; Andie, 23; and Nick, 19 — described her as their best friend, someone they could depend on for support. She helped them recognize and achieve their dreams. Even after her passing, they wrote, they still feel her presence and strength. Andie Richardson wrote she is glad they told each other "I love you" as much as they could.

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