



A NEW YEAR'S TRADITION

## TAKING THE PACIFIC PLUNGE



Swimmers enjoy New Year's Day with a dip into the Pacific Ocean.

ANDREW TONRY/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

By Andrew R. Tonry • Cannon Beach Gazette

Quickly after moving to Arch Cape in 1996, Linda Lapp Murray learned of a long-running, local tradition: on the first morning of each new year her neighbors would gather on the beach before plunging together into the frigid Pacific Ocean.

As New Year's Day broke and the town assembled on the beach in front of her home, Lapp Murray reflexively grabbed her camera.

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Linda Lapp Murray

ANDREW R. TONRY/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Read a first hand account of this year's Pacific Plunge

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## Fire board in hot seat as residents seek ouster

Board 'unprofessionally run,' critics say

By Andrew R. Tonry  
Cannon Beach Gazette

A fissure between community members and the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors over the firing of Fire Chief Mike Balzer has led to a public recall effort.

Resident Susan Neuwirth is petitioning to remove three of the board's five directors: President Sharon Clyde, Garry Smith and Linda Beck-Sweeney.

Neuwirth began attending the board's public meetings after Balzer's October firing, as well as speaking with members of the nearly all-volunteer force. She became alarmed at the prospect of a divide between the board and the volunteers.

"The crew was becoming more and more demoralized," Neuwirth said. "They cannot be in contention with the board. They just want to do their job."

"That's when I decided to step in," Neuwirth added. "I'll be their voice."

Neuwirth collected letters from 17 current and former volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians, which she presented to the board.

The letters, which Neuwirth also shared with the Gazette, convey anger, confusion and mistrust, mostly stemming from the manner in which Balzer was terminated.

A volunteer for 30 years before becoming chief and a decade-long member of the Cannon Beach Police department, Balzer was locked out of his office, met with a police escort while he gathered his belongings, and sent home walking in the rain, Neuwirth said.

A brief, uniform letter, signed separately by seven volunteer firefighters and emergency medical technicians, calls the board's handling of Balzer's termination "disrespectful, cold and calculating."

"I can no longer respect or trust this board to represent our fire district or fire

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## After winter storms, Ecola's Indian Beach road still closed

Storm damage takes toll at state park, recreation site

By Dave Fisher  
Cannon Beach Gazette

Torrential rainfall, a likely result of El Niño, coupled with Ecola State Park's fragile surface geology led to the closure of Indian Beach road and removal of the viewing platform at Ecola Point parking lot in mid-November.

When the storm-damaged road will reopen isn't certain, but Matt Rippee, park manager of the Ne-

halem Bay Management Unit which oversees Ecola and seven other parks and recreation sites in northwestern Oregon, is hopeful it could be as soon as May.

The November storm, said Rippee, dumped over 8 inches of rain along the north Oregon Coast during a five-day period in November, rendering the culvert at Canyon Creek underneath the road useless and leading to its closure. A subsequent deluge in early December triggered the drop of another section of the road leading to Indian Beach near the park entrance.

"That area of the road is still stable enough and park crews

have been able to fill it in to keep it passable. If we take another big hit, however, it could lead to closing the park," Rippee said, noting that the Ecola State Park host has vacated the park as a precaution.

**Creek rerouted**

As for the culvert, Cannon Creek, which flows through the park and is "usually a nice little creek," according to Rippee, rerouted itself around the culvert creating a dangerous situation and closing vehicular access to Indian Beach.

"In the meantime, Indian Beach is still accessible by trail.

It's just a matter of parking at the Ecola Point parking lot and taking the trail down to the beach from there," Rippee noted.

Park crews removed the viewing platform due to its precarious perch just above an active landslide. In 2012, a portion of another viewing platform in close proximity to the one just removed actually fell into the sea, according to Rippee. In evaluating new sites to relocate the platform, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department will be aided by geotech engineers in its effort to secure a more safe and secure location. It is a pro-

cess already underway as the department looks to have the park shipshape for visitors later this spring.

**Wiped out trail**

Farther south, 5 miles from Cannon Beach, the November storm effectively wiped out the trail from the parking lot to the beach at Arcadia Beach Recreation Site. The beach access trail at Arcadia was earmarked for improvements this spring at a cost of \$5,000 and with the help of state correctional crews.

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## Volunteer finds meaning in the jungle, on the shore



Nancy Wesson recalls two years of living dangerously

By R.J. Marx  
Cannon Beach Gazette

Nancy Wesson arrived in Cannon Beach on Labor Day 2014 with a loaded 30-foot U-Haul and no place to live.

That might have been daunting for many new arrivals, but considering what she had experienced as a Peace Corps worker in Uganda for the previous 27 months, this was traveling in style.

Wesson, a mediator and personal productivity consultant in Austin, decided to trade it all in at age 64. "I wanted a venue to try my skill set



SUBMITTED PHOTO/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

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Residents of a village in northern Uganda gather for lessons.