

# Cannon Beach Academy scouts new location

## Original site said to be too costly

By Brenna Visser  
Cannon Beach Gazette

Days after securing enough students to open the Cannon Beach Academy, the board of directors will have to find a new location before opening this fall.

The last-minute change came when the board received a cost estimate of \$245,000 — more than \$150,000 over the \$90,000 they budgeted for construction costs. The original location on Sunset Boulevard would need to be renovated extensively to meet state school fire codes, board member Phil Simmons said Tuesday, May 9.

“We budgeted \$90,000 based on what my contractor friends told me, based on the square footage we were reno-

vating,” Simmons said. “They weren’t envisioning code requirements for school.”

The board submitted their plans for the charter school more than two years ago, Simmons said, but weren’t able to get a formal estimate for construction until after submitting their building permit in March.

Board members are now seeking to lock down the former Preschool and Children’s Center at 3781 S. Hemlock, hoping to fast-track the process amid a looming fall opening.

## New space

When the board originally submitted their charter school plans to Seaside School District, the Children’s Center was not available, Simmons said.

But the Children’s Center closed in April 2016, and in a lot of ways, Simmons said the building is more suitable than the original location.



BRENNNA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

The Cannon Beach Preschool and Children’s Center may be an option for the Cannon Beach Academy, a new charter school.

“We were going to out-grow the building on Sunset,” Simmons said. “In the Children’s Center, we can make this space work for the foreseeable future.”

Simmons said the building would take fewer, if any, renovations because it already meets many of the school

building code requirements. It’s larger, includes a playground, and during a walk through, Simmons said Coastal Construction gave him a ballpark cost estimate of \$50,000.

Being a stand-alone building also helps reduce cost, because the fire code require-

ments in the last location were dependent on the fact the space shared walls with other retail businesses, Simmons said. “When I got the email (with the estimate) I believed we were done. I didn’t have a plan to raise \$150,000,” he said. “I’ve been surprised, within a day there was an outpouring of support of people determined to make this happen. To open this school it’s going to take that.”

## School or housing?

Before the academy can start constructing anything, it must submit a conditional land use agreement to the city, City Manager Brant Kucera said.

Since the city owns the property, the City Council must vote to give permission to Kucera to go ahead with lease negotiations at the June 6 council meeting. Then the earliest the request can go before the Planning Commission for approval is June 22.

“The timeline is tight, but if nothing out of the ordinary happens, and the council decides to grant permission, then I think we can do it,” Kucera said.

However, the city has also designated the Children’s Center as an option for affordable housing in a strategic plan, Kucera said, with a vision of retrofitting the building into nine housing units. Affordable housing has remained a priority issue for Cannon Beach.

“We would be moving away from that plan,” Kucera said.

If councilors denied the property to the academy, or if the permitting and construction process don’t meet the fall deadline, Simmons said students enrolled would just be enrolled in Seaside School District.

“We’ll do what we can to move the process along to meet all of the deadlines if council chooses to move forward,” Kucera said.

# ‘Wind therapy’: Three-day event comes to Cannon Beach

Bikers from Page 1A

“I envisioned a community of women to organize rides, a community to turn to for support, education and training and find inspiration to live their dreams,” Belcher said.

Women from all over the Pacific Northwest rode to convene for the company’s inaugural event, “Flock to the Rock,” the first weekend of May at the Sea Ranch RV resort.

The weekend included touring trips down through Manzanita and east county, group dinners to share experiences of triumph and stigma, and a presentation from Mary McGee, the first woman to ever compete in motocross racing in the U.S.

Four years ago, it took Belcher a 4,800 mile trip across 10 states in 21 days to overcome her fears of conquering the freeway by herself. Now she hopes to offer the opportunity of adventure to other women, she said.

“That’s the moment I got my confidence back,” Belcher said. “These trips are about empowerment. I wanted other women to experience that. Because we all have (moments of fear), we just don’t know how to talk about it.”

## How it all started

Choosing Cannon Beach as the company’s first destination trip came out of a conversation Belcher and her friend Stephanie Luper had while visiting the town back in January.

“What started out as a chat on the beach in January became this event,” Belcher said. “I remember Stephanie watching the people on the beach, and she said ‘I can’t believe it, people are just flocking to the rock!’”

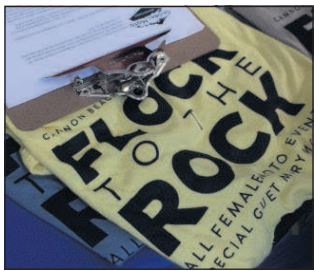
Belcher hopes to make this an annual event.

Much of the support Belcher looks to provide within this organization comes from a general feeling of stigma women riders feel in comparison to their male counterparts. Belcher said she feels women are faced with specific challenges, including



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Stephanie Luper, Mary McGee, Ruth Belcher and Dionne Haroutunian pose for a photo by Luper’s bike. McGee and Haroutunian were both speakers at the event.



BRENNNA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

The event name “Flock to the Rock” came out of a conversation Ruth Belcher and Stephanie Luper had about tourists on the beach back in January.

less sponsorship and recognition of their sport in the industry, fewer gear options and certain cultural barriers tied with family life.

“They are stifled by families or partners, and I want to be that light that lifts them out of that,” Belcher said.

It’s a factor that’s been around awhile in the sport, McGee recalls. The keynote speaker of the weekend started racing cars in the late 1950s, and then transitioned into dirt bike and motocross racing in the early 1960s. She became the first woman ever to race the Baja 1000 — a multi-day, solo ride through the desert — in 1968.

But before she could even enter her first motorcycle race in 1960, she was presented with a number of challenges. McGee, now 80, was attempting to enter races in a time where she wasn’t allowed to



BRENNNA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Event organizer Ruth Belcher laughs with her friend Stephanie Luper, who helped develop the idea organize a group ride to Cannon Beach.

use a debit card unless it was under her husband’s name. Some men refused to take her measurements to have motorcycle gear made to fit her because she was a woman, she said.

## ‘What started out as a chat on the beach in January became this event!’

Ruth Belcher  
CEO Global Moto Adventures

Ultimately, she had to ask permission from the American Federation of Motorcyclists to even be considered to try out, she said.

“They just didn’t know what to do with me,” she laughed. “But that’s alright — they were just afraid.”

McGee said while her husband helped her get her start in car and motorcycle racing, it’s the adrenaline and camaraderie between other women motorcyclists that kept her riding up into her 70s.

“The exhilaration, oh my God how do you describe it,” she said. “The thing about motorcyclists is you always have a friend. You pull into a gas station somewhere you’ve never been, and you see a couple people on bikes, and instantly you’re friends. There’s a special connection.”

## Wind therapy

Barb Brown was one of the many riders who joined the event after Belcher reached out to her. She said she was inspired by the location and the company.

“I love riding with other women,” Brown said. “We

don’t get supported enough, so we support each other.”

Brown has been riding a motorcycle from 38 years. Her journey started out of necessity in Rochester, New York. She was tired of riding a bicycle, so she figured transitioning to a motorcycle would be cheaper than trying to buy and insure a car.

Necessity soon turned into a passion that took her on multiple cross country road

trips. While if she had it her way, she would ride a motorcycle everywhere, but she has conceded to commuting by car in her current city of Seattle because of rain and traffic.

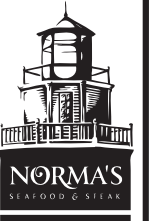
“It’s wind therapy. Motorcycling is special because you have no choice but to live in the present,” Brown said. “And women motorcyclists? We are fearless. We don’t let people stop us from what we want to do.”

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