

Eclipse weekend mostly quiet for fire, law agencies

Eclipse from Page 1A

the state's population by nearly 25 percent. Officials from around the state were expecting massive traffic delays, including in some areas outside the path of totality like the North Coast. But compared to initial worries, it was sunny skies for the state Department of Transportation.

"It's like a busy weekend," ODOT spokesman Lou Torres said. "We didn't encounter anything we couldn't handle."

The Department of Transportation's maintenance crews and communications teams will take the next few days to discuss what worked and didn't work in preparation for future large events.

"This was a great experience," Torres said. "We've never had anything like this in terms of a mass traffic event."

Though some agencies increased patrols and even sent some officers south to aid other departments near the path of totality, law enforcement officials did not report any unusual traffic or criminal activity.

"I think this is a reaction to over-advertising," Cannon Beach Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn said.

'Eerily quiet'

Local wildland firefighters were prepared for a number of emergency scenarios that, by the time the eclipse actually arrived, had yet to happen. Instead, they saw the last thing they had expected: Nothing.

In fact, said Neal Bond, Astoria protection unit forester with the Oregon Department of Forestry, the eclipse weekend was quieter than is typical for the summer. There was even a "vacancy" sign out for Fort Stevens State Park before the eclipse, he said, "which is fairly unheard of in August."

"It's eerily quiet," said David Horning, wildland fire supervisor at the state Department of Forestry's Astoria office, on Sunday.

Fire was a major concern leading up to the eclipse — and, with the mass of people traveling to Oregon, emergency responders worried about



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Porsche Brunzell, left, and Juliette Moore, right, prepare for the solar eclipse at the Astoria Column. The two had a spot staked out early in the morning and were soon joined by many others who chose the location to witness the event.

traffic gridlock that would not only increase fire danger but also make it almost impossible to move crews, fire engines and equipment to where they were needed.

In Clatsop County, out of the path of totality, state and local officials mostly worried about fire and emergency situations that could occur in the days before and after the eclipse when people were

traveling to and from their viewing locations. Local forestland and campground managers prohibited all campfires, and the Astoria Department of Forestry Office began staging crews and equipment at key spots across the county last week.

One firefighter stationed near the county's southern border was prepared to camp for several days in case traffic was so bad that it didn't make sense for him to return to the office each day.

By Sunday, the whole thing felt more like a test run for this weekend's Hood to Coast relay than a response to the eclipse. When fire crews near Forest Grove asked for assistance with a wildland fire there, the Astoria Department of Forestry office was easily able to send a few people down.

In Astoria, businesses downtown were no busier than they normally would be during a summer weekend. Area campgrounds were full or near capacity — as they are every August, eclipse or no eclipse.

The celestial event hap-

pened right near the end of a busy month, beginning with a beach volleyball tournament in Seaside the week before and Hood to Coast this coming this weekend. The popular recreational Buoy 10 fishery has drawn hundreds of anglers to the area all month long.

On a whim

People who wanted to experience the full eclipse had already traveled south to watch it glide along the path of totality. Those who remained to watch it at North Coast landmarks — the Astoria Column, Peter Iredale shipwreck and Haystack Rock — were largely a mixture of locals and vacationers who happened to be passing through the area.

Libbie Stobely and Jeff Skinner of Seattle made reservations at the Hallmark Resort and Spa in Cannon Beach a year in advance. Regulars at the hotel, the two did not consider booking a room in the path of totality.

When pondering whether they should have made plans inside the path or away from

possible cloud cover, both had the same response: "Who cares?"

Others, like Tom Chmielewski and Sharon Russel, of Madeira Beach, Florida, ended up making their eclipse plans on a whim. They were visiting Astoria as part of a two-week West Coast trip celebrating their upcoming 30th anniversary. Though they knew of the eclipse, it didn't factor much into the plans they made Monday morning.

"We stumbled upon this and we said, 'Let's go see the totem!'" Chmielewski said. Later that day, they witnessed the eclipse from the Astoria Column.

Tom Barnum of Astoria had already witnessed the 1979 eclipse, and he considered traveling south. Instead, he and his wife parked their camping chairs and took photos from the Column.

Maybe they will someday witness the total eclipse as part of a foreign vacation, Barnum said. "I'd rather go to Australia than Albany."

Arts Association gets 'a bigger vision'

CBAA from Page 1A

concerts in the park, arts in education, individual artist grants and more.

For just under 10 years, all the events were conducted from a trailer on First Street before moving to their current location at 1064 Hemlock St. in 1994.

Paying the bills

Cannon Beach is no stranger to a number of fine art galleries, but Cannon Beach Gallery's nonprofit status does set them apart from the rest in the community. To operate, the gallery relies on memberships, grants, voluminous volunteer help and, of course, gallery sales to pay the bills, Wickham said.

There are challenges associated with running a nonprofit gallery. Nonprofits are particularly susceptible to downturns in the economy, and drawing from a volunteer pool that is constantly being tapped can be difficult with so many of the same people giving their time to multiple causes at once, said Linda Gebhart, board vice president and volunteer coordinator.

Right now, the association is supported by 30 volunteers, who run the front desk and provide support for programs like summer art classes and paint nights.

But having a business model that doesn't put profit first can do something incredible for the artist community, Program Director Cara Mico said.

"In order to make a living, most artists have to do something else to subsidize," Mico said. "It's nice to have nonprofit support, because then we can focus on supporting artists. Some are getting to the point where they can make a living."

Lack of funding and consistency within the organization about the program's purpose have been points of contention in the association's history, Mico said, but having Gebhart lead the charge to increase volunteers and expand programs has helped make the gallery more cohesive.

These goals have allowed the program to evolve from a place to display art to engaging the community in art workshops, internships and artist grants to keep local artists active.

"It's about getting the processes in place, getting a bigger vision for the association, rather than getting by show to show," Mico said.

What that bigger vision means for now is including more artists of color, Mico said, as well as supporting more pop-up shows that can engage a larger swath of the public that rarely find themselves in a gallery.

For Wickham, having art be her full-time job has only been a reality since she retired 2½ years ago as the health director of Multnomah County. But she said her passion comes from her children, who are artists, and serving on the board is another way to support artists the way she tried to support her own children.

Pot shop building 'needs more work'

Pot from Page 1A

Bell at the meeting and described their goal for the business as "high end."

Bell, who has spent the last couple of years building out dispensaries for clients, is expanding his career in cannabis on the coast to places like Rockaway Beach, Pacific City and, hopefully, Cannon Beach, Benson said. Bell's pitch for a marijuana shop at a condominium complex near Pier 39 in Astoria was rejected by the Astoria City Council last year.

"This is going to be a very nice place. Our goal as a company is to make it look nice," Benson said of the Cannon Beach store.

But before moving forward, Bell and his team must address parking issues identified by the city. As plans stand now, parking spaces are drawn onto the city's right of way, City Planner Mark Barnes said.

"The problem here is these are private spaces half in the public sphere," Barnes said. Bell will have to work with public works to find different solutions before the next Design Review Board meeting Sept. 21 in order to secure approval.

More abstractly, board members took issue with the lack of detail in the application. Bell provided plans to paint the building and modify windows, along with general landscaping ideas, but the board wasn't satisfied without seeing a full mock up. Barnes also noted the lack of discussion concerning meeting ventilation and signage requirements in the proposal.



BRENNIA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

A third marijuana retailer, at 3115 S. Hemlock St., has applied to operate in Cannon Beach.

"We look at actual samples of paints and facade," board member Sandi Lundy said. "It's just a matter of us being able to physically see the changes you are suggesting."

Some neighbors took issue with the vague nature of the design plans, including Steve Crane, the property adviser of Lodges at Cannon Beach next door. In written testimony sent

to the city, he thought more needed to be done to help rehabilitate a structure that has been sitting vacant for years.

Just repainting the building, Crane wrote, "is like putting lipstick on a pig."

Escape Lodgings President Patrick Nofield leases space from a modular unit connected to the property, and asked board members to wait on ap-

proval before issues like adequate parking and more thorough designs were presented.

One of his concerns was making sure this property was "architecturally compatible" with the rest of Tolovana.

"I've leased space for 10 years, and I know that building needs help," Nofield said. "It needs more work than what this plan is showing."

Kiki Meletis is a co-trustee of Demetrios Meletis Living Trust, which owns the property, and said having the new business move in was a great way to "revitalize the property in a timely way."

Benson said she and Bell are happy to work with the city to make sure the business fits with the community.

"This is a community input, so I want community input," Benson said.

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