



COLIN MURPHEY/EO MEDIA GROUP

Members of the Cannon Beach Chorus practice under the direction of Dr. John Buehler, right, as the group prepares for upcoming performances.

Community chorus still ‘healthy’ after 30 years

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Buehler, who started on as the conductor in 2010, is the former director of choral studies at Baker University in Kansas and led a variety of community and collegiate choirs for more than 40 years. He moved to Cannon Beach to be closer to his grandkids, but over the past eight years Cannon Beach has managed to stand out in the chorale department, as well.

“It’s amazing to be as healthy as we are at 30 years,” Buehler said. “Most community choirs in a town the size of Cannon Beach don’t grow to include members from other communities. When in this day in age our area of existence seems to be getting smaller, every person brings that sense of community (to the choir).”

But what is now a robust, four-part choir was born from the humble beginnings of a dozen or so people in 1988 deciding within the walls of a local recording studio that starting a community choir could be fun.

Carole Whitlock, a longtime Cannon Beach resident, was one those founding members. The original director, Danny Lawson, owned a recording studio in Sandpiper Square at the time, which served as the group’s first rehearsal space.

“We worked in the same building, and we talked about how it would fun to organize a group to sing,” she said. “So we did.”

Whitlock sang with the group until 2000, weathering a number of venue and director changes. Averaging only 12 to 20 members, the group struggled to maintain enough voices, but it didn’t stop them from performing all over town at venues like Cannon Beach

City Park, local churches, the Coaster Theatre, and eventually Carnegie Hall in New York City.

In the beginning, most of the music the group sang leaned toward rock ‘n’ roll and musical theater — a large departure from the current group’s classical bent.

“There weren’t a lot of options at the time for singing, so it was a special opportunity,” Whitlock said.

Since then, Susan Glarum, the one member of the chorus who has been involved since its founding, said she has seen the status of the chorus ebb and flow with regard to participation, quality and style.

“It just keeps getting better and better,” she said. “I look forward to the camaraderie when I come to practice. I wouldn’t see all these people other than right here, working toward a common goal.”

For Buehler, so many people coming from such different backgrounds to create something together is what makes directing a community chorus special.

“For a specific moment, we all focus on a product together — and I don’t know how many things in life go that way,” he said.

With diversity comes challenges as well. With a variety of skill levels and ages, Buehler is faced with the challenge of meeting everyone where they are at in terms of technique and musicianship.

But working on those challenges every Monday night is what makes this job best, he said.

“Music does things to us when we do music,” he said. “In our choir we can show joy, despair, healing and hope. It makes the community feel more.”

Bridging the cultural divide

Exchange program brings Costa Rican visitors to Cannon Beach

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

There was a lot to take in during Alfredo Marin’s first trip to Oregon. Back home in Costa Rica, Marin had never seen sea lions like the ones in Astoria, and the clam chowder challenged the stereotype American’s had bad food, he said.

“In Costa Rica, you think Americans only have hamburgers and hot dogs, but that’s definitely not the case here,” Marin said.

The views of Haystack Rock were impressive, and Oregon’s scenery expansive, but what stood out to Marin about Cannon Beach after a day was the feeling of community.

“I live in the capital, San Jose, and we’ve lost that sense of neighborhood feel,” he said. “You can see the community building in the library, HRAP — in Costa Rica there isn’t as many programs for everyone.”

Marin was one of the four visitors apart of the annual Partners of the Americas program, a program started in the early 1960s that facilitates cultural exchanges between South American countries and American states. Every state is partnered with a country, but Oregon is the only state that still provides month-long, statewide home stays and tours for Costa Rican visitors.

The goal of the program is to facilitate that feeling of community Marin described, as well as a way to understand and bridge cultural barriers.

Jeanie McLaughlin has been one of the Cannon Beach coordinators of the program for more than 20



BRENNA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Visitors learn the art of printmaking at Imprint Gallery.

‘In Costa Rica, you think Americans only have hamburgers and hot dogs, but that’s definitely not the case here.’

Alfredo Marin,

Costa Rican visitor with Partners of the Americas program

years. She has participated in the exchange herself by traveling to Costa Rica twice, and said she first got involved when she heard about the program from a friend in town. A former Spanish teacher, McLaughlin found she fell in love with the chance to meet new people and broaden her horizons.

“It’s a really nice program,” McLaughlin said. “Some of the Costa Ricans know Oregon better than some of us locals by the end of it.”

By the end of September, those in the program will have stayed in four separate Oregon cities for a week each. In Cannon Beach, that involved potlucks, coffee shops, art gallery and nature tours. While the trip is focused on showcasing as much of Oregon as possible, these exchanges also provide

invaluable experience for everyone to exercise their English and Spanish.

The program has been established for more than 50 years, but the number of people apart of the program has been on the decline, president Ned Heavenrich said. The average these days for the coastal chapter sits at around 20, when ideally the group used to see numbers around 50.

Heavenrich sees the decline due to the fact most members are retired and older, and the program hasn’t been attracting enough new members to make up for the natural attrition. Budget cuts from the federal government also has contributed to declining numbers.

“You can’t get that personal, cultural connection with someone without exchanges,” Heavenrich said.

“You can’t look up online and learn about a family’s passion or activities. We have a lot to learn.”

And the lessons the program originally sought out to teach are still relevant today, McLaughlin said.

“It’s relevant now more than ever to promote peace and understanding to countries south of the border And we still need that a lot in our political climate,” she said.

Marin, 38, is one of the few in the program who is not retired. His passion for exchange programs came from his mother, whom he said hosted visitors from all over the world growing up. He hopes to keep the tradition alive in his own home.

“It’s a humbling experience. I feel very tiny when I travel,” he said. “But so much good can happen when you learn from others.”



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