

When mutual respect, inclusion go hand-in-hand

Tillamook County resident celebrates civil rights icon

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

MANZANITA — When LaNicia Williams moved to Tillamook County a few years ago, it was the first place she had lived without any sort of celebration for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

“I just didn’t know what to do with myself. I was used to being a part of something,” she said.

Williams decided to change that last year by starting the Oregon Coast Love Coalition, an activist group that focuses on equity education and creating inclusive events of all religions, races, nationalities and sexuality. Last year, she prepared a community breakfast with a focus on racial issues. This year, the coalition expanded celebrating the



LaNicia Williams

holiday with three days of events, including a movie with community dialogue, presentations about civil rights leaders at the Hoffman Center for the Arts in Manzanita and a day of service. More than 40 volunteers were registered to help build six different homes around Tillamook County for Habitat for Humanity.

“Traditionally, Martin Luther King Jr. Day is celebrated as a day of service,” Williams said. “We live in an individualistic society. We forget that people have needs around us..”

It’s important to Williams to plan these events, she said, because in a time where there is an “upheaval of political and social climate,” people need to find what bonds them together.

“It seems like (the community) doesn’t have a lot of diversity, but it does. And it is growing,” Williams said. “I think it’s time to stop focusing on what separates us and to start focusing on what bonds us, which to me is love.”

Part of what inspired Williams to bring people together comes from the struggles of feeling different herself after moving to the coast. As a black woman in a county that is 84 percent white, Williams noted difficult conversations with her neighbors about race. Her devout faith also separated her from her

peers, she said.

“Back in California, I grew up in church. When I moved here, I almost lost spirituality, because I never had lived around a population where most don’t have a belief in God the same way I did,” Williams said. “I had to learn to be respectful of different viewpoints, holding my truths but not casting down my opinion upon others. I matured to a place of listening.”

It’s a lesson she hopes her coalition can continue to teach by incorporating new inclusion mentorship programs through the Tillamook and Neah-Kah-Nie school districts, as well as continuing to bring different people to the table to talk about equity issues past just one day of the year in January.

“You don’t have to agree on everything to live with each other, to live in a world of inclusion,” she said. “To move forward, how do we get different thinkers in the same room and find that we have more commonalities than we think?”



WOMEN'S EXPO

A gathering of businesses and entrepreneurs comes to Seaside in February.

Oregon Coast Women’s Expo

The Oregon Coast Women’s Expo is an annual gathering of women in business, entrepreneurs, change-makers and dreamers. The one-day event brings together women vendors showcasing unique products and services from the Oregon coast, guest speakers, awards ceremony and celebration of creative entrepreneurs and the womanly spirit, Feb. 18, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center in Seaside.

Lifelong love of theater fuels dream for Seaside’s Katherine Lacaze

Lacaze from Page 1A

and will appear this year in “Noises Off” at the Coaster. She also plans to do the choreography for “Musical of Musicals” at the Coaster this summer.

In addition, Lacaze is directing “Peter Pan” this spring for the Astor Street Opry Company and a one-act health-related play sponsored by Providence Seaside Hospital.

Eventually, she said, she would like to establish a non-profit Clatsop Children’s Theatre Company.

“I love theater in general,” she said. “It allows me to explore the world around me. It gives me different perspectives. I can explore grief and difficult hardships in a safe space.”

Lacaze, who moved to Seaside four years ago to be a reporter for the Seaside Signal, said she wanted to help

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the community develop activities for children, something she felt was missing.

“I feel this community doesn’t have a lot of affordable outlets for children,” said Lacaze.

“This is such a tourist-oriented town. We work hard to provide activities for tourists. But we also say we’re a family-oriented town, and we need to provide fun, enjoyable and educational activities for children, something they can take pride in.”

Lacaze’s idea of partnering with the Sunset Empire Park and Recreation District fits



COURTESY KATHERINE LACAZE

The cast of last year’s production, “Alice in Wonderland.”

well with the district’s goals, said Skyler Archibald, district director.

“Certain interests are well represented — such as athletics — but this one was not,” Archibald said. “We want to provide positive activities for children, and this was right up

our alley.

The recreation district offered rehearsal space and some business structure to support Lacaze. “It was a good partnership for both of us.”

Jeremy Mills State Farm Insurance also sponsored the

play last summer.

While she had some assistance with “Alice in Wonderland” last year, thanks to friend Ellen Jensen, who also performs at the Coaster Theatre, and the Coaster’s costume designer, Judith Light, Lacaze did most of the pro-

duction work herself, which presented some challenges.

“The plays might not have been the highest caliber, but we were giving the kids a chance they could get excited about,” Lacaze said. “When the kids were in their costumes, they had so much fun. I love providing that. And the kids are so forgiving when it comes to the production. I’m such a perfectionist, but the kids don’t see it that way.”

Lacaze also enjoyed introducing theater to the children, many who were on the stage for the first time.

“The kids came out of their shells,” she said. “They were proud of themselves and what they had accomplished.”

Archibald, whose daughter was in the play, called the performances “amazing.”

Lacaze, he said, “pulled it all together. She had some long days and long rehearsals, but I think the children will fondly remember it.”

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