

# Liz Johnson makes 'this area special'

**Johnson works as the outreach coordinator for Cannon Beach museum**

By Brenna Visser  
Cannon Beach Gazette



BRENNA VISSER/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

**Liz Johnson is the outreach coordinator for the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum.**

Liz Johnson has thought about leaving the North Coast a few times. But there's something special that always brings the Seaside local back.

"The people. They make this area special," she said. "Anytime something happens, there's always someone there ready to help in any situation."

It's a quality she finds special possibly because of how often she has assumed the role to be ready to help. As the outreach coordinator for the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum, Johnson is the one behind the scenes, helping with tasks as small as changing light bulbs to coordinating the Cottage and Garden Tour, the museum's largest event of the year.

It's through her love of volunteering that she came to work for the museum.

"I grew up working in hospitality. I worked in it for almost half my life," Johnson said. "I decided I've got to give back to the community with my extra time."

About seven years ago, her longtime friend Elaine Trucke, the museum's executive director, encouraged Johnson to volunteer at the museum. "I had no idea the museum existed, and the more I was there, the more I became passionate

about it," she said.

On top of that, Johnson took on Meals on Wheels, summer reading programs and the Lunch Buddy program — a countywide mentorship program for students in elementary through middle school.

While she's worked with a number of kids, one girl in particular made an impact.

"I had a girl in fourth grade who was very difficult to deal with when I first met her. At first she was shy, didn't want anything to do with me," Johnson said. "Now she's blossomed, and does really well in school. When I met her she really hated school. Now she's going into high school on the honor roll. It feels like more than just mentoring, I guess."

Her love for volunteering served as an advantage when the outreach coordinator position opened up at the museum, where a large part of her job is recruiting and managing the history center's volunteers.

And recruiting those volunteers becomes even more crucial when Cottage and Garden Tour season rolls around.

"There's just three of us (at the museum), and we do it by ourselves. Just trying to get volunteers and homeowners to be a part is a full-time job in itself," Johnson said.

With almost no prior event planning experience, Johnson learned many of the skills, like keeping track of all the details, calling homeowners,

organizing catering and even baking some of the goodies offered at the event.

"At the museum I've learned a lot of skills I would not have learned otherwise. I have nonprofit experience. Event planning. Maintenance experience. Even baking experience," she laughed.

But Johnson does take time to herself. When she's not at the museum, she likes to go to concerts and looks forward to Seaside's Barbershop Quartet festival. She would have gone to StackStock, but she said she had a volunteering commitment at the same time. She's an avid Portland Trail Blazers fan, and when all else fails, an evening at home with her cat is where she likes to be.

# Death and dying: a conversation for life

**Participants asked what they hope for when death approaches**

By Nancy McCarthy  
For Cannon Beach Gazette

**THE WORDS THE PARTICIPANTS USED TO DESCRIBE THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT DYING RANGED FROM FEAR TO INEVITABILITY.**

Twenty-two friends and strangers gathered recently to have one of the most important conversations of their lives. The topic: death.

The guided discussion gave participants a way to express their feelings about the concept of dying, remember the death of someone they loved and talk about what they hoped for their loved ones and themselves at the time of their own deaths.

"This discussion isn't to solve any problems," said Jenny Sasser, an educational gerontologist who led the 90-minute exchange. "We're trying to have a conversation about what matters most to us when we reach our end."

Held at the Cannon Beach History Center and Museum, the program, "Talking About Dying," was sponsored by Oregon Humanities through the Oregon Community Foundation.

Although the conversation started somewhat easily when Sasser asked the participants to give a word or phrase that came to them when they thought about dying, the re-

sponses turned more difficult after they broke into small groups to talk about their experiences and hopes.

The words the participants used to describe their thoughts about dying ranged from fear to inevitability.

"Wow!" said one member of the group. "Yikes!" said another.

"Comfort, control, choice," added a third person, and her neighbor added, "compassion."

"It's a fact of life," someone else said.

As they turned to their small groups, Sasser asked them to recall someone in their lives who had already died. How did they live toward their dying? "Not just how did they die, but how did they prepare for it?" Sasser asked. And then, she directed them to discuss their own experiences during their loved ones' deaths.

The consensus of one group's members was that "none of us wanted to go to a nursing home," and they didn't want to suffer.

"How a loved one dies but also where they die is consequential," Sasser said.

While one person noted that "not having control (over how death should occur) can create fear and anger," another person asked, "Can you really control yourself at the time?"

Observing how a loved one dies "shapes our attitudes about our own dying," Sasser said.

"How we approach our dying can be a gift to others," she added. "Dying is not disconnected from living. At some point there is an end, and if we live fully to the end, it is a gift for others."

After the group went into their small groups for a second time, Sasser said she could hear laughter. The groups' assignment was to discuss their hopes for their own deaths.

"Notice I didn't say your fears," Sasser said. Talking about fears sets a different tone for the conversation, she added.

The participants talked about the desire to control the way they die. They discussed the need to talk to their families or friends early about medical preferences during the final days. One of the participants also discussed the

need for family members to be willing to let go.

Those who don't have families or close friends to discuss their dying wishes with could turn to a "death doula," noted history center director Elaine Trucke, who participated in the conversation.

Like a birth doula, who coaches a pregnant woman through the delivery of her baby, a death doula provides emotional support and acts an advocate for the person who is dying.

Sasser suggested preparing an advance directive that states treatment preferences. In addition, she said, it might be helpful to prepare a playlist that can be played at the end of life.

"What would you like to hear even as you're going out?" asked Sasser.

Pets must also be considered when making end-of-life preparations, she said.

"Our web of relationships includes nonhuman beings," Sasser added.

Some plans that must be made — like what will happen to pets — may be pragmatic, but those plans are based on feelings, on what the person wants, Sasser said.

She urged the participants to continue thinking about what they hoped for at the time of their deaths.

"Ask what that means, what is doable and what still needs to be put into place, and what conversation you still must have," she said.

# Classes for parents coming to the Heights

By Katherine Lacaze  
For Cannon Beach Gazette

When it comes to parenting a significant responsibility assumed by a majority of people in their lifetime — everyone could periodically use a little extra training and support.

"Nobody has all the answers," said Lori Wilson Honl, of Northwest Parenting, an organization that is co-sponsoring a six-week parenting program at The Heights Elementary School in Seaside.

The free, group-based program, also sponsored by the Seaside School District, kicked off Jan. 11. Using a curriculum called Active Parenting Now, Wilson Honl is

leading parents and guardians in learning new skills and ways to promote their children's success in school and life. The classes take place Thursday evenings, with dinner served at 6 p.m. and the class running from 6:30 to 8. Dinner and child care is provided for free.

About a dozen families are registered for the program, but newcomers can join through the third week. The information tends to build on itself and participants benefit from being part of a consistent, cohesive group, said Wilson Honl, who currently is a teacher at Head Start in Warrenton and has instructed parenting classes for more than 20 years.

She believes participation as a group creates an advantageous setting for parents to gain insight and support not only from her instruction, but from one another, as well.

"Being able to hear from other parents can be really valuable," she said. Each person is "going to bring their own experiences and questions."

The course features a mix of verbal instruction, educational videos and group discussion, geared toward the same philosophy: parenting, as with any job that's rewarding and difficult, requires training and support. Parenting skills being addressed throughout the course include fostering strong rela-

tionships; using discipline to teach lessons; communication with children and co-parents; helping children express their feelings; developing self-care habits; and motivating children to build self-worth and personal power.

The end goal is to "protect and prepare our children to survive and thrive in the kind of society in which they live," Wilson Honl said. As society changes, people have to change how they parent. They can help their children learn to make wise choices at a young age, when those decisions are easy and the repercussions are small, as opposed to large and life-threatening.

## MEMORIALS

**Saturday, Jan. 27**

GRAYBEAL, Daniel Mark — Memorial and potluck reception at 1 p.m. at Imago Dei Church, 1302 S.E. Ankeny St. in Portland. All are welcome. Graybeal, 39, of Albany, formerly of Cannon Beach and Seaside, died Friday, Jan. 5, 2018, in Albany. Fisher Funeral Home in Albany is in charge of the arrangements.

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