

# Holiday spoiled by rental scam

**Renters lost \$1,400 after fake ad**

By Brenna Visser  
Cannon Beach Gazette

When Carolyn O'Brien got a phone call from a family saying they rented her home in Cannon Beach, she knew something was wrong.

The renter, who asked to remain anonymous, had been to the beach town many times with his family over 20 years. For the Fourth of July, he found a rental online but was perplexed when John Robson, the person who claimed to own the home, never showed up.

A neighbor informed him there was no John Robson and put him in touch with O'Brien.

When the renter told O'Brien he rented her house on Craigslist, her heart sank. O'Brien's family exclusively uses the vacation rental site VRBO. It became clear someone had copied her ad and scammed the family.

O'Brien filed a police report. The family was able to find a rental in Manzanita, but their excitement for the holiday trip — and \$1,400 — was already lost.

## AVOID SCAMS



**Tips from the Federal Trade Commission on how to avoid scams.**

- Pay with a credit card.
- Be wary of cheap rates.
- Check the contract.
- Avoid third-party sites.

"The scammer knew we were receiving the whole family — including our 2-year-old granddaughter — and even that fact didn't phase him," the renter said.

This is the second time O'Brien's house has been used in a scam.

"We've been doing this for decades. It wasn't an issue before electronic booking became available," she said. "(This home) has been in our family for generations. So when something like this happens, it's almost personal. How dare you take our house and scam somebody?"

Vacation rental scams are not uncommon. According to the American Hotel & Lodging As-

sociation, 15 million rental scams last year cost Americans \$1.3 billion.

O'Brien's case is one of only a few Cannon Beach has seen in awhile, Cannon Beach Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn said, but he noted it likely happens more often than reported.

"I think sometimes people don't come forward because of embarrassment, or they think you can't track down the scammer," he said. "But people should report, because there could be something different about your story that could be the detail that helps us find them."

Police initially tried to track down the fake advertisement and the phone number the family used to communicate about the rental, but both were already wiped by the time the report was filed. Because the family used a check to pay in full, the payment could not be tracked or stopped like a credit card transaction.

This is what makes investigating these cases difficult, Schermerhorn said.

"It's frustrating because it feels like there really is no recourse," O'Brien said.

While many local rental companies have yet to face scams, many,

like Linda Beck-Sweeney of Cannon Beach Vacation Rentals, take precautions.

Properties can only be booked through the company's website or another accredited platform, Beck-Sweeney said. She only accepts credit cards and checks every guest in person. Often, scammers will give customers access codes before they arrive at a property, and then disappear when the code doesn't work.

Her company also monitors sites like Craigslist. But this is a time-consuming task for a small business, she said, making it unlikely the team catches every fake advertisement.

"We just live in fear of someone's vacation getting ruined," she said.

While finding the person who scammed the family who showed up at her door is unlikely, O'Brien hopes people looking to vacation on the coast will use her story as a lesson.

"There's not much we can do to make people stop doing this, but the word needs to get out for people to understand to not use Craigslist to do a rental, and that you need to be able to use something credible," she said.

# Suarez aims to make HRAP more inclusive

Suarez from Page 1A

"I remember one day there was a man just walking all over the marine garden. I approached him in Spanish to explain to him why that wasn't allowed, and all of sudden he leaves and comes back with like seven other relatives," Suarez said. "They were asking questions about the environment they otherwise probably wouldn't have asked."

When Suarez isn't working, she likes to spend time — you guessed it — on the beach.

"It really is my life," she laughed.

Other than the occasional craving for sun and decent Cuban cuisine, Suarez said she has found a home in the Pacific Northwest, with dreams to pursue marine science at the University of Washington.

For now, she's excited to see what her background and passion for environmental science can do to help keep Haystack Rock healthy.

"It's all about awareness. Knowledge is power. There's been a small disconnect with that," Suarez said, in reference to a lack of Spanish materials. "But I'm happy to do my part to fill this little gap."

## CANNON BEACH POLICE LOG

**June 22**  
Three incidents of prohibited overnight camping were reported.

**11:26 p.m.**, Sitka: A report of a possible domestic altercation turned out to be two brothers wrestling.

**June 23**  
Seven incidents of prohibited overnight camping were reported.

**4:40 a.m.**, Seaside police request Cannon Beach police provide cover for a disturbance involving three males and a shotgun. No enforcement action was taken.

**4:47 p.m.**, Hemlock and Watts Way: Police respond to a report of a female being shoved into a vehicle. The woman and her companion deny any issue. No further action taken.

**June 24**  
One incident of prohibited overnight

camping was reported.  
**3:38 p.m.**, Mo's: A child reported missing was found before police arrival.

**June 25**  
Four incidents of prohibited overnight camping are reported.

**June 26**  
Three incidents of prohibited overnight camping are reported.

**3:39 p.m.**, N. Spruce: Two transient men reported to be smoking marijuana on the deck of a store took off before police arrival.

**June 27**  
**1:27 p.m.**, N. Hemlock: The owner of a business reported that someone who had been previously trespassed kept returning to the restaurant. Police advised the subject not to return.

**June 28**  
One incident of prohibited overnight camping is reported.

**5:39 p.m.**, Beach at Schooner's Cove: Police respond to a report of a teenager throwing sticks at seagulls. One bird appeared injured and unable to fly. Subject left the beach prior to police arrival. Police searched for the person but were unable to locate.

**June 29**  
One subject was warned for overnight camping.

**12:30 p.m.**, Midtown: A lost dog was reported.

**June 30**  
Five incidents of prohibited overnight camping are reported.

**12:24 p.m.**, Haystack Rock: A subject who refused to leave the protected area around the rock was reported

by a HRAP volunteer. Police located the subject walking away and warned them.

**2:16 p.m.**, Silver Point: Police assist another agency.

**July 1**  
Four incidents of overnight camping were reported.

**10:01 a.m.**, Highway 101, Arch Cape Tunnel: Police assist fire department with a vehicle that caught on fire.

**1:16 p.m.**, Warren Way: Police respond to a complaint about a dog inside a vehicle. Outside temperature was 59 degrees; the internal temperature inside the car was 97 degrees. Owner returned as police were checking the car.

**3:30 p.m.**, Police headquarters: A short term rental vacation scam was reported. Victim paid \$1400 to an

unknown subject via PayPal.

**July 2**  
Four incidents of overnight camping were reported.

**4:51 p.m.**, Hug Point: Police assist other agency with male stuck on the rocks.

**July 3**  
Three incidents of overnight camping were reported.

**12:24 p.m.**, Third and Spruce: A young male reported missing was found walking on the road; he was subsequently reunited with family.

**8:35 p.m.**, 200 block Gogona: Caller reports male urinating outside. When caller spoke to the individual, they say the individual was extremely rude. Police contact individual and warn of disorderly conduct.

**July 4**  
Five incidents of overnight camping were reported.

**3:13 a.m.**, Highway 101, Milepost 3: Police assist Oregon State police and Seaside police with single vehicle crash involving a DUII. Subject had a felony revoke on their driver's license and was also carrying firearms.

**9:11 p.m.**, Beach and Adams: Illegal fireworks were confiscated.

**10:05 p.m.**, 200 block W. Gogona: Police respond to a report of illegal mortars on the beach. Officers responding said the report was unfounded and all fireworks were legal.

**10:08 p.m.**, Breaker's Point: Police respond to a report of possibly illegal fireworks on beach. All fireworks found were legal.

**10:21 p.m.**, W. Surfcrest: Subjects warned for illegal fireworks.

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