



COLIN MURPHEY/THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Kristen Sodervick answers a call at the dispatch center in Astoria.

Crossed wires

Cannon Beach emergency responders look to fix spotty radio communications

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

For emergency responders in Cannon Beach, being able to communicate with dispatch over the radio while on a call in certain parts of South County is always a gamble.

For years, some areas south of Tillamook Head have earned reputations as perpetual dead zones: Haystack Heights. Sections of Tolovana. Large chunks of the beach. Even parts of downtown.

So far, these gaps have not led to serious incidents, though some situations teeter too close for comfort. Police Chief Jason Schermerhorn remembers one officer's struggle to call for backup in a dead spot near Tolovana during a drunken-driving test on the side of the road.

"That's their lifeline," Schermerhorn said.

Radio communication can be so spotty near Hug Point that Fire Chief Matt Benedict recalls a rescue operation where he was close enough to see his crew and still not able to reach them on the radio.

"It's a big safety issue," Benedict said. "If I'm going to send some individuals into a burning house on a repeated channel I may not be able to hear them even if I'm able to see them."

It's an issue that has plagued the region for years, and unforgiving topography is mostly to blame. From Cannon Beach to Falcon Cove, mountainous terrain between radio repeaters and the one radio tower on Tillamook Head interferes with

the signals that bounce between Seaside Dispatch and first responders.

Though there is nothing they can do about the mountain range, the chiefs have been looking at ways to make communications more reliable.

Schermerhorn is applying for a \$130,000 grant to install a new tower near Old Cannon Beach Road on the north end of town that would fill the gap between an area known as "the S curves" and Tillamook Head.

One of the difficulties Cannon Beach faces, Schermerhorn said, is that the main tower on Tillamook Head is not owned by the city, which means the repeaters can be moved around by the private owner.

"One was lowered last year, and it made communicating more difficult for Hamlet Fire," Schermerhorn said.

The fire district, however, sees switching from Seaside Dispatch to Astoria 911 Dispatch as a possible solution.

Gentlemen's agreement

For as long as anyone can remember, Cannon Beach and Seaside have had a gentlemen's agreement to use Seaside Dispatch.

When Benedict took over as fire chief in 2016, he noticed the communication issues and asked Seaside about what could be done. But beyond the upkeep of existing repeaters, he said there isn't much more the dispatch center could provide.

So Benedict began conversations with Astoria 911

Dispatch, which has spent about \$3 million on improvements to its system since 2007, said Jeff Rusiecki, the emergency communications manager at Astoria 911 Dispatch.

"The 2007 storm really caught the county by surprise with how vulnerable our communications were," Rusiecki said.

After having major sites fail, Astoria began submitting grants, securing additional repeater sites and syncing them up to make a more cohesive countywide system.

By moving to Astoria, Cannon Beach could work off 10 towers across the county rather than relying solely on the one on Tillamook Head, Benedict said, improving communication quality.

The fire district could also save some money in the long run, Benedict said. Every call that is dispatched through Seaside costs Cannon Beach fire and police roughly \$35 in comparison to Astoria, which would charge about \$22 a call.

"This isn't so much cost-driven as safety-driven. I'm not saying we're right and Seaside's wrong or Seaside's right and we're wrong," Rusiecki said. "Because we have the county, we have an interest in improving communications throughout the county, and Cannon Beach is just one of those challenging areas."

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OBITUARIES

Betty Jean Casavant

Seaside

May 10, 1927 — Oct. 11, 2018

Betty Jean Casavant, age 91, passed away on Oct. 11, 2018, at Neawanna by the Sea in Seaside, Oregon.

Betty was born May 10, 1927, in Valley, Nebraska, to Edith and Delbert Speer, the youngest of six brothers and sisters.

Betty grew up in Ovid, Colorado, and moved to California as a young woman. After many years of dedicated service with the Civil Service she retired from the Portland VA Medical Center and moved to Cannon Beach, Oregon with her husband, Frank.

Betty served in the community endlessly, volunteering and giving of herself to help others. She volunteered in many capacities at the Community Church in Cannon Beach, and enjoyed being with her church family and Pastor David so much.

Betty preceded in death by her husband, Francis (Frank) Casavant; son, Douglas; and granddaughter, Kimmy. Survivors include her daughter, Jerrilynn Randall, and son-in-

law John; 12 grandchildren; 21 great-grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews, and great-nieces and nephews. She will be sorely missed by everyone in the family, and her endless family stories will live in our hearts forever.

Betty was a loving "mom" and friend to many. She knew no strangers, and was loved by all.

Betty loved traveling, the ocean, "party pants," reading, plays, old movies, friends and family. Her love of Christmas was contagious, and she shared the magic of the season with everyone.

Her family wishes to extend their greatest and warmest gratitude for the wonderful care given to her by everyone in the community, with a special thank you to Mindy, Pastor David, Linda, and the wonderful staff at Neawanna.

Please join us in a celebration of life at noon Oct. 27 at Cannon Beach Community Church on East Washington Street. For those who wish, a donation can be made to the church, to the "Betty Casavant Fund."



Betty Casavant

HRAP wraps it up for 33rd year

Cannon Beach Gazette

The Haystack Rock Awareness Program nears the culmination of their 33rd season of education and stewardship. The program's mission is to protect, through education, the intertidal and bird ecology of the Marine Garden and National Wildlife Refuge at Haystack Rock.

HRAP Rocky Shore environmental interpreters are on the beach during daily low tides from February through October to educate visitors at Haystack Rock about biodiversity found both on and around the rock. Their free public education program offers bird scopes, aquaria stations, interactive visitor displays, and many other fun and exciting educational opportunities.

As of September, the environmental education program had interacted with over 85,000 visitors, ran nearly 70 education programs, rescued and transported 35 birds to the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, and attended more than 100 events with the assistance of 160 volunteers.

The Haystack Rock Awareness Program continues to participate in statewide citizen science projects including black oystercatcher abundance surveys, black oystercatcher nest monitoring, seabird nest monitoring, brown pelican monitoring, sea star monitoring, COASST dead bird surveys and marine debris surveys.

The program reports that the tufted puffins had a good year



HRAP

HRAP education and volunteer coordinator Lisa Habecker leads a group of students on a tour of Haystack Rock.

with preliminary data, showing an increase of nesting pairs from last year. The puffins left Cannon Beach in September.

The new beach wheelchair program has been increasingly popular and has provided beach access to over 265 visitors so far this year. The program continues to accept donations to purchase a third chair. Interested donors should visit <https://squareup.com/store/haystack-rock-awareness-program/> to donate or contact program coordinator Andrea Suarez, 503-440-2598, suarez@

ci.cannon-beach.or.us.

The Haystack Rock Awareness Program's official last day on the beach is Oct. 24, from 4 to 6 p.m. HRAP Rocky Shore environmental interpreters will be on the beach at low-tide, daily, until then. To find their full schedule visit <https://www.ci.cannon-beach.or.us/hrap>. HRAP will return in February.

For more information, contact Melissa Keyser, Haystack Rock Awareness program director at 503-436-8060 or email hrap@ci.cannon-beach.or.us.

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