



## Gearhart recall election slated for March 26

### Voters have option to remove mayor from office

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

Gearhart Mayor Dianne Widdop's fate will be up to Gearhart voters in a special election March 26.

The election was called after Widdop refused to resign after learning that enough signatures had been verified to warrant a recall election.

The Clatsop County Elections Office verified 108 petition signatures, more than the 102 required to schedule a recall election. Widdop had five days to submit to the clerk's office either a letter of resignation or a written statement of no more than 200 words to be printed on the election ballot. She submitted the statement two weeks ago.

In her statement, Widdop writes, "In almost 20 years as a city councilor and mayor, I have consistently made deci-



PHOTO BY KATHERINE LACAZE

**Less than a block away from a sign in support of Gearhart Mayor Dianne Widdop on Cottage Avenue, a resident has placed a sign urging voters to recall Widdop from office.**



PHOTO BY KATHERINE LACAZE

**A sign on Cottage Drive in Gearhart offers support for Mayor Dianne Widdop, who is the subject of a recall election March 26.**

sions that reflect the values of the city's comprehensive plan. My goal has always been to preserve and enhance the livability of our community.

"As mayor, my focus has been to increase the transparency and accessibility of the city government. The city's website has been improved to provide more information. Residents now can access the same information packet provided to city councilors. The city blog allows citizens to receive notices and information automatically."

On Wednesday mornings, she said, she is at City Hall from 9 a.m. to noon for "Coffee With the Mayor," which is an opportunity for people "to ask questions, express concerns or just chat." At that time, citizens also can meet with the Gearhart police chief, fire chief, city administrator and other city staff. Since she was elected to office, she has missed only one Wednesday, she said.

Widdop started the weekly meetings in an effort to

increase transparency in government, she said.

"I wanted people to feel like they could come in and talk," she said. "In the event I'm recalled or when I leave office, I hope whomever takes my place will initiate the same kind of thing."

In her statement, Widdop also talked about her attendance at Gearhart Homeowners Association meetings and her effort to "increase Gearhart's presence beyond purely city affairs" by work-

ing with other mayors and state representatives, inviting Port of Astoria and Clatsop Community College representatives to speak at council meetings and attending League of Oregon Cities and Mayors Association meetings.

"I do this as a volunteer unpaid elected official," she said.

Some Gearhart residents have started putting up signs and wearing buttons in support of Widdop, which she said is gratifying. Other signs supporting the recall also are going up.

Harold Gable, the chief petitioner who is leading the recall effort, submitted 113 signatures to the clerk and elections department Feb. 11, according to elections technician Sheryl Holcom. The number of signatures was previously reported as 114.

Ballots will be mailed out March 6. The outcome of the election will be determined by a simple ma-

majority. Voters will have until 8 p.m. March 26 to submit their ballots either through the mail or at one of two drop sites: Gearhart City Hall at 698 Pacific Way in Gearhart or the Clatsop County Elections Office at 820 Exchange St., Suite 220, in Astoria. Postmarks are not considered.

**INSIDE:**  
Statements made by petitioners and mayor  
page 6

**ONLINE:**  
To view Widdop's full statement or the statement from Gable's petition for recall, visit [www.co.clatsop.or.us/clerk/page/march-26-2015-special-recall-election-city-gearhart-0](http://www.co.clatsop.or.us/clerk/page/march-26-2015-special-recall-election-city-gearhart-0).



PHOTO BY KATHERINE LACAZE

**Kindergarten through second-grade students adorned in dragon masks participate in a parade to celebrate the Chinese New Year at Gearhart Elementary School. The students marched through the school chanting, "Gong Hey Fat Choy" and then sat down to eat Chinese food donated by the Great Wall Restaurant.**



PHOTO BY KATHERINE LACAZE

**Gearhart Elementary School students, from left, Nathan Bohn-Cleveland, Bridgette Duncan and Dallas Hughes carry red paper decorations and chant, "Gong Hey Fat Choy" in a parade held at the school last week in celebration of Chinese New Year. The celebration has been a tradition at the school for about 12 years.**

## Locals show support for medical marijuana dispensaries

### Seaside Planning Commission considers potential zoning

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

Discussion about medical marijuana dispensaries involved the sharing of personal stories during a Seaside Planning Commission meeting Tuesday.

Several people who spoke in favor of medical marijuana and its benefits implored the commission to encourage city officials to allow the facilities when the moratorium expires in May.

"Open this up please, for the people. There's a lot of people who need this," said Oscar Nelson, co-owner of Sweet Relief Natural Medicine in Astoria. "I think this could be a great thing for Seaside if it's done well and done right."

The planning commission will meet with the City Council at 6:30 p.m. March 30 for a work session on marijuana.

Potential zoning or use regulations for medical marijuana dispensaries are being considered by the planning commission. The city's business license ordinance prohibits the licensing of such facilities, but the public testimony was to help the commission consider various restrictions for the location, time and manner for the facilities to be run should the Seaside City Council lift the licensing restrictions, Seaside Planning Director Kevin Cupples said.

Nelson noted that a majority of local voters look favorably on marijuana. In the November General Election, 8,251 people in Clatsop County voted yes on Measure 91, the bill to legalize recreational marijuana, and 6,361 voted no. In Seaside's precincts, 1,249 people voted yes and 838 voted no.

Steve Geiger, owner of Highway 420, the only facility in Seaside that has been licensed by the state to operate as a dispensary, talked about the role dispensaries play in offering a variety of products for patients. With scientific advances, he said, there are 25 to 30 different strains of marijuana available, with each one more appropriate for addressing certain ailments. Employees at dispensaries can be trained to help people find the best products for their conditions.

Seaside resident Angela Fairless testified that since she started using medical marijuana, she has been to the emergency room for migraines once in 10 years; that's compared to the five to 10 times per year she was going from ages 10 to 23. There are nearly 600 medical marijuana card

## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

### Gearhart students explore Chinese customs

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

**A** thread of kindergarten through second-graders wove its way through Gearhart Elementary School, zealously chanting, sometimes shouting, "Gong Hey Fat Choy," the Cantonese phrase for "happy new year."

The parade grew in length as more groups of students, decked out in dragon masks, continually joined in to celebrate the Chinese New Year Feb. 19.

The holiday, based on the Chinese lunar calendar, marked the end of the year of the horse and ushered in the year of the goat for 2015.

Celebrating the Chinese, or lunar, new year is not typical at elementary schools in the area. The tradition started at Gearhart Elementary School about 12 years ago when a Chinese student was attending the school. Since then, it's been something the children enthusiastically look forward to.

The teachers use it as an opportunity to whet the students' appetites for cultural awareness and education.

"I do really feel like (encouraging cultural awareness) is something our teachers strive

for because we don't have as much diversity here as some places in the country; it's something the teachers bring to the kids," said Principal Juli Wozniak.

In the week leading up to the celebration, the teachers infused their classes with lessons on Chinese cultures, languages and customs. They also helped the students create calendars containing the Chinese zodiac signs, paper dragon masks and tiny red paper dragons to be waved during the parade.

The students learned to write Chinese numerals and other signs, which they used to embellish some of the dragon banners.

See Chinese, Page 12A

## Cutler leaving job as general manager of recreation district

### Board to begin recruiting candidates immediately

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

After nearly three years as the Sunset Empire Park & Recreation District general manager, Justin Cutler has resigned, effective March 18, to take a position in Colorado.

Cutler officially submitted his letter of resignation at the district board's meeting Feb. 18.

"This is a bittersweet move for me and my family," Cutler said. "I am proud of what our team and board have accomplished the last three years, from grants to growth of programs and a focus on facility

updates. My family and I will miss our friends and colleagues."

The board members accepted the resignation, expressing their regret that Cutler is leaving.

"We'll miss you. You know we'll miss you," board member Carol O'Donovan said.

Board Chairman Michael Hinton said Cutler's recently completed evaluation identified the work he's done as "highly commendable."

"I am proud of what the district has been able to accomplish under Cutler's leadership," he said. "He has proved himself a valuable member of our community, and we will miss him and his family."

The board voted to use the Special Districts Association of Oregon for support and guidance



JUSTIN CUTLER

in the recruiting and replacement process. The board will pay the

See Cutler, Page 12A



See Pot, Page 3A