

# More than a pass-through, Elsie is at crossroads

County commissioner Lianne Thompson is an ebullient ambassador for the South County. She was the first one to come into my office on my arrival here this spring, and she has since visited a couple of times.

An Arch Cape resident, she offered an unusual proposition, a tour of some of the less-traveled parts of Clatsop County.

Yes, we were quickly becoming familiar with the cities along the coast, Cannon Beach, Seaside, Gearhart and northward, as well as the unincorporated areas of Arch Cape, Surf Pines and Tolovana Park. But newcomers are not always aware of the impressive geography and scenic roads in the interior, and Thompson proposed a journey to Elsie, Hamlet and Jewell, unincorporated areas with a Seaside ZIP code and county services.

We were passingly familiar with the Highway 101 drive-through with stops at Camp 18, the “dining and logging experience” run by Gordon Smith, (not the U.S. Senator Gordon H. Smith) with authentic logging-style architecture and features, including an 85-foot ridgepole weighing 25 tons.

Down the road a little bit east toward Washington County are the Elderberry Inn and Baker’s General Store, busy pit stops for those heading from Portland to the coast.

We met with Diane Jette, the principal broker of Summa Real Estate Group Downtown, and the unofficial voice of Elsie.

Elsie, an unincorporated area at the eastern border of Route 26 in Clatsop, has about 367 households, according to Jette. There is no city government; for emergency services, residents rely on the Elsie Vinemaple Fire Protection District, with about 20 volunteers to cover 300 square miles of land.

“Maybe more, including Jewell, and the Grange, which is across from the school,” Jette said.

## SEEN FROM SEASIDE

By  
R.J.  
MARX



**Elsie, like so much on the Oregon coast, is endangered. Lying on the edge of urban sprawl from Portland and gaining favor with those priced out of Cannon Beach, the green hills of Elsie may soon be more than a pass-through and secret sanctuary.**

With EMTs and paramedics on the fire department, responders can monitor vital statistics and get IVs started while ambulances are dispatched from Seaside, which is 23 miles away. “From Astoria, add another 10 total,” Jette said.

It can take 20 minutes to an hour for an ambulance to arrive, she said.

Elsie residents shop in Hillsboro, Forest Grove, Fred Meyer in Cornelius, and Cornelius Walmart Supercenter. Medical facilities and shopping services are about 25 miles away.

Elsie was named after Elsie Foster, a relative of the first postmaster, George Gragg, in about 1892.

Leading issues in Elsie are cable service, road safety and housing. Elsie residents made a deal with CenturyLink, but as population grew, they crowded the broadband and service bottlenecked to a crawl.

“I have to pay for broadband,”

Jette said. “Sometimes I have a benefit from it, but usually don’t. They’ve attached too many people to the existing space. Now as each person is added on, it’s sometimes like dial-up.”

At Baker’s General Store, the town’s hub, Jette corralled an ODOT worker and asked her if there was a chance that traffic could be slowed passing through “downtown” Elsie — the intersection of Highway 26 and the Elderberry Inn, which neighbors Baker’s General Store. As it is now, the speed is 55 and drivers can pass, Jette said.

“We get rear-end collisions because of the traffic piling up as someone is taking a left into the store,” she said. “We have people pulling out of traffic going 55 entering the parking lot — they try to slow down, but they’re right on your fanny. You come off Highway 26 coming way too fast and hit the brakes like an airplane landing. That’s very dangerous. The store’s there. There are children.”

An earlier near miss led the general store owners to relocate a propane storage tank, Jette said. “The owners said, ‘Holy moly, this could be disaster!’”

According to Jette, attempts to bring speed reduction are stalled. ODOT has “little slivers” of bureaucracy. “One takes care of painting the roads, another takes care of signs — they don’t talk to each other,” she said. “As much as we have asked, begged and pleaded for a turn lane or a slowdown, they say, ‘The law says you can’t have it.’”

Jette guided us on a tour to some of the more distant reaches of Elsie, areas where the Humbug Creek runs and streets have storybook names like Christmas Tree Lane and Misty Mountain Road.

We took a rustic turn to Evergreen Acres, an outpost of trailers and pre-fabs off the main road, where folks of an independent spirit live in harmony and without intru-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Elderberry Inn, along with Baker’s General Store, is the hub of Elsie.

sion of homeowners associations or condo boards. While perhaps a bit rough for the Beaverton and Gresham crowd, Jette assured us that the residents were living their dreams, not quite off the grid but pretty close to the edge.

While most of the homes are very much lived in, Jette guided us to a shell of a house hidden behind tall grasses and hulls of old wrecks. “It’s been abandoned for years,” she said. “It’s got garbage heaps, rats and other health violations back there. It needs to be squared away.”

Jette said getting the county to clear the way for removal of the abandoned structure has taken years.

Meanwhile, down by the Nehalem River, site-built homes nestled in the woods offer elegant and expansive surroundings.

“Houses range from single-wide manufactured from a third acre to half acre, from \$60,000 and up, and we have large spacious open homes, riverfront with a few acres for more than half a million,” Jette said.

“I love the pioneer attitude of the people,” she said. “When a disaster

strikes like it did in 2006, we didn’t dial 911. We just checked on our neighbors and helped anybody who needed help.”

Another thing she loves about Elsie is the air. “I always think every time I open the windows I’m getting the breeze from the ocean without the salt, the sweet, fresh open breeze that come from the sea.” But it’s the people of Elsie who intrigue her most.

“We have a huge variety of people, brainiacs, Intel people, adventurers, artists, rednecks, and kind of in-between people, just the salt of the earth people, they look after their children, their grandchildren. They have deep traditions in supporting the Jewell School. It’s an eclectic mix of interesting people.”

Elsie, like so much on the Oregon coast is endangered. Lying on the edge of urban sprawl from Portland and gaining favor with those priced out of Cannon Beach, the green hills of Elsie may soon be more than a pass-through and secret sanctuary for those who let their own flags fly. First, though, they need to get ODOT to pay attention.



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Students from Elsie attend the Jewell School, “the gem of the Pacific Northwest.”



R.J. MARX/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Diane Jette and other residents are asking the county to take action on this abandoned eyesore.

## Scene and Heard

CLAIRE LOVELL

# Why can’t people just cool it a little on our roads?

I’ve written several times about the killdeer at the Seaside Outlets and the subject is not exhausted. They’re the pretty ring-necked birds that screech and run foot races in the grass near the fountain. They also like a green patch by the theater. Habitat is from there to 9th Avenue, with a lot of low flying back and forth across the highway to the Adventist Church. Recently, an adult and two babies took over 9th Avenue. The mama did most of the hollering but all three were in our busy road too much, skittering here and there. Of course that worried me and sure enough, in a few

minutes a guy came barreling along and though I tried to warn him, his speed inevitably caused him to smash one of the little birds. I retrieved the dead baby and laid him in the strawberry patch. Why can’t people just cool it a little?

I thought we’d settled it with “In One Ear,” once and for all that Seaside’s Broadway is not Broadway Street. Further that streets and drives run north and south while avenues run east and west. I remind The Daily Astorian of this because a recent paper wrote of 9th Street. I know that one since I live on it and



CLAIRE LOVELL

it’s 9th Avenue! Then they began a new error by writing of Oceanway Street — good grief — another redundancy,

which I hope they’ll forget. I can hear a “there she goes again,” but after all, right is right.

On the third of July, I walked to Safeway to fill up my cupboard. Imagine my chagrin on finishing shopping to learn that one cab company had an hour and 45 minute waiting time while the other one had taken two hours off. Holidays are when the home folks are supposed to work extra hard to make money and serve the tourists. The Fourth is our busiest day. I missed the parade because it always happens when I’m at the beauty shop. After the walk home I

didn’t have energy for a trek to the museum, though a couple of horses did run by on my street, so I settled down to watch the celebration on TV — concerts and martial music. I looked forward to a long evening of enjoyment but when the lights went out about 5:45 p.m., I prayed that the restaurateurs wouldn’t have to wait forever to serve their hungry customers. My own dinner wasn’t all that exciting so I decided to pamper myself with a red, white and blue dessert. It was red currants and blueberries in vanilla ice cream. Afterward, I chose to sing my own con-

cert of patriotic songs. Good thing I was alone! We had been warned all week about the possibility of terrorism on the holiday. Little did we know it would be terrorism of our own making — a loose Mylar balloon that flew into the wiring and blew a transformer. This has happened at least twice before. Why can’t we have a transformer on standby — or perhaps some generators?

### Laugh line:

Now that I’m older, here’s what I’ve discovered: If all is not lost, then where the heck is it?

## Obituaries

### Joan Veronica Ryan

Nov. 24, 1926 — July 23, 2015

After two years of bravely fighting pancreatic cancer, Joan V. Ryan passed away in her home, surrounded by her family in Seaside, Ore. She was born in Vancouver, B.C., to Margaret and Herbert Hemington.

She attended St. Mary’s Academy and Marylhurst College.

She married Ernest M. Ryan, who preceded her in death in 1997. They were married for 50 years.

Joan was a social worker for Multnomah and Clatsop counties for 38 years. After retirement, she traveled the world extensively, and she was an avid quilter, master gardener and volunteer.

Preceding her in death



Joan Ryan

are her children Paul, Therese and Peter Ryan. Survivors include her brother, Herbert Hemington; sister, Mary Christman; her children, Pat Ryan, Margaret Lafrenz, Anne Losing-er, MaryJo Ryan, Eliza-

beth Lannigan and Sarah Ahmed; 23 grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren.

She was a devoted wife mother and grandmother. She will be greatly missed by all.

A funeral Mass will be held at St. Ignatius Catholic Church, at the corner SE 43rd Avenue and Powell Boulevard in Portland, Friday, July 31, at 11 a.m.; a rosary is at 10:30 a.m. Remembrances to the Providence Cancer Center for pancreatic cancer research are welcomed.

Mount Scott Funeral Home in Portland is in charge of the arrangements. An online guest book may be signed at [www.mtscottfuneralhome.com](http://www.mtscottfuneralhome.com).

## Golf tournament benefits Camp Kiwanilong



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Bob Burns, Deborah “Sparky” Vail, Kiwanian Kevin O’Keane, Park Ranger Amy Koch, Carolyn Anderson and Marilyn Dwyer. This year, Kiwanian Kevin O’Keane recruited 18 golf teams as the Kiwanis Club of Seaside held a golf tournament at the Seaside Golf Club. Proceeds of \$4,000 were donated to Camp Kiwanilong.