

Short-term rentals 'drive neighborhood nuts'

Do you know your neighbor? Nowadays, you may never meet them, because they are a corporation.

The North Coast is so popular with tourists and out-of-towners that a new player is entering the hospitality mix: the corporate homeowner. Companies like Homeaway, Beachcombers and Vacasa are snatching up area properties. Gearhart homeowners tell us they routinely receive blind mailings from these companies soliciting their properties for rental, with promises of big returns.

When Gearhart was 'under the radar'

Not so long ago, homeowners bought homes on the beach for their own use, or that of their families. They would come and visit year-in and year-out, and many homes are still dedicated to the annual family retreat. As lifestyles changed and schedules got busier, many families discovered they couldn't make it out to the beach every year. Renting the house out for the season became a good idea to help cover costs and maintain ownership.

Jerry Graf, a Marion Avenue resident, grew up in Spokane. Nineteen years ago he and his family bought property in Gearhart. "We don't live here permanently but we spend approximately five to six months a year here, we're here almost all summer," he told the Gearhart City Council in August. "When we bought the place we were aware that part of the fabric in Gearhart was short-term vacation rentals.

"It was low-key, kind of under the radar," he said. "There were a few rental agencies that listed these

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

By
R.J.
MARX



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places, but it always worked. People came back every year and there weren't any problems. But that's all changed now and it's changed at lightning speed."

The Internet is the main reason, he said, and with it, the rise of what is known as "VRBO" — vacation rentals by owner. Graf found 77 properties in Gearhart for short-term rental, split among FlipKey, Vacasa and Edson.

"I think a lot of us feel we bought into Gearhart as a residential community," North Cottage Avenue resident Jeanne Mark said. "It's feeling more and more like a hotel community."

She added a disaster scenario to the mix.

"Since we live in a tsunami zone, visitors are likely to be unprepared and perhaps even clueless in an emergency," Mark said.

Marilyn Gilbaugh, a Seventh Street resident, said only two

homes on her street are owner-occupied. "We don't know the people," she said. "The turnover is just crazy."

Are home values impacted?

Graf recited current Web listings in Gearhart: "From the Vacasa site: 'two bedrooms, three baths, sleeps 10'; 'four bedrooms, one bath, sleeps eight'; '1 bedroom, 1 bath, sleeps four'; 'three bedrooms, 1 bath, sleeps 10'; 'zero bedrooms, one bath, sleeps four.'"

Yes, zero bedrooms — a side studio is being rented out without facilities.

Graf described noisy all-night parties, cars overflowing onto the street, and blocked roadways that prevent garbage pickup.

Graf said he went to Gearhart City Manager Chad Sweet and asked what the rules were.

There are no rules, he was told.

Graf called Vacasa, listed as manager of the neighboring short-term rental. He said he was routed to a corporate office in Lorinda, California.

Graf then sent a letter to the property owner himself. "He said, 'We can do whatever we want,'" Graf said.

"I'm asking you to do something," Graf told the council. "People say 'Why don't you move?'" Graf said. "I can't. If I put my house on the market, according to a Realtor, it's worth \$100,000 to \$150,000 less because of the circus next door — and that's if I can get somebody to look at it."

"Is anybody doing anything on the council?" North Cottage Avenue resident Jenny Sabol asked. "Is anybody attacking this?"

City reviews options

The good news is, short-term rentals are a near-term priority for the city of Gearhart.

Mayor Dianne Widdop urged neighbors to weigh in: "Write letters," she said. "Any problems you see, let us know and we can compile all of these things."

City Manager Sweet provided an update to the planning commission in July, and turned over data on listings, local regulations and police incidents that could apply.

A theft from a Gearhart home by a Vacasa employee — since fired — did little to improve the company's standing. Other police reports of noise or disturbance are hard to directly attribute to the VRBO trend.

Sweet said the city currently requires licensing of hotels, motels and rental units, which can determine occupancy rates and require owner or manager contact information on file.

Under these rules, multiple reservations of the same property — as in the case in the "zero bedroom" rental — could be a violation of other zoning code.

'A living, working map'

City Attorney Peter Watts said properties were considered short-term if rented for less than 30 days. This would exclude six-month and one-year leases.

Sweet said the city is compiling a Google map of short-term residences. The map, posted on a wall in the City Hall building, is "bejewelled" to indicate location of the properties.

"This is a living, working map," he said. "It lists each one of the



R.J. MARX PHOTO/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Vacasa is renting out properties throughout the region, including this inn in Cannon Beach.

short-term rentals known to the city of Gearhart. We will continue to update that map so you can see how they are spread throughout the community."

City officials and administrators are reviewing the information posted on regional and national website. "Not including motels, hotels and condos, we know of 75 rentals in town," Sweet said. "That's 75 different homes. For perspective, that's 10 new homes since April this year that we know about."

Sweet said Vacasa has four new homes in the pipeline, with growth from 12 homes to 25 in Gearhart since April. And so far, there hasn't been mention of another popular short-term rental tool, Airbnb, which could add fuel to this fire.

The stakes will be high for local homeowners, visitors and corporate speculators.

"Get rid of these short-term rentals," Graf pleaded. "It's driving our neighborhood nuts."

Between the Covers ESTHER MOBERG

You really can go anywhere by just reading a book

Do you read for adventure? The best part of reading, just like the theme song of the beloved children's program Reading Rainbow, "you can go anywhere or do anything: just by reading a book! Often readers are inspired by books to try new things or take a trip without leaving the comfort of our home. There is a new practice lately, since we have become a culture so overwhelmed by technology and media, that we now need to take time to unwind or have 'meaningful moments'. Meaningful moments are times to stop, focus in on just one thing, like breathing, or standing in one place, or smelling a flower. The task has now become, can we stop focusing on everything and just focus in on one thing at a time. Meaningful moments can be five minutes or incorporated into your entire day. I believe wholeheartedly that reading is

a meaningful moment! If we take the time to stop and read, our brain relaxes, we relax, and we allow for imagination and building the part of our minds that is creative for developing new ideas.

Sometimes meaningful moments are epic adventures. I have some real life adventurers in my family. I have a cousin that climbed Mount Everest three years ago, and my uncle just completed the entire Pacific Crest Trail this month. He started in March and finished in August, over 2,500 miles from start to finish. Personally, I am not quite as epic an adventurer, although this spring I did do a hiking trip into Havasupai falls area near the Grand Canyon that was ten miles in and ten miles out by trail only. This was pretty intense for me. I prefer to read my adventures.



ESTHER MOBERG

One real life adventure I am enjoying reading right now is called "The Sharper Your Knife, the Less you Cry," by Kathleen Flinn. The author tells of her experience at the world's most prestigious cooking school in France. While she isn't scaling mountain heights, the author is sweating buckets as she

learns basic cuisine under the eyes of expert chefs.

I enjoy reading about adventures by people who dare to live life to the very fullest. If you have seen the movie The secret life of Walter Mitty, I think this is the true way most of us are, we have big dreams but often don't carry them out unless inspired or forced to. Reading is probably the safest form of escapism, without risking life and limb!

Of course if you like epic adventures, you have probably read Cheryl Strayed's "Wild," which recounts her trip on the Pacific Crest Trail. Because of this one book, thousands of people are now hiking the Pacific Crest Trail. This one book inspired people to get out and try something that before only a few hundred would start each year, and far fewer would finish. You get an idea of how vast

and isolated this trail is when you realize hikers can hike up to four days at a time and not see another person.

Some of my favorite real life reading adventures are those of culinary artists. I love reading about tantalizing foods and recipes that I can only guess at the taste (in my mind, they are all amazing except for perhaps foie gras or the squid!) while reading about these gastronomic adventures. I enjoyed reading the book "Delicious!" by Ruth Reichl, about a writer in New York at a fictional magazine that had the gift of a discerning palate and the ability to write about the flavors she experienced. The characters aren't as important as the description of the artisan cheese store or the recipes that are broken down into their individual flavors. I had to follow up on this book with real

cooking experiences, this is probably what has motivated me to plan some fancier cooking when I go camping next, including Inside out s'more bars and chicken nacho bowls.

Did you know the library has an entire section in the adult nonfiction (number 926 and higher) on people who have written about their cooking experiences including Julia Child, Ruth Reichl, and Michael Ruhlman?

If travel through the eyes of another is more your style, check out: "A Year in the World: Journeys of a Passionate Traveler" by Frances Mayes, Sea of Dreamers, Travel with Famous Ocean Explorers," by Phillip Trupp, and also "The Adventurist: My Life in Dangerous Places," by Robert Young Pelton. All of these adventures and more are awaiting you at the Seaside Public Library.

Scene and Heard CLAIRE LOVELL

Over-used expression sounds trite and insincere

One expression I'm tiring of is "Thank you so much." After a while it begins to sound trite and insincere. I think I'll go for a simple thank you, which says it all.

Rags to riches

Saturday, I was happy to see Dr. Ben Carson as a guest on Bobby Schuller's "Hour of Power." He's a great and funny man with supreme intelligence. I used to wish his voice was more assertive, but what he has to say makes so much sense that the volume isn't that important. Dr. Carson has received the Horatio Alger Award, a rags to riches recognition. I

didn't know there was such a thing but it's a distinct honor. I have several Horatio Alger books, which I read over and over as a child — considered by some to be fourth rate. There was something satisfying to me about good's triumph over evil and I especially liked "Joe's Luck," a story about a boy who found a large nugget in the gold fields after many trials. On Saturday, I watched a story about the gold rush town of Bodie — I think in Colorado. Mr. Bodie and his partner were caught in a snowstorm. The partner carried an exhausted Bodie for a while but later on, put him down



CLAIRE LOVELL

to freeze to death a mile from their cabin. Afterward, the town of Bodie became cursed. Visitors who went through and picked up things

like square nails or colored glass or stole other trinkets to take home had bad things happen to them. I'd like to go through one of those ghost towns and see how people lived in the old, old days — in a tap room, an all purpose grocery store or in a regulation shack with outdoor plumbing. Well, Hey, I guess I did live like that in former times. It was primitive!

Once in a blue moon

Doggone, I missed the blue moon, again. This was the second one in about six months. Friday night I saw the regular moon out my south window, but through

the tree branches. I like it best when it rises over the hills. It reminds me of Kate Smith. I can even hear her singing "When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain." It doesn't take much to amuse some of us.

On the last day of volleyball, the Seaside Methodist Church had its annual picnic at Broadway Park. Lots of good things to eat on a beautiful day, and of course, we always have a good time together. What a great way to start the week! My kids from California got to see the men's championship game before the beach closed down.

Love the free-range chicken commercial, especially when she sees the pan of fried eggs. The old hen does get around.

How about the dog that had been missing for about eight years? His adoptive family turned him into an animal rescue place — didn't hear why. Those people discovered a microchip and he was reunited with his rightful owners after all that time. It was a joyful reunion all around.

Laugh Lines:

If you always want bread with your breakfast, are you lack toast intolerant?

Letters to the Editor

Critics of biplane should check their facts

Regarding the article on "Biplane activity sparks conversation" (Signal, Aug. 21) and the unsubstantiated reactions and allegations of a few people only, were noted concerning Mr. Grant's business. Grant flies out of the Seaside Airport, yet Gearhart Mayor Widdop approaches Grant in Seaside with complaints from her constituents without checking with the FAA on VFR regulations or

if there are any existing justifiable complaints.

Concerns were raised listing noise, wildlife, safety and air pollution. No proof was offered, only fearmongering. The FAA 2004 noise advisory is not a rule. Seaside Helicopters and Grant's biplane both fly over my house without undue noise. Flying too low? What are the FAA rules?

Given that Grant's biplane is fabric-covered, it is so light that a powerless landing can be easily achieved. Trying to tie this into the 2008 crash is fearmongering. Steeper take-

offs and landings? Grant's passengers would soon be revisiting their latest meal! Grant flies and maintains his aircraft under strict FAA rules. His pilot's license was earned and is maintained under these rules. In the future, let's see verification, not just allegations.

Terry Johnson
Seaside

Residents had their chance to remedy traffic, missed out

I am compelled to write following a series of letters

expressing frustration with Seaside's ongoing traffic problem.

Go back to the Daily Astorian or Seaside Signal's 2004 archives and you will find that the city had the opportunity to ease the traffic congestion, yet turned it down.

After years of planning, a lengthy public hearing process and the legislature's approval of more than \$30 million in funds, ODOT and the Seaside City Council agreed on a plan to ease the traffic pain.

A small group of opponents sued ODOT for the citizen's right to vote on the proposal and after a contentious campaign waging fears of changing Seaside's quaint environment, the plan was voted down by Seaside voters.

The money allocated for the Seaside traffic problem was then used to ease traffic in Tillamook County. Additionally, ODOT and Senator Betsy Johnson made it clear that the "no" vote would put Seaside to the "back of the line" with no funding avail-

able for a Seaside project until 2025.

Complain all you want. We had our chance. So the next time you're sitting in traffic to get some groceries or pick up medication, thank the short sightedness of a small group of renegades who chose a quaint Seaside over a carefully planned proposal to prepare for the area's future.

Don't blame ODOT. Don't blame the Seaside City Council. They tried to make it happen over 10 years ago.

Dennis Brodigan
Seaside