

# Sammy's Place brings Buddy Walk at the Beach

Event will raise funds to create nature-centered community for people with special needs

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

The Sammy's Place board of directors envisions establishing a living, working community for adults with special needs. The 11th annual Buddy Walk at the Beach is primed to be a big step toward achieving that goal.

Through the Buddy Walk at the Beach, scheduled to start at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 19 at Quatat Park in Seaside, sponsor Sammy's Place, a Nehalem-based nonprofit organization, seeks to raise at least \$30,000 as start-up funds.

"We're at the community engagement phase, getting people aware of the organization's vision and supporting that vision," said Julie Chick, president of the Sammy's Place board of directors.

## The Buddy Walk evolves

The National Down Syndrome Society established the annual Buddy Walk in 1995 to celebrate Down Syndrome Awareness Month in October and to promote acceptance and inclusion of people with Down syndrome. More than 250 communities nationwide host the annual event.

For about 10 years, the North Coast Down Syndrome Network put on the Buddy Walk at the Beach in Seaside. This year, the walk will double as a kick-off fundraiser for the new sponsor, Sammy's Place. Many of the people involved with the network, which dissolved last year, also are involved with Sammy's Place, so the transition was easy, Chick said. The event may evolve under the leadership of Sammy's Place, but Chick guarantees it will remain a staple for the community.

During the event, participants will take a parade-style walk along

Broadway from Quatat Park to the Turnaround and back to raise awareness for an array of developmental disabilities — "when we're in a rural space like this, the number of people with Down syndrome is limited, so we got to include everybody," Chick said. The rest of the day will feature activities, music, games, a raffle drawing and food, all with a circus theme.

"It's really just a couple hours of networking and camaraderie," Chick said.

## A nature-centered community

More than 20 people, including board members and their families, are fundraising on their own or with a team through an online platform. The five people who raise the most before the event will qualify to win a prize. The first-place prize includes \$1,000 in Visa gift cards, a two-night stay at the Oceanside Surfsand Resort in Cannon Beach, a \$50 gift certificate to the Fort George Brewery in Astoria and two tickets to the Columbia River Maritime Museum.

As of Sept. 9, participants raised \$15,619 toward the \$30,000 goal. Seven percent of proceeds will go to the National Down Syndrome Society; the rest will go to Sammy's Place, which does not have a physical location yet.

Of those funds, a third will go to building the organization's operational capacity, Chick said. The rest will go to a savings account for a down payment on property.

The vision of Sammy's Place is to create an inclusive, nature-centered community for people with special needs. Originally, the organization's mission was solely respite but the current board of directors worked during the past 18 months to broaden the mission to include living and work resources, as well.



The 11th annual Buddy Walk at the Beach is scheduled for Sept. 19. In the past, the North Coast Down Syndrome Network sponsored the event; this year, the Nehalem-based nonprofit organization Sammy's Place is sponsoring the walk as a fundraiser to create a working, living community for individuals with special needs.

They envision obtaining property on the North Coast that would provide rural acreage, gardens and paths; a main lodge with independent living cabins; and opportunities to work and learn that would lead to community integration. Some ideas include organic farming, farmers market vending, animal husbandry, farmstead cheese production and artisan crafts.

People with special needs could include hearing- or vision-impaired individuals. "There's a whole gamut of how to think about it," Chick said, adding the board will address the topic of who could join the community at a later date.

Board members are currently focused on strategic planning and obtaining long-term financial sustainability. With money in the bank from the Buddy Walk at the Beach, Chick said, the board is hopeful the organization can obtain matching grants or other funds.

Participants of last year's Buddy Walk at the Beach gather downtown for a photo. The 11th annual Buddy Walk at the Beach is scheduled for Sept. 19.

JULIE CHICK/SUBMITTED PHOTO

More importantly, she added, the funds raised symbolize community support. More than 200 people donated money and at least 20 businesses sponsored this year's event.

"Each one of those persons, even if it is just \$10 they give, they prove to foundations that they support our vision, and that's critical to us," Chick said.

Until the community demonstrates a desire for a respite center, "it's not real," she said. "That's really vital."

For more information about the organization or to serve on a board or committee, contact Chick at chickj@charter.net or (503) 368-5193 or visit www.sammysplace.info.



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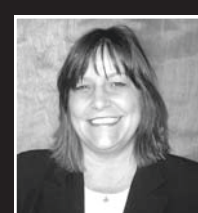
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## BUSINESS DIRECTORY

# John Duncan remembered by Gearhart leaders as an asset to the community

Mayor, City Council plan to fill vacancy in coming months

By Katherine Lacaze  
Seaside Signal

Gearhart Mayor Dianne Widdop plans to take her time finding candidates to fill a City Council vacancy left after Councilor John Duncan's death Sept. 7.

"I want someone who will carry on the way John has," she said.

Duncan, 67, died at his home in Gearhart early Labor Day morning. Only a few days prior, he had sat at a City Council meeting, attended a Gearhart Homeowners Association picnic and worked on his pet project of cleaning and restoring the Gearhart Ridge Path.

Widdop, as mayor, will appoint someone to serve the remainder of Duncan's four-year term. Her appointment must be approved by consensus of the council.

Gearhart City Administrator Chad Sweet said there is no rush to fill Position 3, the at-large seat Duncan held for about nine months after being elected last November.

Duncan will not be easy to replace, he added.

As opposed to those who simply talk about working on projects or getting things done, "John did things," Sweet said. "He took big projects and busted them up into little pieces and made them easy and fun."

Widdop said she is giving the next appointee "a lot of thought" and will get opinions from councilors Kerry Smith, Dan Jesse and Sue Lorain. Once the council approves Widdop's ap-



John Duncan

**Bagpiper plays at the memorial for John Duncan in Gearhart Monday. The event drew several hundred mourners and friends.**

R.J. MARX PHOTO/SEASIDE SIGNAL



pointment, that individual will start immediately.

## 'An asset'

Duncan was a professional engineer and land surveyor who lived at least partially in Gearhart for about two decades.

"He was passionate about his engineering and his land surveying," said his wife, Sandy. "He was passionate about his family. He was passionate about being fair. He was very fair. He followed the rules and would interpret them in the fairest way that he could determine."

Duncan was an outdoor person who enjoyed rafting and fishing. He was a good storyteller and an avid golfer, Sandy Duncan said.

"He was just a good friend to everybody," she said.

Duncan served in the Army during the Vietnam War. He and Sandy met in 1978 and married in 1979. They have a daughter, Nicola Duncan, and a grandchild, Marcus Duncan-McKinney, who live in the Portland area.

John and Sandy Duncan owned a home in Gearhart

for 20 years and moved permanently to the area five years ago.

In 2013, Widdop appointed John Duncan to the Gearhart Planning Commission. With the 2014 General Election approaching, Widdop said she asked Duncan to run. "I convinced him that he was such an asset to us," she said.

In November, Duncan took over Position 3 after claiming about 68 percent of votes.

"I think that I've been fortunate," he said about being elected as city councilor. "It's kind of a big responsibility that the voters put on me, but I thank them and I want to do a good job for the city."

## An interest in community

During recent council sessions Duncan provided input on a local street vacation request, short-term vacation rentals, firehouse renovations and the Ridge Path Trail.

He was an advocate for better emergency preparedness and citizen involvement.

In the nearly one year he served on the council, he did

"an excellent job," Widdop said. "He is one of those people who, if he says he is going to do something, he does it, and he gives it 100 percent."

Sweet said Duncan was "a constant presence at City Hall." He would stop by at least three or four times per week to get caught up on what was going on. Because he had decades of experience in surveying and engineering, Duncan was "a wealth of information," Sweet said.

Duncan spearheaded a project to complete the Gearhart Ridge Path, a walking trail favored by residents and visitors.

"This is something he will always be remembered for doing," Widdop said of the trail.

Sweet agreed. "John just loved working on that trail and making that happen," he said. "If anybody wanted to walk on it, wear it in, that would be a good way to remember John also."

Caldwell's Funeral and Cremation Arrangement Center in Seaside is in charge of the arrangements. A memorial service for Duncan has not been set.