

New couple hopes to have a positive impact on the coast

Luciaks arrive from Vancouver in February to give care to family member

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

Joseph and Britta Luciak moved to Gearhart in February and feel right at home in the friendly, coastal community.

Coming from Vancouver, British Columbia, where Joseph was born and raised, the weather and culture are similar, making the transition easy for the couple. Also, Joseph visited the area frequently growing up, as his grandparents lived in Gearhart. "I do feel connected to this town," Joseph said.

Britta, who was born in Berlin, Germany, does not have the same memories or family ties, but she traveled a lot growing up and feels she "can call any place my home," as long as she is with her dog and husband.

The couple moved to the area to take care of Joseph's grandmother. Joseph currently works for local contractor Timothy L Beatty Builder.

Britta, a freelance graphic designer, still works remotely for the family's business in Canada until she gets permanent residency in the United States.

The Luciaks are due to launch their business, Oregon Mold Medix, an indoor mold consultation, inspection and remediation company, in January 2016. The couple believes it will provide a much-needed service in the area. The couple hopes, in particular, to help that demographic and low-income families, who tend to be disproportionately affected by the problem. Joseph said if one in 10 of their remediation projects could be done for a low-income family, then they can have a "fairly significant



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Britta and Joe Luciak moved to Gearhart from Vancouver, British Columbia, in February to help take care of Joseph's grandmother. The couple plans to open their own business in January 2016.

impact with our effort."

"I don't think those goals are that ambitious," he added. "We all live here because we love the air outside."

They are excited to get the business off the ground.

"By this time next year, I think we will be able to say we have had a bigger impact," through both their business and charity work, Britta said.

They enjoy living in a small, tight-knit community. The advantage of having good neighbors was evident when, during the summer, By the Way owner Linda Goldfarb temporarily closed her shop to help

the couple look for their missing basket hound, Columbo. She located the dog on U.S. Highway 101 near the Sons of Norway Field.

"It's nice to not just be anonymous in the big city," Britta said. "Here's it's so much closer knit."

Joseph agreed. "This place is so neighborly," he said. "When we walk down the street, I wish the locals would start to adopt the nod, because my arm gets sore from constantly waving at people."

When not working, Britta and Joseph share time outdoors with Columbo, going outside during storms, hiking and camping. They also enjoy watching documentaries.

In Vancouver, Britta and Joseph managed bars, dance clubs and live music venues. They volunteered with the Access to Music Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides children in British Columbia with instruments and music education opportunities. Joseph recently resigned his post as chairman of the foundation. After heavy involvement at a community level with performing arts and community service, Joseph said, they "haven't really been culturally stimulated yet down here."

"We're really looking to get involved in any sort of capacity," he added.

They feel Gearhart is a good place to be and to raise their first child, due in March.

"We'll give it a good shot here for a while and see how it goes," Britta said.

Christmas lights

Lights from Page 1A

Her work twice was recognized — in 2013 and 2014 — with first-prize awards in the residential category for the Seaside Chamber of Commerce's House of Warm Lights contest. Unfortunately, the contest is not happening this year, but that didn't stop her from going all out, decorating with the same fervor, if not more, as previous years.

Part of it is having two children, 7 and 4, who have illuminated the holiday spirit with additional excitement and joy.

"Now that we have two kids, they insist on it," she said. "We can't really get away with not doing it."

Israel is Seaside born and bred. She left the area for college and spent a few years in Portland before moving back in 2008. She and her husband, Adam, own the Human Bean drive-thru coffee shops in Seaside and Warrenton.

Throughout time, Israel's passion for Christmas and decorating has rubbed off on her husband, which she said described as her favorite part of the holiday tradition. They have turned the activity into a family event that has "grown and grown," Israel said.

"We add things every year," she added. "We make it a fun event, and look forward to it every year."

Israel's husband has even talked about wanting to grid the roof, "so we're going in that direction," she said.

They pull the decorations out of storage and starting putting them up about two weeks into No-

vember. Near the start of December, everything is in place and ready to be inflated or lit up.

"The holiday season goes by so fast, it's nice to enjoy it while we can," said Israel, who also likes to decorate the interior with a large tree, garlands, lights and other ornaments.

Of course, decorating on the coast is accompanied by tasks like making sure all the items are extra secure with staples and zip ties and some fixing and replacing when things get damaged by wind and rain, but Israel said they are accustomed to it and they don't let it dampen the experience.

The Israels' house has become locally renowned as prime stop for those on personal or group tours to look at festive lights. Israel sees people on a regular basis driving by or stopping their cars to enjoy the Christmas music — mostly classic carols or holiday music from the '80s — playing on a loop to accompany the visual display.

"Seeing the looks on their faces just makes it really special," she said.

Decorations throughout the rest of Israel's neighborhood are pretty sparse, but she said she doesn't think her elaborate display or the passersby it brings bothers them. At this point, "they are used to it," she said. She tries to have everything shut off by 9:30 or 10 p.m.

The decorations will stay up through the month of December. Israel said they usually start coming down around the first of the new year.



KATHERINE LACAZE/SEASIDE SIGNAL

Kristi Israel and her family take pride and joy in elaborately decorating their house on Skyline Drive for the holiday season.

Winter brings increased need for food, shelter

Homeless from Page 1A

Hands' rehabilitation program after several tumultuous, emotional months of relapsing and using crystal methamphetamine after 14 years of being clean; having people she thought were friends turn against her; becoming homeless; and having her two sons, now 7-year-old Kai and 8-year-old Zar, taken from her custody.

While at the hospital on suicide watch, a social worker asked if Chambers thought she could be a good mom while using crystal meth, she said. She knew the answer was "no." In October 2014, after a summer of "kind of destroying myself," she said, and after being evicted from her apartment, she remembers sitting at the Short Stop convenience store in Astoria "feeling lost." The Department of Human Services had referred her to options for getting back to a point where she could be with her children. Helpings Hands was one of the options.

Support and accountability

Chambers made her way down to Seaside on an evening bus from Astoria. Upon her arrival at the emergency shelter, staff member Alicia Camberg greeted her.

"Alicia took me and just hugged me and told me, 'You're going to get your kids back,'" Chambers said. "From that point on, I knew what I had to do. There was no question."

Chambers told herself nothing could stop her. By December, she had visitation rights to see her sons two hours once per week. Seeing them for the first time made her stronger in her pursuit to provide a stable environment for them and herself.

Christmas last year was one of the saddest

times for her, but it also was a time of hope. She had moved into the women's home and was going through the reentry program. With support from Helping Hands staff and volunteers, she got herself clean and found a job.

"I was doing everything I possibly could to get my kids back," she said.

Her hard work paid off. On Valentine's Day, Zar was back in her care. She still was living at the women's home, and the environment provided extra accountability. Chambers was surrounded by nine women who she knew understood her story and cared about her but also could report her if she slipped up.

That didn't happen, though. Chambers stayed the course, and by June, had moved into her own apartment. She believes her success was due to Helping Hands, which she said "is a very, very loving and helpful place," and her motivation to be the best version of herself for her sons.

"There's one thing that makes my heart beat, and it's my two kids," she said.

She still is working to strengthen the family. In October, she was given the ability to have custody of Kai, who has severe autism. However, he is thriving and developing well with his foster family. Chambers feels it is best to keep him there for a while longer.

"It's not better that he's away from me, but it's better that he's growing," she said.

She wants to make sure she has a stable environ-

ment for Kai to return to. She hopes to get training to strengthen her ability to cope with his autism and to provide the support and guidance he needs to continue developing.

"My gut tells me it's not time," she said. "I'm not ready to make a wrong move and have him removed again."

She has full access to him and calls and visits frequently. Her hope is they will be ready for him to return home late in 2016 or 2017.

Chambers is grateful for the difference a year has made. From being homeless and removed from her kids, she now has a job, Zar living at home, access to Kai and wonderful people around her who will not let her fall, she said.

"Life is way better," she said. "I couldn't have done it without Helping Hands."

Countywide housing assistance

Clatsop Community Action, which provides a variety of services and referrals to those in need in the county, is reporting a large increase in demand for all of its social services, in particular, housing and emergency food requests. The organization reported housing assistance requests have increased about 600 percent from two years ago. Many families and individuals — including numerous children and senior citizens — remain unsheltered.

Food distribution also increased by about 50 percent over the past four years. More than 25 percent of residents qualify

for emergency food assistance, the organization reported.

Clatsop Community Action runs multiple housing programs with different eligibility requirements. The organization assesses people who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless to see if they are eligible for any of the programs. Typically, the people have some type of income, although it may not be much, Executive Director Elaine Bruce said.

"We can't do everything, but we try to augment what's there," she said.

Clatsop Community Action assists Helping Hands by diverting some of its grant money to the latter nonprofit if it fits the criteria for a specific funding stream, Bruce said. The agency also works with the Northwest Oregon Housing Authority and other organizations and agencies.

As for seasonal need, the organization's energy assistance program runs from October to February and uses five different grant sources to help reduce energy costs for those that qualify.

"In the winter, that's when people really need that," Bruce said. "We have a lot of applications that come in."

She said multiple socioeconomic factors contribute to the increasing need for housing assistance in the county. They include a lack of manufacturing and other living-wage job sources in the county; a lack of housing in general; and slow recovery from the economic recession in 2008.

"Those are heavy contributors to people asking for help," she said. Sometimes people are hit by more than one factor at a time, she added. "It's just a complex myriad of problems."

'We can't do everything, but we try to augment what's there.'

Executive Director Elaine Bruce, Clatsop Community Action

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