

Lorain is 'up to speed' as she seeks re-election

Rentals, fire hall on the horizon

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Nearing the end of her first four-year term, Gearhart City Councilor Sue Lorain gathered enough signatures to qualify for a re-election bid in November.

"It feels like it takes two years to get up to speed," she said. "Then you start participating. To me, a second term is important — to have the background, be more prepared and finish the things we started in the first term. It's continuity."

Lorain and her partner moved to Gearhart in 2004. A retired teacher — "I taught everything at some point," she said — Lorain spent much of her career teaching fifth- and sixth-graders in Washington's Highline School District.

Lorain serves on the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce board and as vice-president of Seaside Scholarships, a nonprofit providing scholarships for local students.

Looking back on her four years as councilor, she singled out short-term rentals, legal actions at Neacoxie Creek Barn and the attempted mayoral recall of Mayor Dianne Widdop as key issues. "I didn't see that coming," Lorain said. "That was tough."

Lorain said she objects to the personal tone injected into local politics. "What puzzles me is how issues don't become about the community and what's good for the community, but they become personal issues against certain individuals," she said. "I'm running to make decisions for the good of the community, not for the good of an interest group, this person or that, or even where I stand personally. I think this council position is about doing what's good for all of us in Gearhart."

Lorain said the council's short-term rental solution "meets extremes on both sides."

As chairwoman of Gearhart's Fire Hall Committee, she said she hopes to develop a community-involved campaign for the new building, designed to replace the firehouse on Pacific Way. A proposal could go before voters in 2017.

If re-elected, Lorain said she foresees a relatively calmer council interaction. "What's cool about this group now is we can disagree on issues, but at the end of the meeting we can look at each other and say something funny and laugh, and be respectful of each other as human beings. That hasn't always happened. I like the group I'm working with, even though we're not always on the same page. We're a good group, and diversified."



Sue Lorain

Dan Jesse seeks second term on City Council

Councilor calls for greater emergency preparedness

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Dan Jesse is making his second City Council bid in Gearhart, defeating his opponent in 2012. Jesse's career in public service began with the Seaside Convention Center and the Seaside Improvement Commission, before he and his wife Julie moved to Gearhart, where he served on the Planning Commission before election to City Council.

Dan Jesse, raised in Silverton, met his wife Julie, a lifelong Gearhart resident, while a student in Seattle. The couple returned to the region after school. Trained as a commercial photographer, Jesse is a builder by trade.

"When we moved here, commercial photography was not a viable way to make a living," Jesse said. "I love the ability in a small town to see a client I've worked with in the grocery store, to have smiling faces and people happy with what you've accomplished. I wish I could say the same about politics."

Jesse was referring to the last four years on Gearhart's City Council, which have seen a number of contentious issues, from a mayoral recall vote and vigorous short-term rental debates to ongoing litigation at neighboring Neacoxie Creek Barn.

The reason for city's disquiet, he said, is a "generational shift," in which many longtime residents are either leaving or being displaced by newcom-

ers. "People knew each other and had a mutual respect and understanding, how to get along and play nice together."

With a vacation rental ordinance expected to be passed in September, Jesse said the contentious topic would likely spill into future council sessions.

"I don't think this is coming to an end," he said.

Both a referendum or a lawsuit in response to the ordinance are possibilities, Jesse said, "and I've heard rumblings of both. At least with a referendum, people could decide based on what the referendum is."

He said he welcomed a vote on the ordinance or portions of it, which could come in the form of a special election in 2017. "I'd like to hear what the people think, and I hate to see tax dollars going into a lawsuit," Jesse said. "I'm not convinced the people wanting short-term rentals would come out as well as they think it would if it was put to referendum."

Jesse said he hopes the dispute with Neacoxie Creek Barn owner Shannon Smith will draw itself to a conclusion as the process moves to Circuit Court. "I'm hoping we put that one behind us."

One issue he'd like to see greater attention to is emergency preparedness.

"I think we're still missing the boat in dealing with emergency preparedness," he said. "We need to be putting time and effort as well as money in trying to put ourselves in a better position when a catastrophic event happens."



Dan Jesse

Vacation rental owners make plea for compromise

Survey says: take a fresh look at new regulations

By R.J. Marx
Seaside Signal

Short-term rental property owners are seeking a compromise to new rules in Gearhart that were approved in a first reading of an ordinance early this month.

"Half the voters are against regulations or have no opinion," vacation rental property owner Jim Whittemore said in a letter to the City Council. "The message is, the voters of the city want this process to take more time — that we need a compromise."

Homeowners in Gearhart, including Whittemore, hired a polling company to determine local attitudes on short-term rental housing.

The poll was conducted by Jim Moore Methods, af-



EO MEDIA GROUP/FILE PHOTO

Homeowner Laurie Whittemore addressed the Planning Commission at a May hearing in opposition to rental regulations.

ter being contacted by part-time Gearhart resident David Townsend, founder and president of political consulting firm Townsend Raimundo Besler & Usher in Sacramento. Townsend said while he is the owner of a rental proper-

ty in the Little Beach area of Gearhart, he would not be affected by the new rules.

One-hundred people drawn from voter rolls were surveyed, six of whom said they had rented their home as a vacation rental and 94 who had not. All said they were familiar with the short-term rental issue.

"These are decision-makers," Townsend said. "What they're really saying is, 'Can't we compromise? Why do we have to jam this thing? Why don't we step back, form a committee, sit down and see if we can do some compromise?'"

But the results also show almost two-thirds of Gearhart residents said the city needs to adopt an ordinance to regulate vacation rental units. And slightly more Gearhart residents favored moving forward with new rules — 41 to 38 percent — even if the "vast majority of vacation rental owners think the process has

been unfair and incomplete."

City Administrator Chad Sweet said this week that the survey, which was created without city input, "pretty much says the Planning Commission and City Council are moving in the right direction. It reinforces what we're doing."

The council approved new rules in a first reading earlier this month and could bring them into law with a vote in September. The ordinance would go into effect a month later.

If enacted, permit applicants would be required to complete forms, pay a \$600 permit fee and provide proof of inspection. The ordinance requires a 24-hour property owner representative and permit display, which would list maximum occupancy, parking and the designated representative by the entry door. Each rental would need a \$125 inspection and a posted tsunami evacuation map.

Permit holders would need to pay city vacation rental taxes.

Overall, a majority of residents polled supported these measures, however, seven out of 10 residents disagreed with a provision stating: "Any home currently used as a vacation rental unit cannot be used as a vacation rental in the future unless it stays in the family."

"The voters acknowledge the need for ordinances, many of which are already on the books, but do not want to lose (their) rental homes," Whittemore said.

"The voters are really, 'Let's have some fair regulation,'" Townsend said. "Let's not go overboard and deprive owners of their right to rent their property or sell their house so somebody else can rent their property out."

Opponents to the rules could file an appeal with the state Land Use Board of Appeals or present a referendum challenging all or any part

of the ordinance they want to change or remove, Sweet said.

Townsend said a referendum could be filed within the next year.

"We don't want to do that," Townsend said. "The council should do the right thing. There's no reason not to look at what this poll says, not to dismiss it out of hand because you don't agree with it. All the council has to do is step back, take a deep breath, pull some people together and say, 'Where can we make some compromise to bring everybody together?' I don't know why the council and the mayor need to make this so divisive."

On Sept. 7, the council will vote again on the proposed ordinance.

"I expect they will be unanimous again," Sweet said. "But you never know. And they did have time to take this survey under consideration before the first vote."

Former British soldier says he's on a mission in America



DAVE FISHER/FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL

On foot and traveling light, former British soldier Stuart Repon-Ness stopped at the Seaside Signal office to share his story.

Goal is to raise awareness and money for veterans' charities

By Dave Fisher
For Seaside Signal

A British veteran from Orford, England is running his way from Seattle to San Diego, 1,447 miles, to raise awareness and money for two charities close to his heart.

Stuart Repon-Ness, 35, took a short break from his trek along U.S. 101 and stopped by the Seaside Signal office Aug. 5. His goal that day was to make it from Astoria to Arch Cape and he was well on his way as he arrived at the Signal office about 11 a.m. just to say "hi."

Repon-Ness plans to complete his West Coast journey on foot in just 45 days, which means he will be running on average more than 32 miles per day.

"I left Seattle last Saturday (July 30) or at least I think it was last Saturday; it's hard to keep track of the days," he told the Signal.

He served in the army as a physical training instructor and was deployed in Iraq and Kosovo before he left the British military forces in 2008. Coming back from Iraq, Repon-Ness said he was "a wreck" and that the British charity Combat Stress really helped him with his post-service traumatic issues. The other nonprofit organization he looks to help is an American one; Homes For Our Troops, that

builds mortgage-free, specially adapted homes for severely injured post 9-11 veterans to help rebuild their lives.

Initially, the plan was to conduct his awareness run on the East Coast, but the summertime weather on America's "left coast" was more to his liking, plus he has friends in Sacramento who can lend support.

For the most part, the married father of four will be completing his journey without a support crew, making his trek that much more challenging.

A vegan, who eats mainly raw food, Repon-Ness says he

is not worried about keeping his strength up along the way. "The west coast of America is like the vegan capital of the world so I won't have any problems with finding something to eat," he said in an interview prior to his journey across the Atlantic. "The best thing about being vegan is the simplicity."

As for running, he loves it and it's therapeutic.

If all goes according to plan, Repon-Ness will arrive in San Diego Sept. 13. To visit his fundraising page and follow his progress, visit stusrunning.com.

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