

SignalViewpoints



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Chetco Bar fire, Clatsop County Task Force 25 members Louie Laukkanen, James Hutchinson, Brent Salisberry, David Rankin, Josh Como. Back row, Amy Lenz, Mike Lalonde, Jeff Golightly, Frank Stuhr, Kattie Bulletset, Dallen Maine, Joey Daniels and Bill Eddy.

Firefighters take the front lines as state wildfires burn

Where all know the phrase, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” I would amend that to where there’s smoke, there’s firefighters.

Local residents might not have noticed the absence of members of the Seaside and Gearhart fire departments over the last month, because they’ve done such a seamless job of coverage in their absence.

As an editor and reporter, I’m aware of the fires by the daily press updates we receive from throughout the state: weather conditions, territory covered, hot spots and structures destroyed. It all seems pretty remote, until the haze descends on the Coast and it’s not just morning fog.

While most of us are covering are faces at the sooty smells and closing our windows, others in our community are heading in the direction of the blazes. These local heroes are among the hundreds of volunteers and professionals who have taken an oath to serve in harm’s way.

Firefighters from Seaside, Gearhart, Cannon Beach, Olney, Lewis and Clark, Warrenton and Knappa fire districts have been deployed to fires throughout the state.

Seaside Fire participated as a member of the taskforce at the Milli Fire near Sisters, at the Chetco Bar Fire and now the Gorge fire.

Gearhart, a city of 1,200 full-time residents, sent teams to the Chetco Bar Fire near Brookings and to the fire at Eagle River.

“They’re leaving their jobs and their families to go down there,” Gearhart City Administrator Chad Sweet, who is also a firefighter, said at the city’s September City Council meeting.

Seaside Fire Chief Joey Daniels served as task force leader at the Brookings fire, accompanied by Gearhart Fire Chief Bill Eddy and local firefighters.

The task force leader assigns six crews, Daniels said shortly after his return. Their task was to protect structures in a 40-mile area, to create what they call “defensible space.”

Firefighters prepped houses, sweeping off the roof, cleaning gutters and making a defensible space, Eddy said.

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



The team installed sprinkler kits, weed-whacked, cleaned gutters and blew excess grass away from houses.

On days when the “lid was on the fire and the smoke was on the ground,” air support was impossible, Eddy said. Sky cranes equipped with snorkels, double-bladed and single-bladed choppers with buckets would dip into the Chetco or the Pistol rivers before dumping into on the fire lines to slow its growth, Eddy said.

The challenge was to learn the area quickly, Daniels said.

A day on the lines

Mornings began with a wake-up at 5 a.m., a 5:30 a.m. briefing, followed by a 6 a.m. meeting with task force leaders from each division.

Daniels said at times there would be an hour wait for a shower, “so you’d have to gamble of whether to use baby wipes.”

James Hutchinson, a 20-year-old firefighter with the Gearhart Fire Department, was among those who “maxed out” their time at the Brookings fire, capped at 14 consecutive days. When he got there, he slept in a tent outdoors — first on the ground, then on an air mattress. He later found a bed at Brookings High School before being sent to a fire camp about 10 miles south.

Eddy said temperatures in the region ran in the mid 90s to low 100s. Firefighters were spared the heat of the blaze, except when the winds picked up, he said. “The outside temperature was bad enough.”

Community support

Community support made a big difference, Daniels said. “The people in Brookings were nice as could be.”

He said it was almost like having another family. “We had a church group that would do the laundry. You would drop off your bag in the morning and

they would have it back to you before you got off the shift.”

“Speaking about the community, no one was a stranger,” Hutchinson said. “Everyone appreciated you being there. They said, ‘We’re glad you’re here.’ Driving by, people would honk or wave at you. Even coming down I-5, we had people honking and giving thumbs up.”

Return home

During long absences of volunteers, local departments teamed to share mutual aid, with Cannon Beach, Seaside and Gearhart sharing responsibilities in the South County.

It went “seamlessly,” and residents probably didn’t notice a lot of the difference, Daniels said.

Hood to Coast took place without incident, he said, despite the fire personnel shortages. “I’m really proud of the people in Seaside. They really stepped up.”

Daniels described the commitment firefighters make when they head to a wildland fire. “It’s not like going to a home fire for two hours,” he said. “These guys are gone for long stretches. Even though we are paid it doesn’t mean we don’t want to be home with our families.”

With firefighters heading back out to fight the Gorge fire, North Coast cities remain shorthanded.

“That’s just how it is,” Daniels said. “We never want to use the resources, but I want to know when we have something happen here the state, they will step up to help. Whether it’s a tsunami or a big fire, we’re going to need all those resources to come help us. We’re sure going to want them to come to Clatsop County.”

After a 10-hour drive back, exhausted volunteers returned to their firehouses and homes.

The first thing Daniels did was spend time with his 18-month-old son Jacob. “He was having a tough time with daddy being gone,” Daniels said. “That’s another thing: our families are taking a pretty big hit too.”

“Our task force represented our town pretty well,” he added. “They were well-trained, they did their job and they represented the agencies well — and I think that’s what the state would say.”

The people you meet along the way

I was near the Cove at that place some people call Painted Rock Beach and others simply call The Rock Garden when I saw a woman sitting on a bench painting a rock. This was unusual because the rocks people place there seem to be painted elsewhere, but this lady was painting with Wite-Out, a product I haven’t used since my old editorial assistant days, back when we were all still using typewriters.

“Sorry,” I said. I felt like I was interrupting something, specifically her privacy. What she was doing seemed very personal. She had her open bag beside her and she was wearing a windbreaker and a hat to ward off the sun, which that morning was bright and shining. It was about two weeks before the wildfires broke out, before the air became thick and heavy with smoke and ash, smoky enough to make my eyes water when I walked the dogs in the morning.

“That’s alright,” the woman said. She put down the tiny brush and the bottle of Wite-Out. She seemed like maybe she didn’t mind some conversation.

So we began talking. I told her I was a writer. She said she was taking a little time off from work to paint a rock for her son who was no longer with her. She told me a bit about her life. We talked about how expensive housing had become in the area. She asked about my dogs, the one who is young and spunky and beautiful, and also the one people tend to avert their eyes away from because he is old looking as well as crippled. I told her I had another dog at home, a tiny very ancient dog who is blind and who doesn’t leave the property very often.

She told me her name is Kimberly and that she came to Seaside via Cannon Beach and that she had recently started a business. Her business is called AA Brilliant Clean (with double AAs) and that it is a cleaning service. She said she had just put up more business cards to advertise it at Ken & Son’s Market. “I’m not so interested in cleaning short term rentals,” she said. “I’d like to work for people who live in their houses.” She said she does all the regular jobs that house cleaners do and that she also does windows.

The entire time Kimberly was talking I was listening, but I also felt something else. My rational brain was telling me I’d never met Kimberly before, but another part of me felt we had connected at another point in time, on another level. Perhaps it was something about her eyes, very clear blue eyes radiating nothing but peaceful kindness.

At last it seemed time for me to leave her to her task of painting that rock. I had a pie to bake anyway. Our apple tree has been very generous this year and boy, do we have apples. I think my husband may be tiring of eating apples at almost every meal. We’ve had chicken salad with apples; tuna salad with apples; baked apples; apples baked with potatoes; apple and cabbage slaw. For a snack I cut them up and dip the slices in honey. They’re very good with peanut butter. My husband’s favorite thing, however, is apple pie, which I’m pretty sure he would eat every day, or at least until we finally run out of apples.

Walking home, I reflected how everyone I’ve met on the beach with the painted rocks seems to be a kind person. There is something about that little stretch of beach that draws gentle spirits. Everyone who steps on to that beach leaves a tiny bit of themselves behind, whether it’s a painted rock, a prayer, or their own gentle good wishes to a fellow visitor. I wish I’d brought an apple with me that day. I would have given it to Kimberly.

Eve Marx is a book author and bi-coastal journalist.

It’s apple-picking time in Seaside.

EVE MARX/ FOR SEASIDE SIGNAL



How summer reading helps kids build a better world

The Seaside Public Library wrapped up our annual summer reading program for children, teens, and adults, with record numbers this year. We set a new record of 335 registered and 268 total finishers for this year’s “Build a Better World” themed reading program. Total read came to a grand total of 2,048 hours. Starting June 10 and finishing on Aug. 31, kids who kept track of their reading with reading logs throughout the summer could turn their reading logs in for prizes. The goal of our annual summer reading program is to help kids retain what they have learned throughout the school year. Studies have shown that “summer slide” occurs when kids don’t actively read throughout the summer

BETWEEN THE COVERS
ESTHER MOBERG



and children may regress up to an entire grade level if they don’t keep up with their reading.

We had two fun puppet events this year. Professional puppeteers from Dragon Theater puppets entertained Seaside Children with a puppet show based on the summer reading theme and Penny’s Puppets, sponsored by the Oregon Savings Plan, gave a free show at the Seaside Library. The 234th Army Band also came and entertained with a storytelling and music show for all ages. The Inter-

national Border Collies are always a big hit and came ready to perform, entertain, and educate. Building with blocks, Legos, straw construction and snap circuit electronics was the most desired hands on programs for kids and parents working together and getting lost in building things. The parents who attended requested this event on a regular basis.

At one of the weekly preschool storytimes this summer, preschoolers tried hands on science. Story-time science experiments included a density tower and tub of water. Kids followed the five steps of the scientific method by asking a question, making a plan, experimenting, observing and coming to a conclusion of items that would sink or float. The experiments were done

together with a read aloud story that explained the five steps of the scientific method: “Charlotte the Scientist is Squished,” by Camille Andros.

Some of the fun events for teens at this year’s summer reading program included events where teens made blankets and donated them through Clatsop Community Action. Our teen Tuesday attendees also made dog and cat toys and donated them to the local animal shelter. Other fun teen events included a bridge building competition and a cooking class baking rigatoni in a cup.

Wolves, hiking, and music were just a few of the highlights of this year’s adult summer reading program. In July, author Beckie Elgin told the story of “Journey: The Amazing Story of OR-7, the Oregon Wolf

that Made History.” The incredible story of a tagged Oregon wolf who left northeast Oregon, to find a mate, and became the first wild wolf to enter California in 87 years in an incredible 4,000-mile three-year trek.

In August, author Carolyn Wood retold her experiences hiking the famed Camino de Santiago. The Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) is a large network of ancient pilgrim routes stretching across Europe and coming together at the tomb of St. James (Santiago in Spanish) in Santiago de Compostela Spain. Carolyn faced emotional and physical obstacles as a 66-year-old when she decided to hike 500 miles in 40 days along the famed pilgrimage route in southern France and northwestern Spain.



PUBLISHER
David F. Pero

EDITOR
R.J. Marx

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Jeremy Feldman

ADVERTISING SALES
Brandy Stewart

PRODUCTION MANAGER
John D. Bruijn

SYSTEMS MANAGER
Carl Earl

STAFF WRITER
Brenna Visser

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Skyler Archibald
Rebecca Herren
Katherine Lacaze
Eve Marx
Esther Moberg
Jon Rahl

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