Signal Viewpoints



JEFF TER HAR/FOR EO MEDIA GROUP

This van parked in Seaside for several nights, with passengers seeking handouts, merchants said.

City may tighten rules to stop aggressive homeless

stumbled on this article from 1930 that shows the scope of Seaside's homeless problem over time. An itinerant cook with three children, ages 7, 8 and 11, got off the noon train from Portland on a charity ticket on the impression she was going to be given a job here. But when met by police, she was unable to explain who was expected to employ her. "She was given food by the Seaside police force, allowed to occupy one of the cells at the police station and was sent to Astoria the next day," the Signal reported.

Today of course there are no trains the last passenger train came through in 1952 — but visitors of varying means continue to make their way to the Coast. Portland's "Ticket Home" bus program, modeled after a similar program in San Francisco, gives bus, plane or train tickets to people who have places to live in other cities.

A pilot program in May and June 2016 got \$30,000 and gave 53 homeless people tickets out of Portland. According to the Portland Housing Bureau, clients in 40 households were assisted with transportation costs to return home, provided with six airplane tickets, 42 bus tickets, and five train tickets.

With or without a subsidized government program, in Seaside, the need grows, with a 6 percent increase in housing assistance for children, 18 percent for senior citizens and a 19 percent increase in the transient population. Helping Hands now sees 190 people a month seeking housing options.

With increased numbers comes some more aggressive visitors, especially around the holidays.

"We see the wave everywhere around the state," Alan Evans of Helping Hands Re-Entry said at a breakfast meeting of the Seaside Downtown Development Association.

Clatsop County is ranked in the top three of homelessness per capita in the state, he said, and the problem is going to get worse before it gets better.

"We are dealing with much deeper issues," Evans said. "The steady increase over the last four years is scary. And in the summertime, people flock to the places we have coming in to visit."

As housing becomes scarcer, the problem is going to get worse before gets better, he added. "I think every community struggling with the same thing we are. It's a very tense conversa-

City struggles to cope

In Seaside, the problem spills over into our everyday lives. Participants at a Seaside Downtown Development Association breakfast complained of aggressive and rude panhandlers who camp out on city streets, block sidewalks and harass passersby.

City Manager Mark Winstanley commented that the public library has been a place where homeless issues are growing, especially as homeless seek a refuge from the area's wicked winter weather.

Heidi Wright



Transients and panhandlers are not uncommon on Broadway.



"This is something they don't teach you about in library school," he said.

Ordinances, while in line with those of other cities, are limited.

'We do have an ordinance on the books that talks about begging," Police Chief Dave Ham said. "But court rulings tell us that we are very limited how we can interact with these folks.

Anything that is open is city-owned and open to the public provides a "pretty wide berth" for interpretation, Ham said.

Darren Gooch of the Bob Chisholm Community Center said people coming into the center looking for a place to sit or talk on their cell phones or use the center's courtesy phones.

"We are dealing with issues now that we never dealt with in the past," Gooch said. "For some people, 'community center' is a buzz word for something for

While homeless may find temporary shelter at Helping Hands or through other charitable groups, there are few options for managing the activities of aggressive panhandlers.

Loitering around an ATM machine is enforceable Ham said. But laws are more difficult for those holding signs saying "God bless" may be more diffi-

"You can't say someone 'looks like a doper," Ham said. "You're not going to be able to pick and choose which one is going to be OK."

When incidents are reported, complainants are asked to serve as witness-

"And the answer often is, 'I'm not going to get involved in this," Winstanley said. "And that's very frustrating for police officers. They want to be able to do something.

Police don't have the resources or justification to jail offenders, Ham said, and citations are often ignored. "If they do appear the judge will say you are fined \$150, which they do not have the ability to pay. So the cycle continues.'



Story from 1930 tells of a family arriving in Seaside seeking food and shelter.

A designated area for transients — a pocket park was suggested — could be a possibility, Ham said. But rules for the area would be problematic as well.

'Some of these people come with a lot of gear," Ham said. "You could say you can have a acoustic guitar you can't get real loud, but if you're coming in with five different duffel bags and leaning against the wall and people trip over them that's not really great."

The communities successful in this issue right now are those where everyone works collaboratively, Evans said.

Town hall discussion?

Winstanley said the solution could be simple — don't give handouts.

'If panhandlers see an opportunity to make money, they will stay," Winstanley said. "One of the reasons they are there is because they are making, and in their business, they are making good money.'

Another proposed solution is a free permit for those coming to Seaside, to be administered at city hall, enabling officials to track transients.

But the permit process would have "some challenges," not least of which, constitutionality and the right to assemble. "You have the right to be in public places," Ham said.

A committee of the Seaside Downtown Development Association will be seeking a solution, possibly in a town hall discussion. "This is a community discussion, not just a downtown discussion," the association's director Sarah Dailey said. "We want to work with the Seaside Police Department, the city and the businesses to find a solution that works for everybody."

A cat comes for Thanksgiving and stays for 16 years

e was booted from a moving car, an orange teenaged kitten given the heave-ho by some boys Ldriving around in a beat-up Caprice. I'd just emerged from the fitness club where I was waging war with my belly fat. The Caprice came hurtling through the club parking lot. An arm shot out the window and out flew a squirming cat. It was the day before Thanksgiving, 1992.

The cat landed on his feet. Come here, kitty, I said. He was half-grown and lanky, a feline James Dean. He

managed to exude a certain nonchalance I found admirable considering the situation. He came right over when I called. I petted him and picked him up. He immediately draped himself over my shoulder and burrowed his head into my neck.

I put the cat in a box I had in the car and drove directly to the nearest animal hospital. "Know this guy?" I asked. They didn't. The doctor offered to do an exam and throw in free shots. I gave permission to neuter and said I'd pick him up the next day. The staff reminded me the



Duke was thrown out of a car at Thanksgiving time.

VIEW FROM THE PORCH **EVE MARX**



next day was Thanksgiving and the animal hospital would be closed. I said I'd pick him up at 4 o'clock.

I called my husband and said we were getting a cat. He immediately protested.

'You'll like this cat," I said. "And if you don't, we'll find a new home for him after the weekend." Then I went to meet the school bus.

My son was in first grade. He bounded off the bus clutching a construction paper turkey. His cheeks were red from cold and candy corn. His teacher that year taught math with Hershey kisses, candy corn, and Tic Tacs. "We're getting a cat," I told my son. "You can come with me to pick him up.'

The next day we were seven for Thanksgiving. That may not sound like a lot to you but it was too many for me. I was stressing because my aunt Adele brought a surprise guest, an attractive young foreign woman, a medical student, who had only been in the country a few weeks. We also invited our friend Neil, who lived in the city, a single guy who got upset whenever he thought we're trying to fix him up. I was breaking a sweat from the heat of the oven. We were just about to sit down. The cat hissed from the top of the kitchen cabinets. At knee level our rescued terrier, Happy, ran in circles, barking. It wasn't yet clear if Happy wished to play with the cat or destroy him.

Dinner was rough. Our foreign guest, an East Asian who had never experienced Thanksgiving mistakenly thought cat was on the menu. She thought he was hanging by the rafters to avoid a meeting with the cleaver. Happy persisted barking even when I stuffed his mouth with turkey. Aunt Adele launched into the full story of her operation. While I was scraping dishes in the kitchen Neil urgently whispered his desire to stay overnight to avoid having to travel back into the city with the foreign woman who clearly had eyes for him.

Later that evening, after we sent my aunt and the future doctor and Neil on their way, my son and my husband and I sat down to watch "Mary Poppins." My husband was still fuming over what he described as "your usual three-ring circus," a remark I chose to ignore. Exhausted from 24 hours of nonstop barking and sedated by tryptophan, the dog curled himself into a ball on the rug before the fireplace. On silent feet the orange cat appeared at the entrance of the family room. He walked the perimeter of the room before leaping into my lap. Then he went over to the rug and lay down beside Happy, who opened one eye and then closed it.

"Look at that," I said to my husband. My son beamed. "Happy Thanksgiving, Mom," my son said. "And thank you for getting Daddy and me a cat."

We had that cat 16 years.

LETTERS

Mayor seeks input on short-term rental rules

It's time for the healing process to begin. The citizens of Gearhart have had a tumultuous couple of years. Measure 4-188 pitted neighbor versus neighbor, STR owner versus citizen, and business owners versus the city. Our citizens voted overwhelmingly to keep Gearhart residential and we all need to honor the will of our voters. But that doesn't mean our work is finished. When we give our current regulations a chance to work, over time we will be able to identify parts that are working well and parts that need fixing. I very much look forward to hearing common sense ideas from all sides that benefit our citizens while following the guidelines in our comprehensive plan.

I encourage folks that have constructive ideas to come to our city council meetings, stop by city hall and pick up a copy of our current regulations and comprehensive plan, or contact me and other councilors at any time with suggestions. Protecting our residential zones, empowering

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The Seaside Signal is published every other week by EO Media Group 503-738-5561

Seaside Signal

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Letter policy

The Seaside Signal welcomes letters to the editor. The deadline is noon Monday prior to publication. Letters must be 400 words or less and must be signed by the author and include a phone number for verification. We also request that submissions be limited to one letter 97138, drop them off at 1555 N. Roosevelt Drive or fax to 503-738-9285, or email rmarx@seasidesignal.com

Subscriptions

Annually: \$40.50 in county • \$58.00 in and out of county • e-Edition: only \$30.00

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