

SignalViewpoints

Gearhart firefighters deserve better

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX

Firefighters are great at saving lives, but they're not always as good at promoting on their own behalf.

Public relations is antithetical to the selfless spontaneity that enables someone to respond to a call at 2 a.m., enter a burning house or forgo evenings and weekends for training necessary to save not only the lives of others, but protect your own, too, in the most desperate and dangerous situations imaginable.

Over the past couple of years, I've had the privilege to write about the heroics of the Clatsop County strike teams who leave their homes and families to volunteer on the lines, in Ventura County and Sonoma, California, and in wildfires in southern and eastern Oregon.

Gearhart's 35-person department sent seven men and women to California to fight the most destructive wildfire in that state's history.

In Paradise, California, James Hutchinson, Jordan Chandler, Tanner Rich, Sean Kirby, Angels Vargas, Kayla Miller and Lindsey Wolfe saw images that will remain with them for a long time: the remnants of charred homes, rotting animal carcasses on roadsides, and the raw fear on the faces of residents and homeowners who had lost everything.

"A lot of us have seen fatalities and we've seen the devastation before," Chandler said in November. "But none of us have seen what we saw down in Paradise. It's on a much larger scale than anything we've dealt with here. That town will never be the same."

Children waited in lines to thank them for their service; community members



Members of the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department.



In 1956, Gearhart firefighters battled this blaze at "Cobra Gardens" on U.S. Highway 101 at the corner of Pacific Way. Many of the snakes survived the blaze, but later died as a result of asphyxiation from smoke or pneumonia after being left outside in the cold all night, the Signal reported at the time.

brought them food and supplies, even if they had little to nothing themselves.

Fires, floods and snakes

Over the decades Gearhart fire has responded to fires, flooding and gales, literally serving as a lifeline to families isolated by the storm of 2007.

They've made untold numbers of ocean rescues; firefighters helped find countless children and lost dogs.

In November 1956 they

even responded to a fire at "Cobra Gardens" — victims of the fire were snakes on display at the building along U.S. Highway 101.

Gearhart Fire was on the scene in the aftermath of a horrific plane crash in 2008 that took the lives of two adults and three children.

I come from New York City where of the 2,977 people killed in the 9/11 attacks, 413 emergency workers perished, 343 of whom were firefighters.

There are Gearhart Fire

**WHERE TO PUT THE NEW BUILDING?
ASK THE FIREFIGHTERS**

Department volunteers today who weren't even born then.

When they built the fire station in 1958 the word "tsunami" was perhaps only a Sunday Times crossword puzzle word for what happened somewhere else.

Nothing has changed except the science. It's more precise and the threat is more certain.

Station is 'maxed out'

The firehouse is "sagging about 5 inches and we have a lake every time it rains hard," fire committee chairman Gary Gillam said — in 2017.

Firefighters are "maxed out" on lockers to store their gear. There's no space for new volunteers or even to have drills. If there's a disaster, how will they even get their gear?"

Sue Lorain, a member of the original firehouse committee, told me at the time about cracking cinderblock, crumbling walls — "not such a different scenario

from the school," she said.

Gearhart Elementary School is closing in spring 2020 — firefighters will still be in a deathtrap on Pacific Way.

City Planner Carole Connell sent out a revised tsunami map in February — 1,221 Gearhart tax lots are located in the "medium" risk zone; 1,861 would be impacted by a "large" and 2,130 or every property in Gearhart impacted by an "XXL" or "extra extra large."

Gillam was back at this year's town hall. "It's taken me three years — or more — to fully compile the information shared tonight," he said.

Input sought

Three sites are in contention: the current station, the city park at North Marion and Pacific Way; and what is referred to as the High Point site further north on Marion.

Gillam and others shared what they called "ideas and

concepts. They can or will be altered or changed. We want to know not just what you don't like — but what you do like."

The purpose of the strategy, Mayor Matt Brown said, is to spend the next three months collecting public input.

"I want everyone to tell me what location they like, which one they don't like, and I want specific feedback how we can make any of these locations better or designs better," said on Jan. 29. "Pro, con, give us your ideas. Our only strategy is to listen for three months. I want some specific feedback how we can make any of these locations better, these designs better."

Unofficial survey results show the city park site lagging behind High Point and the current site, Brown said at the city's March 6 City Council meeting.

Fire Chief Bill Eddy said "good information" was presented at the January town hall.

"Most of this is getting out to the public what we've done so far and what their feedback is," he said. "That's all we want: their feedback."

The decision of where to place the fire station remains with the people of Gearhart, he added. "If the people feel the park is where they want to put the station, that's the direction they're going to go. If they like one of the other locations, that's where the city will go. The people are going to direct where this location is going to be. It's not going to be the city. It's going to be the people, the citizens of Gearhart."

Does he have a preference?

Eddy paused. "All I know, is I don't really care for it to be in this (current) location again, mostly because of the tsunami problem. One of the other two locations are fine. Even here, if it gets to be a worst-case scenario, I guess this is better than nothing."

County shelter pets need your love

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



Because Rinaldo was so tiny, the shelter had him housed with the cats.

Every day as I walk with my dog past Ken's Market on Avenue U, I pause at the Clatsop Animal Assistance poster taped up inside the grocery store window. I look at the sweet faces of two dogs, Callie, and Doug, and linger on the calico cat, Rayne.

A quick check of the shelter website informed me that Callie is a young Rottie mix described as playful and snuggly. I watched a video of her playing ball with a volunteer; the shelter staff says Callie is well-trained and intelligent; she prefers to be the only dog in the home.

Doug is a handsome one year old cattle dog/heeler mix. He's blind in one eye, which to my mind gives him a debonair pirate look. It's easy to see he just wants to play.

Rayne is a calico domestic shorthair; she's delicate and pretty as because she's an older girl, she just wants a nice lap and a quiet home.

Lately on their Face-

book page, Clatsop Animal Assistance has been posting adoption success stories. I find them endlessly uplifting. In fact I search them out and read them when I'm feeling a bit down. They recently shared the story of a previously shy cat named Flower whose new family reports has developed an adorable feline sense of humor.

A small, black dog the shelter christened Kimmy was adopted by a family who renamed her Lucy; the dog is now the best friend of the family's 10 year old daughter who is doing a 4-H project called "Classy Canines" with her. Little Lucy it turns out is a champion hiker and has climbed Kings Mountain in the Tillamook National Forest Cathedral multiple times.

Zoe, a 25-pound mixed

breed, was adopted in Dec. 2018 by a man who lost his partner of 47 years. The man said after his loss he was overcome with grief, but Zoe has been helping him get better. He said having Zoe in his life has been transformative. I love reading these micro stories. They reaffirm my belief that loving and being loved by animals can change the dark to light.

My family has been into rescue for a long time. We rescued five cats over the years and eight years ago, a 10-year-old Chihuahua. The dog was an owner surrender; when we got him, he was seriously underweight and mostly toothless.

Because he was so tiny, the shelter had him housed with the cats. We met him the day after Christmas; it

was brutally cold. The dog was wearing a tiny sweater and was curled up under a towel. He was depressed. When we spoke to him, he barely lifted his head. With two dogs and two cats at home at the time, we had no plans to adopt another pet.

We'd only gone to the shelter to make a donation. It was an impulse to take a look. We brought him home and changed his name to Rinaldo and he lived on for seven years, a highly entertaining and always loving rascal to the end.

The next time you see a Clatsop Animal Assistance poster (and they are everywhere), take a moment to consider bringing new love into your life. Dogs and cats find their way to the shelter for all sorts of reasons; sometimes their owner is forced to move and can't find housing that accepts pets. People lose their jobs; they no longer can afford to feed their pet. Sometimes the owner has died. The great majority of these animals have experienced love and training before they arrived at the shelter. All they want is a second chance for a good life.

Clatsop Animal Assistance is located at 1315 SE 19th St., Warrenton.

Yearning for a visit to my childhood home

Thanks to Jack Nicholson, bucket lists have become fashionable. So last week I made a list. I would like to visit Thomas Wolfe's memorial in Asheville, North Carolina, or take the boat ride to Catalina Island or be a part of the crowd at a Steelers and Browns football game, but most of all I want to go home again. I want to revisit the house in Toledo, Ohio that I grew up in 70 years ago. Perhaps you're asking why would anyone want to do that? The terminally nostalgic or as lyricist Dave Frishberg put it: "people with a psychopathic involvement with the past."

I drive by my old house every time I am in Toledo, but I want to go inside. I want to know what it is like to step back in time realizing that several generations have made changes at 4108 N. Lockwood. This urge is more than just a nostalgic trip. I want to test my memory. Could I climb the stairs, turn right, and find my bedroom? Will the size of the rooms inside match my recollection? Is the living room, the dining room, and the kitchen where I remember? And what happened to the coal eating furnace in the basement that

OUT OF MY HEAD
BOB DIETSCH

my Dad and I used to feed each night? Is there still a place in the backyard where grass would never grow? I get a rush just thinking about it, but with some apprehension. What is it going to be like when I step inside, where the past and present are there all at once like an episode out of the Twilight Zone?

I want to know what the current owners think about my old house and why they bought it. I want to know what they think about the neighborhood and Whittier Elementary where I went to school. Does it still have great teachers like Ms. Dryfus, Ms. Moon and Ms. Atkins?

I thought a lot on how to make this happen. I can't out of the blue just knock on the door. My friend April has a better idea: She said, "find out the names of the current residents on Google and ask them if they would be willing to let you have a one hour tour at their convenience."

News at 11.

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