



'AT THE HEART OF IT,

IT'S VOLLEYBALL'



Craig Barrow dives to keep a rally alive during quad, or four on four, action on the main court at a previous Seaside Beach Volleyball tournament. Alex Pajunas photo

By **KATHERINE LACAZE**
For Seaside Signal

When an event has been around for 38 years, like the annual Seaside Beach Volleyball Tournament, it creates the opportunity for people who participated as children to return and continue the tradition with their own families.

"We have kids that are younger than 12 and adults that are older than 60, and everywhere in between," Seaside Chamber of Commerce Director Brian Owen said. "To see the community support each other — seeing the kids watching the adults, seeing the adults watching the kids — it really is why this is a family event."

Local proprietor Michelle Wunderlich and her 16-year-old daughter Annika are a case in point. Wunderlich has long possessed an affinity for beach volleyball, summing up some of her best adolescent and young adult memories as playing the sport in the sand, biking along the Promenade, and eating at The Stand. She has attended the tournament — which takes place this year from Aug. 8 to 11 — for about 30 years, playing in a majority of them.

At 5 months old, Annika made her first appearance as a spectator. Now, for the sixth year, both mother and daughter will compete in the tournament, albeit on different teams.

"It's really fun for me having her love it as much as she does," Wunderlich said.

They have a standing tradition to watch pros play at the annual Seattle Open with one of Wunderlich's long-time friends and volleyball partners, but the Seaside tournament is an equally meaningful tradition and destination in its own right.

"It's my favorite weekend of the summer, far and away," she said.

Optimizing the experience

The tournament originated in 1982 when local lifeguards were raising funds to either fix a lifeguard tower or purchase a new one. During the inaugural tournament, about 25 teams participated.

At present, the tournament averages about 16,000 teams playing among three divisions: doubles, quads, and sixes.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR SEASIDE BEACH VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT

The Seaside Chamber of Commerce is looking for a large number of volunteers to help with Seaside Beach Volleyball Tournament tasks, including setup, booths, prize giveaways, security, tear down and more.

The event is Aug. 8-11 on the Seaside beach.

Come be a part of one of the largest volleyball tournaments in the world.

Sign up at <http://bit.ly/2XTCNGG>

For 2019, there will be 184 volleyball courts set up on the beach, which is about 20 more than last year, Owen said.

Four years ago, Bad Boys Open Volleyball partnered with the chamber, becoming the tournament directors. The event also is now sponsored by the AVPFIRST and AVPNEXT divisions of the AVP Pro Beach Volleyball Tour, contributing to a national pipeline for youth, semi-pro and professional beach volleyball.

During the past three years, "the player experience has been our No. 1 goal," Owen said. The tournament used to be open to anyone who wanted to participate, which led to inefficient scheduling and game delays that negatively impacted players and spectators.

"We had them always waiting for us to tell them when they were going to play next," Owen said.

Based on input from participants, each division has been capped for the past three years. The organizers also implemented set brackets, so as soon as a team finishes one game, they know when and where their next match will be, if not necessarily who they are playing. They use a web-based digital communication tool that can be downloaded as an app to schedule matches and communicate with the athletes.

Not only does that create "a better player experience all day long," Owen said, but it also means participants aren't stuck on the beach, waiting for their next match. They can return to their hotel to relax or migrate into town to go shopping, eat a meal, or visit a local attraction.

Going green

Another way the Seaside tournament is evolving over the next few years is through an increased focus on sustainable event practices and reducing the amount of waste brought to the beach.

The first "big swing at this," Owen said, is a partnership with Liberty BottleWorks, who will be setting up a hydration station where both players and spectators can fill their reusable water bottles. They also are providing first-, second- and third-place prizes.

Next year, the organizers plan to request food and other vendors provide a recyclable and/or biodegradable packaging option for bags and to-go containers, as well as straws and other items. They already focus on vendors that have sustainable practices within their mission.

"This way, we can make sure, when we do leave the beach, we've made our best effort to leave it clean and clear," Owen said.

The beach volleyball culture

Billed as the world's largest amateur beach tournament, the Seaside event draws in several thousand participants and spectators. In the open division, there will be a few familiar faces. Past champions Bill Kolinske and Miles Evans will be back. Adam Roberts, whose team placed second in their division last year, is returning with a new partner. Chris Honer, an energetic player who is "incredibly fun to watch," is also returning, Owen said. In the women's open division, Katie Spieler, last year's champion is returning with a new partner, Courtney Knudsen.

Doubles is the most popular, and competitive, style of play for beach volleyball, whereas playing as quads and sixes is "really a time to gather with your friends and enjoy a day at the beach," Owen said.

The different divisions and levels of competition create a conducive environment for anyone to join in, but they all contribute to same unique culture surrounding the activity.

"Honestly, at the heart of it, it's volleyball," Wunderlich said. "It's just this feeling of being a part of it, even when you're not on the court. I would challenge anyone to go watch the tournament and not feel it."

Six new golf champs in the Oregon Coast Invitational

By **GARY HENLEY**
The Astorian

WARRENTON — It was some sort of record Saturday, July 27, at the Astoria Golf & Country Club, where six first-time champions were crowned in all six divisions of the Oregon Coast Invitational.

Pretty impressive, considering the annual tournament has been around since 1910.

A few previous champions came close to winning again — but all came up short in Saturday's championship flight finals.

A few of the new champions had waited a long time for their titles, including Super Senior winner Gaylord Davis and Women's Seniors champ Mary



Gary Henley/The Astorian
Gretchen Johnson raises her hat to the crowd, following her championship win over Lara Tennant, left.

Jacobs.

The men's Seniors champion, Tom Mulflur, avenged a tough loss to his opponent of two years ago to win Saturday's final, while Jim

Alder of Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club was a first time champion in the Junior/Seniors division.

Twenty-year-old Jon Holzgang of Tigard had

a big week on the North Coast. He earned medalist honors in the qualifying round a week earlier in the Grand Champions division, then won the match play title Saturday against former champ Anthony Arvidson.

And the third time was the charm for 33-year-old Gretchen Johnson, who had the "feel good" victory of the tournament, winning the Women's title over 11-time champion Lara Tennant, after coming close the last two years.

"This is my third year playing in (the OCI)," said Johnson, who trailed for most of Saturday's match with Tennant. "I was medalist and got to the finals my first year, and couldn't quite close the door. And last year, I was up in the semi's and in a good position, but

couldn't close it out. This year I was fortunate enough to come out on top."

She held a 1-up lead through the first three holes, before Tennant pulled even on the fourth, then led (by as much as 3-up) for the remainder of the morning round.

Johnson trimmed her deficit to 1-down over the first six holes of the afternoon round, and the two were even for most of holes 25 through 30.

Johnson took a 1-up lead on the 13th hole (31st overall), but nearly lost it on the 16th.

Tennant's second shot rolled within feet of the cup, while Johnson's second shot landed on the side of a sand trap.

Her shot out of the bunker was still farther away than

Tennant's ball, but Johnson hit a long putt from the edge of the green, while Tennant narrowly missed her putt, leaving Johnson with her 1-up lead still intact.

Johnson hit another nice putt on 17, then was able to play the 18th safely to end the match.

"I had two great up-and-downs on 16 and 17," Johnson said. "I had kind of a 'hanger lie' on 16 that I thought would go right, but I closed it a little bit and pugged it left," into the bunker.

"Then I hit a pretty good bunker shot, and a 20-footer for par," she said. "Then on 17 I thought I hit a great iron, but the wind pushed it over the green. I had a pretty good chip after that, then made another eight- or 10-footer."