



Sarah Nebker



John Toyooka

Nebeker, Toyooka vie for county commission

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Since being elected to the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners in 2012, Sarah Nebeker has been an advocate for the arts and health and social services.

She believes her institutional knowledge and decades of experience in government and running a small business position her to respond effectively to new challenges created by the coronavirus.

John Toyooka, of Lum's Auto Center, who is challenging Nebeker in the May 19 election, believes he can offer a different perspective and create a more transparent and cooperative culture on an often fractured board.

The campaign in District 2, which covers Gearhart, Clatsop Plains and portions of Seaside and Warrenton, comes as the county is navigating through a phased reopening of the economy during the pandemic while facing a potential budget shortfall.

Major projects, like construction of the new county jail in Warrenton and moving county facilities out of the tsunami inundation zone, need tending. Challenges like housing and homelessness still need to be addressed.

'Experience is going to help'

"I know things are going to be different now to some degree," Nebeker said. "And we don't know exactly how much. But I think that experience is going to help.

"Because somebody new coming onto the commission, especially somebody who doesn't have any prior government experience — in the midst of this — I think it's going to be really tough. I think it will be tough for the commission, and I think it will be tough for them individually."

Nebeker said she has believed in civic engagement since she was a teenager. She served on the Gearhart Planning Commission for 25 years before her election to the county commission.

"I've just committed to doing things that I think will help people, that will make things better," she said. "That's kind of who I am."

Nebeker, who has managed art and real estate properties, was married to the late painter, Royal Nebeker.

While serving on the commission, she has been a strong supporter of funding for the arts and social services.

She started the Arts Council of Clatsop County, which she believes has helped nonprofits receive grant funding and increase the economic impact of the local arts and culture sector. She believes the council has also helped educate people about the importance and value of art.

Nebeker has been a supporter of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county's mental health contractor, along with the county's needle exchange and other outreach designed to combat substance abuse and address

mental health issues.

She also believes she played a role in the success of the crisis respite center in Warrenton, which is in the process of being purchased by Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare.

"I have formed strong liaisons with those on health and human services, and we've been able to get some phenomenal things done," she said. "It's never going to be enough — there's always going to be people who are at risk, there's always going to be mental health issues. But I've been able to work so well with people who are in our public health and mental health to improve things."

Nebeker is also proud of her decision to appoint Larry Taylor, a longtime Democratic Party activist, as parliamentarian to help advise her on how to run board meetings when she led the commission as chairwoman last year.

Although the appointment was met with some resistance from other commissioners, she believes the training the parliamentarian provided helped keep the focus of conversations on the issues. She credits the training for making board meetings more efficient and improving communication between commissioners.

'A different culture'

Toyooka believes more work needs to be done to increase transparency and cooperation on the board.

"If I have any influence, if elected, on creating a different culture, one of more cooperation than adversarial would benefit all," he said.

During his career in the U.S. Marine Corps, Toyooka said he learned how to unite for a common cause. He believes he can be helpful in handling issues in a more collaborative, efficient and effective way.

While he has no government experience, he has served on the foundation boards of Clatsop Community College and Providence Seaside Hospital.

"I can be very objective," he said. "And I don't represent any agenda or any special interest."

"I'm very much of interest of the people of Clatsop County. I believe in forestry, farming, fishing, business, tourism, arts — I believe that it all works together. I don't think we should weigh one heavier than the other. They all have to work in harmony."

Toyooka, the manager of Lum's Auto Center, lives in Gearhart and is married to Lori Lum, the general manager and part of the family that owns the dealership. He said success and economic development in all sectors

is important in providing the tax base to fund programs, services and infrastructure improvements.

Toyooka has opposed cap-and-trade legislation in Salem because he believes it lacks transparency and guidance on how it would be implemented.

Although county commissioners do not have a direct policy role over cap and trade, he believes a unified voice from the county can influence state decisions. More than two dozen counties in Oregon opposed a cap-and-trade bill this year. Commissioner Mark Kujala and Commissioner Lianne Thompson wrote letters in opposition to the bill, but the other commissioners, including Nebeker, did not take a position.

Nebeker said she did not see a reason to sign a letter in support or opposition since the county is not involved in the decision in Salem.

Toyooka has also criticized Nebeker for her vote in 2017 to opt Clatsop County out of the \$1 billion class-action lawsuit against the state over timber harvests. Commissioners voted 3-2 after the majority concluded the lawsuit did not align with their values for balanced forest management.

Clatsop was the only eligible timber county to opt out. The counties won in Linn County Circuit Court last year, but the state plans to appeal.

Nebeker said she stands by her vote.

"I'm a taxpayer and I could not get beyond seeing that all we would be doing is taking money out of one pocket and putting it in another, except in between, we would be giving a big chunk to the attorneys," she said. "We live in the state, we pay taxes to the state."

Nebeker said if the state has to pay the counties it will be detrimental to taxpayers.

"It isn't free money that I can see," she said. "It's going to come from somewhere, and either it will increase our taxes or diminish our services because the state will not have that kind of money to pay out."

Nebeker has been endorsed for a third, four-year term by Indivisible North Coast Oregon, a progressive group, and has received campaign contributions from Clatsop Citizens for Good Government.

Toyooka has been endorsed by Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown, the United Steelworkers Local 1097, Kurt Englund of Englund Marine & Industrial Supply and North Coast First PAC. He has received campaign contributions from North Coast First PAC and the Oregon Automobile Dealers Association PAC.

Virus outbreak closes Bornstein Seafoods

13 workers tested positive

The Astorian

Clatsop County reported Monday that 13 workers at Bornstein Seafoods in Astoria tested positive for the coronavirus.

The Public Health Department began testing workers at Bornstein Seafoods on May 2 after the company alerted the county on May 1 that one of its employees had tested positive for the virus. A second positive case was reported on May 3.

The county met with workers at Bornstein Seafoods on May 2 and tested 35 people showing symptoms.

The county has received the results for 30 of the tests, which included the 11 positive cases. The county planned to test more employees on Tuesday.

The 11 positive cases reported Monday include four women — one in her 30s and three in their 40s — and seven men — two in their 30s, four in their 50s and one in his 60s.

The county has directed all 35 workers to be quarantined or to self-isolate.

Bornstein Seafoods has closed both of its processing

plants at the Port of Astoria.

The Lower Columbia Hispanic Council, responding to concerns from workers about how Bornstein Seafoods was protecting them against the virus, filed a complaint with the state Occupational Safety and Health Administration on April 18 citing a lack of social distancing and personal protective equipment.

The Oregon Health Authority reported 2,916 cases and 115 deaths from the coronavirus as of Wednesday morning.

The health authority tracked 610 test results in Clatsop County, including 17 positive cases.

Voters asked to approve two tax levies

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Voters will be asked to support two tax levies on the May 19 ballot to increase funding for the Clatsop County Fairgrounds and the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating impact on the local economy and unemployment, making it a difficult time to ask voters for more money. But supporters of the levies say the crisis has shown why additional funding is crucial.

The Clatsop County Fairgrounds has already taken a financial hit with the cancellation of the Crab, Seafood & Wine Festival and the Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival — two of the fairground's biggest events of the year.

"I think it sort of highlights that we've tried really hard over the last several years to be real frugal and to balance our budget and keep a contingency, and bring in new events ... But boy, just something like this sure changes the equation pretty quickly," said Mike Autio, the chairman of the Fair Board.

Autio said a reserve is built into the budget to maintain operations, but without the levy, the fairgrounds will not be able to keep the doors open, let alone make needed improvements.

The fairgrounds wants voters to renew a five-year levy for operations and maintenance. The tax rate would go up to 7 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value, from 5 cents. Taxpayers would pay about \$21 more a year for a home valued at \$300,000.

The tax rate was reduced from 7 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to 5 cents in 2016.

The new tax rate would generate between \$471,000 and \$530,000 a year to help the fairgrounds stay even with increasing costs.

Autio said when the tax rate was reduced in 2016, the focus was mainly on maintaining existing operations. He praised John Lewis, who took over as operations manager in 2018, for his work to complete much-needed deferred maintenance, improve the fairgrounds facilities and expand events.

"I think that in order to keep on this track, when we're trying to make it more of a resource for our community, we need to go back to the 7 cents that we were at," Autio said.

"The fairgrounds is one of the few venues in Clatsop County besides the (Seaside Civic and Convention Center) and a few smaller venues that we can bring in a big event that generates revenue to the community and

allows for opportunities and events that the community wouldn't otherwise have," he said. "I think it really is for the benefit of the community that we improve our facilities and are able to bring in more events ... It's an attraction in our community."

The Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District wants voters to pass a five-year levy for 35 cents per \$1,000 in assessed value to help sustain operations.

The fire district has a permanent tax rate of 35 cents per \$1,000 — one of the lowest in the county. A permanent tax rate is set when a district is established, which leaves fire districts dependent on voters to approve levies and bonds for more funding as time goes on.

Voters have approved a five-year levy to support the fire chief's position for 19 cents per \$1,000 and a five-year bond for a ladder truck at 9 cents per \$1,000. If voters approve the new levy, the total tax burden will increase from 63 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value to 98 cents, or about \$141 a year for a home valued at \$400,000.

The new tax would bring in between \$403,000 to \$454,000 a year.

The money would be used to hire a second commanding officer and replace equipment while developing a replacement cycle to reduce maintenance costs.

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