



West entrance of the Seaside Civic and Convention Center.

Seaside Civic and Convention Center

'STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT'

Convention center weathers the pandemic

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

With a newly renovated building and contracts for events through 2030, Seaside Civic and Convention Center General Manager Russ Vandenberg projected optimism as he presented the center's annual report.

"COVID-19 taught us to be stronger and more resilient," Vandenberg said. "We can now toss aside our 2020 calendars with hope and anticipation that 2021 will be a better year."

The report comes after a year of pandemic-related declines, particularly at the convention center, where state mandates shuttered its doors for most gatherings.

The pandemic downturn came after historic numbers of tourists and citywide economic impact of the center's annual programming, peaking at more than \$36.3 million in 2018, and following completion of the building's \$15 million expansion and renovation.



Upper level of the convention center; Pacific Room stage at right.

The city saw a 6.43% year-over-year growth in bed tax receipts from October to December 2019, Director of Tourism Marketing Joshua Heineman said at Monday's City Council meeting.

January and February 2020 were also "very, very strong," Heineman said.

In the first three months of 2020, Oregon Fine Foods Inc., the center's food service provider, had been on pace to set a new food and beverage record of \$1 million for the fiscal year, Vandenberg said, a number that

would have exceeded by 25% the previous high.

March changed all that. On March 11, as a result of rising pandemic numbers, Oregon banned gatherings of 250 or more. On March 16, the state banned gatherings of more than 25 people, and Seaside issued an emergency order on March 21. All short-term lodging was banned March 22, and on March 23, the state issued a stay-home order.

Since short-term lodging was

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Seaside goes own way on special ed programs

By KATIE FRANKOWICZ
The Astorian

Seaside School District will leave a long-standing consortium that provides special education services to North Coast students across the region's five school districts.

Seaside instead plans to develop its own programs in an effort to better provide services to students close to home beginning in the fall. It is a conversation that has been going on for some time, said Superintendent Susan Penrod. As a five-year commitment to the consortium came up for review, "we really started to evaluate: Are we serving every student?" she said.

For the school districts that remain in the consortium, Seaside's decision takes away one option for younger students and means a change in what the program costs.

Because of the support and resources these students often require, the consortium classes can be expensive for districts to run. For Astoria, a slot for a single student has cost just over \$29,000 a year. Without

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Following guidance, Seaside kids are back in classroom

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For Seaside Signal

Nearly a year after the coronavirus pandemic initiated the closure of school campuses nationwide last spring, a majority of Seaside students are back for in-person instruction.

"It was a really, really special day," Superintendent Susan Penrod said during the school board meeting March 16 — the same day students from all grades, prekindergarten through 12th grade, returned to campus. By the end of the week, all cohorts had participated in on-site sessions.

The reopening plan in Seaside preceded Gov. Kate Brown's March 5 executive order, which directed school districts across the state to offer in-person or hybrid instructions for students in kindergarten through fifth grade on or before the week of March 29 and for students in sixth through 12th grade on or before the week of April 19.

"We are ahead of that schedule, so that's really nice to know," Penrod said.

On the cusp of the executive order, the Oregon Department of Education updated its Ready Schools, Safe Learners guidance, which has already undergone numerous revisions since the start of the pandemic.

"We are really thankful to ODE and (Oregon Health Authority) for all of their help as we've been navigating this year," Penrod said.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently updated its operational strategy to recommend all students remain 3 feet — rather than 6 feet — apart in classrooms where mask use is universal. However, for Oregon and the Seaside School District, "this has not changed," and whether the district will eventually implement a 3-foot standard "is yet to be seen," Penrod said.

Although the schools continue operating with health and safety measures to contain the spread of COVID, there was a sense of joy and satisfaction from administrators following the start of in-person instruction for all grade levels.

"To have that sense of community back in the

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Mimi's Flowers to close after 28 years in Seaside

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

Mimi's Flowers is closing April 15 after 28 years on U.S. Highway 101 at Avenue U in Seaside.

"The adventure that started in Michigan with my husband, Warren, in 1988 has been a life changing, challenging and a rewarding experience, owner Mimi Merrow said. "I will never forget the respect this community has given me and my family."

Merrow will move to be with her children and grandchildren in Portland.

"The community's acceptance and the friendships we have fostered throughout the last 28 years in business will continue to be remembered and cherished long after we're closed," Merrow said.

Employee Annette Lear will also be leaving. The former neighbors met when



Annette Lear and Mimi Merrow of Mimi's Flowers in Seaside. The store is closing after 28 years.

Lear's daughter broke Merrow's window playing basketball. They've been working together since the beginning, in 1993, Lear said.

Customers and friends are invited to stop by and give well-wishes to staff.

"Thank you for making us feel welcome," Merrow said.

Gearhart journalist probes rap legend deaths

By R.J. MARX
Seaside Signal

In 2001, Rolling Stone magazine assigned journalist Randall Sullivan a story about corruption in the anti-gang unit of the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Sullivan worked his source, Detective Russell Poole, who had evidence officers moonlighted

as security for the hip-hop label Death Row Records and arranged the 1997 killing of rapper Notorious B.I.G. No one has ever been charged.

Sullivan's reporting culminated in the book, "LABYRINTH: The True Story of City of Lies, the Murders of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. and the Implication of the Los Angeles Police Department." The book has been made into the movie, "City of Lies," starring Johnny Depp and Forest Whitaker and hits

theaters this month.

"City of Lies' is about a corrupt chief of police and a group of gangster cops," Sullivan told The Astorian. "The bad guys were Black but the victims were Black, too."

"It's as if Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra had been whacked by the mob in Las Vegas in the '50s," he said. "Do you think that murder would go unsolved for 20 years?"

A privileged position
Sullivan considers him-

self an Oregonian. He and his wife, Delores, moved to Gearhart in 2018. Locals sometimes recognize him for his roles on the popular Oprah Winfrey Network show "Miracle Detectives," or "The Curse of Oak Island: The Story of the World's Longest Treasure Hunt" on the History Channel.

He was born in Los Angeles but moved to Coos Bay before he was a year old. The family spent 12



Randall Sullivan at By the Way in Gearhart.

R.J. Marx

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