

New reporter Bengel is a familiar face

By **ETHAN MYERS**
The Astorian

A familiar face is back with The Astorian.

Erick Bengel, who worked as a reporter and the Coast Weekend editor for the paper from 2015 to 2019, will cover criminal justice, social services and county government this time around.

"I've always envied the person who occupied this beat," he said. "It always seemed like an essential challenge ... I like that it is a serious beat and has very sharp edges to it."

Bengel filled in for report-

ers over the years and dabbled in the beat during his two years at the Cannon Beach Gazette.

"But this is the first time I've been able to own it," he said.

When Bengel left The Astorian in 2019, he moved to New York to get a master's degree in journalism at Columbia University.

With a bachelor's degree from Portland State University in philosophy and political science, he had never formally studied journalism outside of a few high school classes.

"I wanted to study it in a



Erick Bengel

serious and systematic way," Bengel said.

Journalism first came on Bengel's radar at Portland State, where he was a news writer, the arts and culture editor and eventually the editor-in-chief at the university's student newspaper, The Vanguard.

Bengel first joined The Astorian through the Snowden internship program in 2011, where he first saw the service that local journalism fills.

"We give people the information they need to navigate their day-to-day lives and

communities," he said. "It has an immediacy that oftentimes large-scale reporting fails to capture because you are reading about your neighbors, you are reading about locations you know well — an immediacy and an intimacy. Insofar as you think anything local is important — local elections, local services — local journalism is incredibly important."

As for Bengel's long-term goals, he hopes to keep broadening his horizons within journalism.

"At this point, I am trying to get good at different modes and forms of journalism and that is what excited me about this beat," he said.



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Nikki Davidson is the new editor of Coast Weekend.

Coast Weekend welcomes new editor

By **GRIFFIN REILLY**
The Astorian

Though Nikki Davidson's career in journalism has taken her all over the country, her landing in Astoria will be her first taste of Oregon.

Davidson is taking over as the new editor of Coast Weekend, a weekly arts and entertainment publication featured in The Astorian and Chinook Observer.

She hopes telling the stories of a region with such rich history will help her get familiar with the area, as well as let her explore one of her biggest interests.

"I'm very interested in history," she said. "I really want to delve into the quirky history stories that people don't hear about as often — the ones that seem like they're lost in time."

Davidson started her time in journalism at the University of Northern Iowa, where she was editor of the school's paper. At the same time, she juggled working for a local public access station and as an associate producer for Iowa Public Radio.

She has had reporting and anchor roles at television stations in Michigan, South Carolina, Iowa, Minnesota and Louisiana.

While often difficult,

Davidson said her time in broadcast journalism exposed her to the value of visual media in storytelling, something she hopes to incorporate into her work with Coast Weekend.

"We can do multimedia, maybe some videos — just to really showcase the area and the people in a way that print alone can't do," she said. "I think it can really complement the work that we're doing here."

In an area as beautiful as the North Coast, she said, creating that type of content shouldn't be a problem.

"It seems like a really awesome place to be," she said.

Davidson said overseeing Coast Weekend is somewhat of a perfect situation for her, since it allows her to stick beside her husband in the U.S. Coast Guard while indulging her passions for storytelling and journalism.

Her husband, Patrick, is stationed at Cape Disappointment in Washington state. Previously, the couple lived in Louisiana.

"You don't always necessarily get to choose where you end up in journalism," Davidson said. "Getting the ability to do what has been my passion in life in the place that we are is really what attracted me to this."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Khan is awarded association philanthropy award

On the third day of the 2021 Asian American Hotel Owners Association Convention and Trade Show, the association recognized achievement and excellence in the hospitality industry with its annual awards.

Masudur Khan, co-owner and managing director for Seaside Lodging LLC, won the Philanthropy Outreach Award. He co-owns and operates 13 hotels on the Oregon Coast and operates two hotels in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The award is given to an individual deeply involved with helping humanity through philanthropic and charitable activities, domestically or overseas.

The association is the largest hotel owners association in the world. The nearly 20,000 members own 60% of hotels in the United States.



Masudur Khan, second from left, at the 2021 Asian American Hotel Owners Association Convention and Trade Show.

Elks offer Most Valuable Student scholarships

All high school seniors in Oregon who are U.S. citizens can apply to the Elks Most Valuable Student Scholarship Program.

The application process is handled online, with applicants being judged on academics, leadership, community engagement and financial need.

Applicants will be judged at four levels with the opportunity to earn scholarships at the local, district, state and national level. The top male and female students will advance from the local

level to the district level, and from there onto the state and national competitions.

At the national level, two first-place students earn \$50,000 each, two second-place students earn \$40,000 and two \$30,000 third-place students will be awarded. The remaining 14 finalists will each receive \$20,000 and 480 runners-up will receive scholarships of \$4,000 for a total of \$2,440,000 nationwide.

Students wanting to apply for the scholarships do not have to have an affiliation with the Order of Elks. The deadline to apply is Nov. 15.

For applications and additional information, visit elks.org/scholars/scholarships/mvs.cfm.

Also available for those not attending a four-year college or university, the Oregon State Elks Association offers a vocational grant scholarship for those attending a program specific to a trade or profession. Adult learners are also eligible to apply for this scholarship. Applications are now open and must be received by midnight on March 1, 2022. For more information and to apply visit oregonelks.org/student-contests/scholarship/.

Interested students, families or high schools can contact their local lodge or the Oregon State Elks Association Scholarship Chair Mary Danca at emjade@opendoor.com for more information.



Rae Ray Sunshine, Kelly Ray's children's entertainment persona, poses with the Seaside sign.

ItzOk2bU: Store tailored toward children

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supplies, craft projects and other novelties, for sale. The Rays assemble and custom paint starter ukuleles, which in the past five years have become "the new recorder of the time," Kelly said.

Ultimately, they don't want to cultivate a high-volume retail environment where patrons are herded through with the expectation to buy something and then simply leave.

"I want them to have a very unique, personal experience," Kelly said. "Our philosophy is hands-on: Come in and pick up the ukulele, touch the drums, have fun."

Cary offers private music lessons on guitar, piano, drums and ukulele, while Kelly focuses on the visual arts side of the establishment.

For \$15, plus the cost of materials, families can join Kelly in the studio and work on art projects. Music lessons are \$60 per hour, but Cary charges by the minute, without a minimum, since many beginners don't have the dexterity and attention span for a full hour of



LEFT: ItzOk2bU, in downtown Seaside. RIGHT: ItzOk2bU, in downtown Seaside, is a unique art and music store, where families are invited to explore different instruments or do art projects. The owners, Kelly and Cary Ray, also offer private lessons.

practicing a new instrument, Kelly explained.

Artistic outlet

ItzOk2bU is tailored toward children, as Kelly believes children "need to be able to express themselves in whatever manner they see fit." At many schools, there is a lack of programs, or they've been stifled by the pandemic.

"If we can provide the outlet that (children) don't have available right now to them, it's great," she said.

However, Cary and Kelly

work with beginners of all ages. Kelly finds it particularly rewarding to introduce a child or a novice to a new artform and watch their creativity burgeon. She also enjoys getting to revisit and explore the arts through new eyes.

Kelly and Cary's plan for ItzOk2bU and the services they can provide continues to unfold. They recently developed entertainment personas, Rae Ray Sunshine and Mr. Fun, who will become the leads of a weekly YouTube show they



Photos by Katherine Lacaze

plan to produce. The show will promote a message of acceptance, caring and love, Kelly said. Rae Ray Sunshine also will be available for appearances at birthday parties and festivals once the pandemic has subsided.

Kelly imagines hosting private paint and sip nights in homes and businesses, for patrons and their friends.

Another aspect of ItzOk2bU is providing an in-house studio for photography and video services, with a special focus on creating celebration-of-life videos.

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