

‘I thought I would never get it, and boy was I wrong’

By **ABBEY McDONALD**
The Astorian

Gigi Thompson doesn’t remember the August night when she knocked on her neighbor’s front door, desperate for help. She doesn’t remember getting in the neighbor’s truck to go to the hospital, or saying goodbye to her husband and asking him to watch over their pets.

She doesn’t remember being transferred from Providence Seaside Hospital to St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland the next day, or getting the scars on her neck.

What she does remember, from moments in and out of consciousness, is the feeling of the oxygen mask tight on her face and her sense of suffocation.

She remembers a nightmare that seemed so real, where she died and cold hands pulled her into the darkness of a mortuary drawer as she kicked at them and begged God for more time. She doesn’t think she’ll ever forget that.

Thompson spent 122 days in the hospital after contracting COVID-19.

Her neighbor drove her to Providence Seaside on Aug. 15, and she was quickly transferred to St. Vincent, where she stayed until early November. She then spent another month back in Seaside, getting less-intensive treatment and physical therapy.

Thompson has pieced together what happened through conversations with doctors, family and friends.

Her neighbor filled her in about the night she was admitted. Her daughter told her she had approved



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

Providence Seaside Hospital staff clap for Gigi Thompson as she leaves to return home.

the emergency tracheotomy that cut into her neck, leaving scars but saving her life. After she woke from a monthlong coma, a doctor told her she had nearly died twice.

Grateful

There’s a lot to be grateful for, Thompson said. She can walk a little bit and can dress herself. And she has hope that her health will improve with time.

“That experience with COVID, that actually changed my life for the better,” Thompson said. “I have a better outlook on certain things, and I always try to keep a positive attitude.”

Thompson, who is 72 years old, was discharged

from Providence Seaside on Dec. 15 after several months of treatment for the virus. She exited the hospital in “Rocky” themed attire, wearing boxing gloves, an American flag and a nasal cannula.

The hospital staff lined up and clapped, some teary-eyed, as they said goodbye to the long-haul COVID patient.

Two days later, Thompson sat at home after her nurse left for the evening. Her cat, “Amara,” which will have her 22nd birthday in March, sat on Thompson’s lap as she told her story over the phone.

“She just won’t leave me alone. She has to sleep on me and keep touching me to

make sure I’m still there,” Thompson said.

Being back home has been an adjustment. When she first arrived, her husband, her son and a neighbor had to carry her wheelchair up the stairs to the front door. They’re looking for first-floor apartments, but finding few options.

She can’t make dinner anymore, and for now has resigned to observing and critiquing her husband’s work in the kitchen.

“I’m doing OK. It’s time-consuming, that’s what healing is,” Thompson said. Her statements were sometimes punctuated by brief coughing fits.

Thompson’s daughter, Carol Dickeson, said

she is amazed her mom got through her battle with COVID.

“She had one foot in the grave there, and that scared us,” Dickeson said.

She talked to the hospital daily for updates on her mom, calling from her home in Colorado.

“Just the thought of losing her? Oh man, that was — it really, really scared me,” Dickeson said. “She’s a feisty woman. She’s very, very feisty and she’s a fighter. She won’t let nothing keep her down.”

Thompson worked in the fishing industry her whole life, from shrimp picking in Gold Beach to Pacific Seafood in Warrenton, and up to Alaska for a time. She retired in her 50s after an on-the-job shoulder injury while hauling 35-pound crab buckets.

Dickeson described her mom as selfless, and said she always had a place at her table for neighborhood kids. She said her fried chicken recipe was so good that her siblings would ask her to make extra just so they could share it at school.

“With my mom, she’s always ...” Dickeson said, before getting emotional. “There’s not enough time to say enough good about my mom. She always — always — is looking to help other people.”

A struggle to get vaccinated

Prior to her hospitalization, Dickeson and her siblings had struggled to convince their mom to get vaccinated.

“Now that she’s had this COVID, and went face to face with that. She’s taking it seriously now,” Dickeson said. “So I’m glad she

went through this to realize that it’s not funny or anything, and I’m glad that she survived it. I’m happy that my mom’s still with us, and we get to put up with her wittiness.”

Now Thompson can assure them that she received two vaccine doses during her stay at Seaside, having changed her mind after dealing with the virus firsthand. She plans on getting the booster as soon as she is eligible.

“I thought I would never get it, and boy was I wrong. It smacked me down like nothing. And I’m glad I got those two shots,” Thompson said.

Thompson is a mother of eight, including two stepchildren and an adopted daughter. She described the support of her family and her faith as her strengths.

“With my strength in the Lord, and my kids and my husband, we all got together. And so many people — people I didn’t even know — were texting my phone and saying, ‘God bless you Gigi. We’re so happy you made it. You’ve been through the wringer.’ And I said, ‘I have literally been at hell’s door and came back,’” she said.

She thanked the hospital staff for their work and said that she’s glad to be alive.

“There’s still things that I want to do, and things I want to see. I’ve been a fish filleter for over 40 years. I did a little bit of logging for three years, and raised my children before all that. Life has been alright, you know, it’s like a roller coaster,” she said. “I’m here and I’m so grateful that I am here, and I want to thank everybody for everything that they have done.”

New Clatsop County Jail set for completion this year

By **ERICK BENDEL**
The Astorian

WARRENTON — The new Clatsop County Jail, originally slated for completion in 2021, is now estimated to open in September or October.

The jail is under construction at the former North Coast Youth Correctional Facility, which closed in 2017. In December, construction crews raised the walls for an addition that will house the jail’s general population.

“It’s been a moving target, which has been frustrating,” Sheriff Matt Phillips, the project supervisor, said.

A combination of supply chain disruptions, labor shortages and rising material costs has slowed progress. The bid date was postponed when contractors involved

needed to flee fire zones during the historic wildfires of 2020.

When the county went out to bid, the bids that came back were significantly over the nearly \$24 million construction budget. The project is being financed by a \$20 million bond voters approved in 2018, a bond premium and money from the county.

The county scaled back the design by eliminating a few housing units and making other compromises, such as reducing the number of skylights.

But the new facility — a project overseen by Cornerstone Management Group and designed by DLR Group — will be a drastic improvement, Phillips said.

The existing jail in Astoria, which opened in 1980, has 60 beds — 40 in use because of coronavirus restrictions — and a long his-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The new Clatsop County Jail is expected to be completed this year.

tory of overcrowding.

The new jail, designed to have 148 beds, will allow the county to house inmates who normally wouldn’t qualify for the county’s pretrial release program but who still get sent back into the community shortly after they’re booked.

“This will certainly put

us in a position to where we won’t have to make forced releases,” Phillips said.

The Astoria jail has one exam room. “It literally used to be a closet,” Phillips said. The new one will have a medical suite with two exam rooms, as well as a mental health interview room.

At the current jail, visitors

talk to inmates from a tight row of stools. The upgrade will include private booths for visitors.

The new jail will also have a kitchen where staff can prepare and serve breakfast, lunch and dinner on site. Inmates now eat from pre-made meal trays.

Among the most significant upgrades: The wing that used to house the juvenile detention center will become an intake unit where jail staff can hold inmates in one-person cells when they first enter the premises.

At intake, they can be monitored, their condition assessed. Deputies can see if the person is ill or detoxing from drugs or alcohol, or has drugs that need to be removed.

“If someone is going through withdrawal, it’s pretty awkward to be laying in a day room or in a dorm

with a bunch of people who are feeling well,” Phillips said.

The new jail will be a more rehabilitative environment for inmates, he said.

“People have to remember that every person that comes into this jail is someone’s family member — mother, brother, sister, son, daughter — and that most of the people that come into the jail are members of our community,” Phillips said. “And oftentimes, it could be the person checking your groceries, pumping your gas, it’s the person that built your house, that cycles through the jail.”

The facility, he said, will give law enforcement better tools to take care of these community members. “And hopefully to get them to a place where they don’t have to come back and visit us,” he said.

SEASIDE POLICE DEPT.
PUBLIC SAFETY LOG

Dec. 25

9:33 a.m., 2200 block Cedar Street: Police respond to a request for a welfare check for dogs left outdoors all night and into the morning. Police are unable to contact the owner.

2:05 p.m., U.S. Highway 26 Elsie/VineMaple: A crash is reported.

Dec. 27

8:52 a.m., Avenue R and Roosevelt: EMS call.

12:44 p.m., 1200 block S. Wahanna: Caller reports children’s father has violated a restraining order by sending the kids presents.

5:43 p.m., 86000 block U.S. Highway 101 @Circle Creek: Caller reports female yelling from inside a trailer to let her out. The subject was contacted and agreed to keep the noise down for the night.

10:21 p.m., Seventh and King: A prowler reported around a construction site is the property owner checking on their property.

SEASIDE FIRE & RESCUE
PUBLIC SAFETY LOG

Dec. 28

10:04 a.m., 400 block Avenue G: Police assist a motorist stuck on the ice.

2:37 p.m., 900 block Avenue H: A deceased person is reported.

5:12 p.m., 2500 block S. Roosevelt: Another deceased person is reported.

10:04 p.m., Broadway and Holladay: Caller requests a welfare check on a person who activated an emergency button on their vehicle.

Dec. 29

1:32 a.m., 900 block S. Holladay: Caller reports possible abuse of dogs. Owner is contacted who said dogs are howling because they need to go to the bathroom.

11:48 a.m., Avenue C and Roosevelt: Caller requests welfare check on a person described as screaming and barefoot.

Dec. 30

11:15 a.m., 800 block Avenue C: A person is arrested on a warrant.

3:57 p.m., 500 block S. Edgewood: Caller reports a person at her door wearing blue pants she thought was a police officer. It wasn’t.

8:45 p.m., U.S. Highway 101 by

Ruby’s: A person is arrested on a warrant.

Dec. 25

2:07 p.m., N. Wahanna: EMS call.

Dec. 27

9:27 a.m., 1600 block Whispering Pines Drive: EMS call.

Dec. 28

10:40 a.m., Wahanna Road: EMS call.

11:48 a.m., 1700 block 12th Avenue, Thousand Trails: EMS call.

Dec. 29

1:23 p.m., 1100 block Broadway: Fire alarm.

3:30 p.m., 900 block Avenue H: Fire alarm.

Dec. 30

6:27 a.m., 2500 block S. Roosevelt: Fire alarm.

2:48 p.m., Seventh Avenue: Fire alarm.

9:16 p.m., First and Necanicum: Motor vehicle accident with injuries reported.

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