

Participant: Sandy Roumagoux
Title: Mayor, City of Newport
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Courtney: The first part of this process is to capture some stories about what it's like to live and work on the Oregon Coast. So this is part of NOAA's Voices from the West Coast project. So, to get us started I'd just like to talk a little bit about your experience. What's it like to be the Mayor of Newport? Maybe you can talk about either a typical day as Mayor and maybe start.

Sandy: Well, yes. The Mayor of Newport is elected every two years and this will be my second term. So it's my fourth year as Mayor. And my sixth year in municipal government. My first two years were as a Councilor and then I shifted to Mayor. Nothing prepares you for being a Mayor. There is no job description or Mayors for Dummies or anything out there. And so I came in uh relying heavily on past Mayors and people who had been in city government for many years when I would get stuck. It is a non-paying position and there, as you saw, my office is very small. The City Manager's is very large. And so I have, I set up office hours every other week. The first and third Tuesday of every week. Based on my years in academia and teaching to have office hours in the City Hall. And so I have them on Tuesday afternoons from 2 to 3. And that is to get no appointments. Just come in. The reason for doing that was to get people to come in to City Hall. And I did that from my own experience, my own fringe (?). You live in a city, you never go in to City Hall unless you pay your water bill, usually you know you mail it. Or if you have a gripe or you're uh not happy with something. So this was a way for me to try to reach out so that people would have to come in to the building. And it's worked. It's been...it's.. you know I don't have hordes waiting for me. But it does get that kind of transparency going between the building and people who work here. So a typical day. Um, I check my mail and of course my email. And I try to go through the ones that seem quite urgent and urgent usually means they're not happy. And that is something that I have also encouraged. If people aren't happy, for heaven's sakes let me know about it rather than let it fester. Um, next is welcoming conferences here. Uh, cutting ribbons. I attend many committees outside of the city, so I have a good communication with the Hatfield Marine Science Center, with the Port of Newport, with NOAA. I really try to keep in contact with the personnel there. And the college, and now the new OMSI discovery center that's out south of town. And then of course being a Coast Guard city, not forgetting to check in and see how they're doing and making sure they know we're there for any help we can give them. So it's a, it's a potpourri of different things. It's uh, and then I also belong to service organizations like Rotary, like Chamber, uh there's an organization called YBEF, which stands for Yaquina Bay Economic Foundation and it's for projects to boost the economic foundation of this area that is around the bay itself, so that would include Toledo. So, there are representatives from the Hatfield and NOAA and uh the Port of Toledo, Port of Newport, the city, the city of Toledo, Georgia Pacific. All of those meet and we rank and decide what kinds of economic projects that will boost

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this area. And consider and then work on that, the latest being the Marine Initiative at OSU.

C: Great. What inspired you to get involved in City Government, first as a Councilor?

S: Well, my real life is as an artist. And uh I have painted, I show work. My paintings in Portland. But to me I've never seen much of a difference between art and politics. And then I was raised by very active parents who were involved in their political party as precinct committee women and men, worked on campaigns, and as a child one of my best memories was to help with the tea for then Senator Wayne Morse. And he was my hero for so many years. And um so it was that kind of interest and then what was happening within the city and how it was going to be changing. I wanted to be a part of having a say I guess in that. I didn't have a particular agenda. I just thought well that sounds interesting, I think I'll apply. And that's about as far as it went. Or filed for the job. And it is a job. *laughter*

C: Can you tell me more about those changes that you saw on the horizon?

S: Well, um, what... Newport is I think situated uniquely on the coast. We're in the center of the state. We have highway 20, when its fixed, we're all waiting. *laughter* It's coming soon they tell, ODOT tells us. And so you have a direct shot to the valley. Um, it's a... we're more in the place of being open to a diversified economy. So where Lincoln City is just by its location is really more forced into tourism and Newport, that's big, that's a big part of us, but also we can, we have a huge fishing industry here. And we're the uh Dungeness Crab capitol of the world. And also with, and it's one, it's an industry that I think is going to last because kids from the parents who have boats are coming up and taking over so its not dying off. The younger generation is stepping in. And then of course the science. I mean the Hatfield Marine Science Center has been here what, since 1965. And to see the growth. So, the change to marine research, wave energy research, having the aquarium here, getting Oregon Coast Community College here. And um, and then of course bringing in OMSI. So its changed. We're more diversified than I think most coastal cities are. And you know, geology. I mean, the bay has really helped to establish that.

C: Yeah. Great. Just one last question for this Voices project. Do you have any particularly memorable days as Mayor? Either it was a really good day, or maybe it was not so good of a day. Any special days that stick out to you?

S: Well, I'm a real poor loser. So, as Mayor I have to remain somewhat neutral and so when issues that I really believe in go down by one vote I don't take it well. So, that would be an example of one day, a bad day. One of the best days was when we were told that the helicopter, Coast Guard helicopter would remain here indefinitely thanks to our, well all the work this community did but also our legislators. And uh, DeFazio, U.S. Representative DeFazio and then of course Senators Merkley and Wyden and then U.S. Representative Schrader really stepped up to the plate. Um, and helped us keep that. And

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I think that was one of the best days because it was such a community organized effort. And we just put everything we could into it to make sure that that result happened.

C: That's great. Okay. Now we're going to move just a little bit, think a little bit more broadly, and go into my specific research questions. So, first of all can you tell me a little bit more about your community, about Newport?

S: Well, it's... we have a population of right around 10,000. 10,050, 10,075. It is aging as is most communities. Um, I do think we hold the record for having the most Wi-Fi or internet connection. Um, in another life of mine when I was an administrator for the new community college, I was Dean of Instruction. And when I needed instructors and part-time instructors, all I had to do was to put an add out and retired full-time profs from Universities all around would apply and I always thought the students here were so lucky to have these people to teach them in a freshmen level class. There reason out here was to retire, to, they loved the area. Um, the community is also one of the best for volunteers I've ever seen. Um, and a lot of the retired people uh populate those committees. But if you want something like if you're the, uh, NOAA and the community college, whatever project is seen as beneficial for this community, there is energy where people come together in a focused way that is phenomenal. And they just say we're gonna do it. And that force is set in motion. Um, we have problems, of course, with housing, bad infrastructure. You know, we've....everything, all of the social programs that were cut federally, you know, it's the old trickle down in the worst way. The cities end up holding the bag with sewer and water and uh roads you know. I just cringe every time Congress or our state legislature looks at funding for roads, and we so desperately need it. Um, so working around those obstacles, we still manage to have a great community that supports the arts. We have a city-owned performing arts center and we have a city-owned visual arts center. And then it is run by the Oregon Coast Council for the Arts. We contract out for them to run that. Um, that's, for this size town, that's pretty neat.

C: Yeah. That is very neat. What about the economy here?

S: Well, it's... it's based a lot on low-paying jobs because of the tourist industry. Um, we're desperately seeking companies that you know, that aren't big, huge conglomerates to come in, but more smaller businesses and which, especially in internet, things that can be done from here that will feed into a larger organization. Uh, we're not as lucky as Prineville that has Google and Facebook, I think. And so we would love for them to *laughter* to have an organization like that. But, no, we have a lot of very low-paying jobs. That is pretty typical of the coastal cities. And that's inherent, I think.

C: Can you tell me more about the role of fishing here in the economy of Newport?

S: Well, that's where I wish I had the numbers. And Terry Thompson who is a fishermen and is also a Lincoln County Commissioner, has all those facts right at his fingertips. But, I, millions of dollars that the little quarter mile down on the bayfront brings in every year. Through crabbing, I think shrimp now. Going into halibut. Um, these are all fisheries that are maintained because of the active involvement of the fishing industry themselves.

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They have an organization called FINE. Let's see if I can...Fishermen Involved in.... oh.... Something or other Environment. In other words, they meet and look at what's going to affect the fisheries, where it is politically, and then they can organize and take action. I... I have been very impressed with how they are very much involved in their own livelihoods that way. Um, there's an addition going on to one of the fish processing plants down here right now. So they're expanding on their shrimp processing plant. So, yes, it's a huge part of our economy.

C: What do you think fishing contributes to the culture of Newport?

S: Oh! I just think it's wonderful. *laughter* I am scared to death to go out on a boat but I love watching them. *laughter* It gives a connectedness to our oceans and to what that means over the centuries back from you know... time on. And how it...there's no middle man. You can see it transparent from the kid that goes on the boat to the fish to the processing to the ocean and involved. I just remembered what FINE is...Involved in Natural Energies. Okay. Fishermen Involved... So, it brings the economy but it also brings a, this wonderful ambience. The bayfront I think we have is one of the few working bayfronts. And in the summer and beginning right now it is crammed with people just looking at boats and fishermen having to maneuver around to get on. But there so far seems to be a nice relationship between the two populations - tourists and fishermen.

C: Yeah. Great. The next set of questions go a little bit more in detail into the fishing industry and if you can't speak to anything in detail that's fine. I'm still just curious to know your perspective as a leader of this community, what you perceive. So, have you seen a lot of family-based fishing businesses here?

S: Yes. Um, you know, yeah there are. It is, there is a very active organization called the Fishermen's Wives here. And they have been involved from day one to get the helicopter here. It's they who banded together and there's kind of a saying that you don't mess with fishermen's wives. And so yes, uh, they have...when I was working for the college we had courses for bookkeeping and things for families so that they could do the books while their husbands, they were on... in Alaska fishing you know for crab there. And so yes, very much family-oriented here. And of course with the quotas you know they have to, I'm not sure how that allows or doesn't allow people to enter in but I would say this was very much slanted to family.

C: Have you noticed any changes in terms of those family-based businesses?

S: Um. I would say its remained more stable across... because of the interest in having sustainable fisheries. And that is not a bad word here. There are people that, the leaders in the fishing industry understand that, and they know that to continue this is what they're gonna have to do. So they work with Oregon State and uh, and put information in on fishing grounds and what should be left to you know, for the rockfish, say, recovery. That sort of thing. So I would say it is changing some, but I don't see it dropping off a cliff. Maybe changing to other fisheries, or how it's done, but. So far, so good. *laughter*

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C: What do you see in terms of the age of fishermen?

S: Well, there arethere are none my age. I'm way to old. *laughter* But I see, there and there, some of the captains are what...mid-50s perhaps. But their kids in their 20s and 30s are coming in.

C: Do you think that this has always been the case? This demographic make up of the fishing industry, or have you noticed or heard about any changes?

S: Well, that I... I've lived here 30 years. Um, I would say that... it's always been a fight. I mean this is not an easy industry to be involved with because you're... it's similar to farming. I mean you may... you have to negotiate for prices, and some years the catch is down. And there's something else that goes wrong or your equipment goes on you, you know you're aced out pretty fast. So, with this I would say it's been, oh, uh, it's been even. I mean, it's been able to be kinda stable. Some drop out, some will come in, but it has to do with the risks of the industry itself.

C: Yeah, sure. From your perspective, why do these young adults or the kids of fishermen want to get involved in fishing or fishing-related businesses?

S: From my point of view, being totally scared of water...*laughter*. That is such a good question. It is, it's a love of the sea. It's everything romantic about it. Um, they, the independence. Nature and you know, it's position. Um, it is a "last of the frontier" type things. I equate it really to farming in many ways. It's very risk-based but once you get a taste of it, and most of these young people who are taking, you know entering in, have that passion and love for it. I would say it was more than that than the you know, gonna make, get it rich quick, you know, sorta thing. It's a way of life.

C: Yeah. Have you noticed or heard about any barriers to young people getting involved?

S: No, I haven't. The only thing I would say is that you would need whatever permits. So whatever, and whatever your boat is capable of doing you know. Whether you can... there's an opening for you to do mostly crab and fill in with other fisheries, or whether your uh boat will allow you to do several and then it's how you get in on the quotas and um, permits. I think would be the main uh stickler to getting into the business.

C: Yeah. So, in some communities in the Pacific Northwest researchers have identified that there's a graying of the fleet or the average age of fishermen is getting older. So part of this research project is to try to get a sense, is that happening here? And if so, what would look like, what might the impacts be in this community? So, not to say that it is, but if that were the case, if for some reason we saw barriers to young people getting into the business and you saw a gradual aging of the people in the business what do you think the impact might be in Newport if we didn't have young people coming in to fill the ranks?

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S: Oh, I think it would be devastating. I really do. Um, it is, you know it's a big piece of the pie for Newport. And to have that missing, um, you know it'd really *laughter* impact, it would be hard for me to imagine this place. It would have to reinvent itself. It'd be as devastating as losing the timber. And it took a long time to reinvent and how are we gonna get along without timber? And the fishing is that big part and it would not be an easy transition. I wouldn't want to go there. *laughter*

C: Yeah. What other options are there for young people here in Newport?

S: Oh, I get that all the time. Um, they say not many. *laughter* And in many ways, they're right. Unless you're...without, not without further education. I mean so many of the seniors this year at the high school are talking, you know, they're gonna go to college. They're gonna go away. They're gonna become teachers, then they're gonna come back. And then of course some can't wait to never look at Newport again. Typical. I was that way. And, so, it's not. I mean, it's not like an urban place where... you are limited in your choices. And you're limited in your pay rate. So, it isn't the best for young folks, I don't think.

C: What do you think would happen here in Newport if all the family-based fishing businesses were sold? So maybe fishing continues to be a part of the economy but it's not family-based anymore. What do you think that would look like?

S: That would look like so many.... again, as I equate to farming you have those huge farms that are buying out the family-owned farms and they're consolidating into huge conglomerates, corporations. And I can imagine that happening here, you know. We're...if...uh processing plants, you know, take out the smaller family-owned processing plants and you get ... it changes it, it changes it to more corporate-like. Um, it loses, my opinion only, the humanity that is important and that this... of how people earn a living. It puts more power into fewer folk. And maybe decisions made outside of Newport. So... I don't see it really as a good thing myself.

C: Is there anything else that you thought we'd talk about today that we haven't either related to this idea of the graying of the fleet or even just in more general terms the relationship of the fishing industry and how it fits in here in Newport?

S: Well, I... they fit. I mean. I think one is, if one has to prove one's worth to be in Newport, if one is a fisherman you're automatically accepted. *laughter* You've earned your right...that's kind of a strange way of putting it, but it is such a natural part of this area. Uh. You know there are so many pictures of this bridge but with this bridge are all those boats, those fishing boats. And uh those boats have been painted by artists, you know. People love to take pictures by them. Um, and now of course we have the sea lions and their own dock which adds...sea lions love it because the fishermen are basically sharing their catch whether they want to or not *laughter*. But, it wouldn't be the same. It would lose I think a big part of what makes us unique.

C: Yeah.

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S: I can't think of anything else.

C: Yeah. That's fine. Is there anyone else that you think I should talk to?

S: Yes, we have a very knowledgeable, he came in uh on the job running. He is our City Manager, Spencer Nebel. He is, uh, been here three years and he's from Sioux Saint Marie, Michigan and was City Manager there for I think 26 years, may be wrong on that. But he would be great to talk to.

C: Okay!