



**INSIDE WEEKEND BREAK: Ultra cyclists roll out Sunday in coast-to-coast bike race • Page 1B**

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JAY CORELLA/THE ASTORIAN

A panorama of the U.S.N.S. Watkins at the Port of Astoria's Pier 1. The cargo ship is a part of Military Sealift Command, transporting tanks and other cargo for the United States military.

## Another Navy visitor docks at the Port of Astoria

By Jay Corella  
The Astorian

The USNS Watkins docked at the Port of Astoria's Pier 1 on Thursday from Van-

couver, Washington. Unlike the U.S.S. Chaffee, the destroyer that visited last Saturday, the Watkins is a non-combatant vessel, part of Military Sealift Command, the Navy's logistics arm.

Also unlike the Chaffee, the Watkins is not scheduled to participate in the Portland Rose Festival's Fleet Week.

The Watkins is a member of the Watson class of "roll-on roll-

off" cargo vessels. These vessels are designed let tanks and other vehicles roll directly out of their cargo holds using a ramp located on the stern, according to The Ship Report.

The Watkins also brings its own pair of cranes to help offload cargo independently.

Watkins is one of the Navy's

See VISITOR, 3A

## Oregon releases PIT count data

County numbers still to come

By Aislin Tweedy  
The Astorian

As Oregon communities begin to receive results from the state's annual Point in Time count, Clatsop County officials are still waiting for final numbers. However, local officials are anticipating a lower count than last year's when Clatsop County had the highest rate of homelessness per capita at 29.75 per 1,000 residents.

"What I can share is that the number of people experiencing homelessness has decreased by approximately 15% compared to last year," said Viviana Matthews, executive director of Clatsop Community Action.

The annual Point in Time count takes place on a single night each January; this year it was on Jan. 27. That's when volunteers, service providers and outreach workers across communities count people staying in shelters, sleeping outdoors, living in vehicles or spending the night without permanent housing.

Those numbers help determine how millions of dollars in state and federal housing funds will flow into communities like Clatsop County.

In 2025, 1,243 people experiencing homelessness were counted in Clatsop County, up from 944 people counted in 2024. That increase of 299 people strained local resources including food banks, available

See PIT, 8A



ABIGAIL JABLON/THE ASTORIAN

Several people experiencing homelessness told The Astorian they've come back from jail to nothing. They said their things are rummaged by other people in the homeless community.

## Homelessness and public safety in Astoria, Part II: Criminal justice v the street

In Clatsop County, it can be a 'never-ending cycle'

By Abigail Jablon  
The Astorian

*Editor's note: In this series, The Astorian is exploring the complex intersection of homelessness, public safety and criminal justice by consulting voices from the unsheltered community, law enforcement and other invested Astorians, covering topics ranging from prosecution and penalties to proposed solutions.*

According to Astoria Police Chief Stacy Kelly, about 49% of the total crimes committed in Astoria are by people experiencing homelessness. Police records indicate most of the crimes are minor offenses, such as nonviolent trespass or minor theft involving an unlocked car or garage door. In 2026, homeless people have been arrested in 75 out of 156 cases

between January and April. Of those arrested, "about half of the 75 crimes involve the folks living in the tents," said Kelly. "The rest are committed by homeless people who are couch surfing, living in vehicles or taking advantage of the shelter system that exists."

### JUDICIAL PROCESS CHALLENGES

Upon violation of a law, a law enforcement officer can arrest a person or give them a citation with instructions to appear in court. When a law enforcement officer arrests someone in Clatsop County, they take that person to the county jail in Warrenton. Depending on the offense, the arrestee stays in jail until a trial or the county can release them with a notice for a future court date.

With the effect of Oregon

Senate Bill 48 in 2021, Clatsop County Sheriff Matt Phillips said it's often the latter scenario. "If someone steals your car today, and we catch them, it's super unlikely we'll be able to keep them in jail," Phillips said. With the exception of murder, treason and other violent felony cases, SB 48 eliminated the requirement for defendants to post security for bail prior to release. Now, when someone is arrested, they can be released, no bail required. But many then fail to appear for court hearings. In Clatsop County, Phillips said 30% of people released pretrial fail to appear in court or commit another crime in the meantime. "We should be able to hold people in jail at least until arraignment," he said.

See HOMELESS, 8A

## OREGON New amenities, repairs coming to parks

By Mia Maldonado  
Oregon Capital Chronicle

From a refreshed historical gift shop to new showers at a popular North Coast camp site, several state park properties received upgrades just in time for summer visitors to enjoy.

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department manages more than 250 state parks, recreation areas, scenic viewpoints and other sites. In the face of budget constraints, the agency in the fall and again this spring implemented fees on more than 40 parks where it previously waived day-use parking fees. The fees help pay to maintain and operate amenities at those locations.

A handful of properties underwent less aesthetic, but essential upgrades such as dump site repairs and storm debris clearance. That includes Silver Falls State Park, where winter storms downed many large trees that agency staff are still clearing in parts of the property. Those upgrades, however, are key to keeping the state park system running smoothly, agency spokesperson Lauren Wirtis said.

"All of this work provides a better experience for visitors, even though it isn't what ends up on Instagram," Wirtis said.

Some parks, however, did receive more glamorous, noticeable upgrades. Here's a look at those spots.

### HISTORIC GIFT SHOP AT OTTER CREST

The state parks department has completed its renovations at its nearly 90-year-old cliffside gift shop next to the Otter Crest

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## Coast-to-coast bike race rolls out Sunday from Astoria

*Ultra cyclists ride from sea to shining sea*

**By Heather Douglas**  
*The Astorian*

For over a decade, a group of ultra cyclists have been meeting annually in the wee hours of a summer morning in Astoria. This year, about 50 riders will gather at 6 a.m. on Sunday, June 7 at the Columbia River Maritime Museum, to begin the Trans Am Bike Nonstop Race, a trek of 4,200+ miles. Like a vanishing act, they'll assemble and depart with little fanfare before most have their first cup of coffee.

The multi-month-long continuous coast-to-coast race derives its name from the route. It traverses America along the oldest cycling route in the country — the historic TransAmerica Bike Trail, curated by the Adventure Cycling Association. The race begins on the Pacific coast in Astoria and ends on the Atlantic coast in Yorktown, Virginia, attracting riders worldwide.

Except "race" isn't entirely an accurate term. While times are recorded and posted online, the race is unsupported — riders are on their own. They carry their own provisions and are responsible for re-stocking along the way. Some spend up to 20 hours "in the saddle" — the seat of their bike — riding over 250 miles a day.

Even though it's a do-it-yourself style race, founder Nathan Jones said it's still a lot of work. Jones, 44, who also organizes a handful of other similar races, is a self-employed developer and operates "Ride Yr Bike LLC" in Portland.

"On the surface, it shouldn't take much," he said. "The reality is I spend most of the year toiling with it from one way or another. It takes as much work as I have the bandwidth for, which for an endurance cyclist is variable and seemingly endless for better or worse."

Jones travels to Astoria every year to see the riders off and "to make sure the race goes off without a hitch," he said. "For the most part, racers come in and leave just as quickly as they show up. The footprint is fairly small, aside from the number of hotels we may book up," he said.

The most laborious task for Jones is keeping track of the competitors via a customized computer app he created, the Ride Yr Bike App, that tracks riders who appear as dots on a map of the United States. The app is available to the general public, and many fans also monitor the racers' progress. In addition, race participants track themselves with satellite trackers.

"Aside from the trackers and emergency contacts, there is no support," said Jones. Once they leave on their own, "they are of their own volition."

Fans — nicknamed "the dot watchers" — follow the cyclists across the county. "The dot watching trail angel community has developed naturally over the years with great results," said Jones. "Lots of lifelong friends have been made through this event."

The race attracted as many as 138 riders in 2017, but Jones has since honed it down to a sweet spot of 50 riders, "because that number is stable enough for me to watch for 40+ days straight."

**REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK: MEET FELIX**  
I became a "dot watcher,"



Felix Wong poses in front of the Liberty Theatre in Astoria the evening before the start of the Trans Am Bike Race in 2015.



Gretchen Newlin, Corey Harn's mother, becomes a Trail Angel, running out to cheer Felix on Peoria Road in Corvallis, Oregon. While "dot-watchers" voyeur the race via dots on a screen, "Trail Angels" are just altruistic members of the public who cheer the riders on with a smile, cheers, a cold drink or a snack alongside the road.

along with my husband Corey, in 2015, when there were 24 riders in the race. Through a booking app, we hosted one of them, Felix Wong, at our house for two nights before it began. Felix was an endurance athlete-blogger-mechanical engineer from Fort Collins, Colorado.

I recently emailed Felix. It had been over 10 years since our brief but memorable meeting in the days leading up to his race. He quickly responded with an update. He lives in Galicia Spain these days with his partner.

Felix remembered his visit and our house. "I contacted Corey out of desperation," he wrote. The start of the race coincided with "The Goonies" 25th Anniversary festival that year and literally every hotel and hostel within 10



The moment that Trans Am Bike Race rider Felix Wong entered Idaho during the 2015 race.

miles of Astoria was sold out.

Felix had heard about the race from watching an award-win-

ning documentary called "Ride the Divide." Among those in the cycling community, the film "is now something of a cult classic," he said.

So, he signed up for the 2015 race. It was also Felix's first time visiting Astoria, which he remembers as "absolutely gorgeous."

### BECOMING A DOT WATCHER

On the morning of Felix's race, my husband left the house before sunrise to watch the riders depart in front of the Maritime Museum.

Over the weeks, we fell into a routine of watching the dots move across the map on our computer screen. While Felix was still in Oregon, we asked my mother-in-law, Gretchen Newlin,



COURTESY/NATHAN JONES

Nathan Jones, pictured above, is the founder of the Trans Am Bike Nonstop Race, a trek of 4,200+ miles. It is a coast-to-coast ultra cyclist bike race that starts in Astoria and finishes in Yorktown.

to cheer Felix on as he passed through near Corvallis where she lived. Because of the GPS tracking and Jones's app, we were able to pinpoint the exact moment he rode in on Peoria Road so she could wave him on as he passed by.

Watching the dots on the screen was addictive and we began following others in the race as well. One, on a recumbent bike dropped to the back of the pack. It was just as much fun watching the stragglers as the jackrabbits out front. We could see how many miles each rider covered in a day and when they turned in for the night. I also enjoyed watching two lone women riders — especially one who went by the name "Vespa Chick," who I followed until she dropped out.

It was like watching a feature film in dots. Some riders dropped out or had no choice but to quit due to injury. Some riders at the front of the pack hardly rested and when they did it was barely off the side of the highway, often at a random picnic table or on the porch of a building. We watched as two dots dropped behind the group riding as a pair. The stragglers stopped at the same hotels — rather than sleeping under a random picnic table — and covered a small number of miles each day. We created a made-up narrative around them and imagined they were in a bike-riding romance — two dots clinging to each other through rain, sleep, sun and wind falling deeper in love mile-by-mile, enjoying their own luxurious schedule.

We watched as Felix's dot moved across the country and became alarmed when it stopped moving one morning in rural Appalachian country. Felix was not one to sleep in as we had learned from weeks observing his dot on the app. "Felix's dot hasn't moved," said Corey. We pulled up Google Earth and located a grocery store across the street from Felix's last known GPS location. Corey called the store owner. "There is this cross country race ... can you just walk across the street and look for him? Yes, his name is Felix, he's on a bike."

Felix was nowhere to be found. Turned out, he was safe. While he can't recall if his tracking unit stopped working or his phone malfunctioned, he does remember being "exhausted and mentally drained. I don't remember much beyond desperately trying to make progress and reach the finish line to recover from my injuries."

The race itself is an imposing beast. Over 4,200 miles, it's 40% longer than more well-known races, including The Race Across America and the Tour de France. "Once I got past the Cascade Mountains, the temperatures in the West every day were usually over 90 degrees every day all the way to Illinois," said Felix. "The UV index was at times off the charts, particularly in the eastern Oregon desert. There were some racers who would nap in the afternoon and ride through the

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## RACE

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night, just to avoid the heat. That wasn't a good option for me because my lights weren't great and nighttime always slowed me down, so I sweated it out."

It was a grueling undertaking, he said. He suffered sunburn, saddle sores, muscle aches and loss of feeling in his hands after reaching Wyoming. "By the end of the race, it was hard for me to shift gears — particularly downshift the rear derailleur or upshift the front derailleur — because my hands were so weak. Undoing buttons became near impossible. Ultimately, after the race, it took two and a half months for my right hand and seven and a half months for my left hand to regain all feeling. ... It takes a long time for nerves to regenerate," he said.

Felix also developed "Shermer's Neck," a condition named after one of the first four cyclists to do the Race Across America, Michael Shermer. Shermer came down with it during the 1983 race after 2,000 miles. It's when neck muscles weaken to the point one can no longer hold up their head. "Only ultra distance cyclists riding a ridiculous amount of miles get Shermer's Neck, so there are only maybe a few dozen people each year who are afflicted by it," said Felix.

"For me, not only was it painful, but it made cycling dangerous. I couldn't see the road ahead, nor could I turn my head around to look for traffic. To make a left turn, I'd have to stop along the right side of the road, pick up my bike, and rotate it 90 degrees to the left, and then ride straight across the intersection simply because I couldn't look behind me," he said. His neck muscles recovered a week after the race, he said, "and that was only after I visited a massage therapist who spent nearly an hour-and-a-half working on (my neck)."

Felix said he never encountered any close calls with cars, but it was an ever-present danger. "I was both surprised and grateful for the courteous behavior of drivers, especially in the South and East where shoulder roads are often nonexistent." He said others haven't been as lucky. "There have been several cyclists involved in — and even tragically lost their lives due to — accidents with motor vehicles in the history of the race."

Felix said he was also "chased by at least a hundred dogs in Kentucky." He was able to get away from them by "yelling a sharp and loud 'hey.' ... I never got bitten."

## THE PAIN CAVE

Race organizer Jones grew up racing mountain bikes in Missouri and did the race in its first year. "These races are more about challenging yourself than competing against others," Jones said. "This event is very much 'choose your own adventure.' If you want to make friends and community, well you'll do that, if you want to suffer in the 'pain cave' and tune out the excess noise of the world, well you can do that as well. It's great that it can be many things to different people. ... The overarching message is to



COURTESY/FELIX WONG

Felix Wong of Colorado, Michael Wacker of Germany and Michael Mausser of Montana celebrated reaching mile 1000. Wacker exited the race in Kentucky and Mausser had to abandon the race a few hours later due to a knee issue.



COURTESY/FELIX WONG

Corey Harn and Heather Douglas hosted Trans Am Bike Race rider Felix Wong before the race in 2015 at the house where they used to live in Uppertown Astoria.

do it yourself, and be sure to pass along the goodwill that you receive along the way."

Felix said he felt the pull of the "pain cave" at an early age. "During my senior year in high school, my friend Ken and I had the wild idea of entering the Delta Century — a 100-mile ride held by the Stockton Bike Club that

started in Lodi, California. Never mind that I had not biked 100 miles total the whole year and that my longest ride in my lifetime was around 20 miles. It sounded like a fun challenge and a great way to punctuate my high school years before heading off to college," he said.

He borrowed "a classic Bianchi race bike" from a

friend "since my own bike was a \$5 garage sale special that had perpetually exploding tires." The Bianchi was much lighter and faster, but it also had a genuine Brooks leather saddle that was supposed to conform to one's backside. "It never conformed to mine and was a literal pain in the butt after seven miles," Felix

said.

At mile 30 his legs began to cramp and he had to dismount and walk up the only hills there were during the "mostly pancake-flat ride." In the end, all that mattered was he did it. "We finished — and from then on, I was hooked," he said.

Then, in 1996, Felix completed his first "double

century" 200-mile ride. "Ever since then I have ridden at least one double century a year," he said. In addition to the 2015 Trans Am Bike Race (since renamed the "Trans Am Bike Nonstop Race"), Felix completed the inaugural Tour Divide in 2008 and the Furnace Creek 508 in 2011. The Tour Divide — a mountain bike race from Banff, Canada to the New Mexico-Mexico border is now considered the "granddaddy" of all ultra-distance bikepacking races. Felix finished in sixth place.

Not satisfied with one ultra sport, Felix is also a marathon runner. He recently completed a goal years in the making — of running 50 26.2-mile marathons in all 50 states. "It took me 23 years," he said. "Now I am trying to run a marathon in under four hours. So far I've run sub-four-hour marathons in 40 states. I'd also like to run all of the World Marathon Majors."

For those who may not know, the Abbott World Marathon Majors is a series of seven of the largest and most renowned marathons in the world: Tokyo, Boston, London, Sydney, Berlin, Chicago and New York City.

## STILL ROLLING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

I asked Felix if he would ever do the TABR again. "After completing the first 1,000 miles, I made a resolution to avoid participating in any future races exceeding 1,000 miles," he said. "Bicycle tours, where you can stop, rest, and recover normally, are perfectly acceptable. So far, I've adhered to that decision."

But he has no regrets. "Despite the challenges, the entire experience was an adventure of a lifetime. I cherish the beautiful landscapes and charming towns I passed through, the camaraderie of the other racers — in the rare instances I encountered them — and the exhilarating days when I felt incredibly strong, riding as much as 311 miles in a single 24-hour period." He even documented his journey in a blog he created on his website at felixwong.com.

Felix said an upside to the TABR is that it's accessible with no entry fees, and few rules. "This is to keep the playing field as level as possible," he said. But it can also be a double-edged sword. "The

See **RACE**, 3B



COREY HARN

Felix Wong, on the far right, readies himself minutes before the 5 a.m. Saturday start of the Trans Am Bike Race in June of 2015 in front of the Columbia River Maritime Museum in Astoria.



COURTESY/FELIX WONG

Cyclist Felix Wong encountered the Ozark Hills, undulating roads that are much steeper than they look in this photo, during the 2015 Trans Am bike race, a nonstop self-supported ultra-marathon race from coast-to-coast across the United States.



COURTESY/FELIX WONG

Hoosier Pass at elevation 11,539 feet, in Colorado, was the highest point of the 2015 Trans Am Bike Race.

**RACE**

*Continued from 2B*

clock never stops until you finish in Yorktown, Virginia, so keeping sleeping to a minimum is crucial in order to finish in a good placing.”

The record for finishing the TABR is around 14 and a half days, but stragglers in the back can stretch the race out up to four months. Felix finished in Yorktown in eighth place after 23 days, 23 hours and 17 minutes. In the photo he emailed me a few months ago, showing the moment he reached the finish line in Yorktown over 10 years ago, he is smiling through Shermer’s Neck.

I asked race organizer Jones if there was a hedonistic party on the other side of the pain cave. “Functionally no, it’s very anticlimactic,” he said. “In some years there have been enough finishers in Yorktown to have an informal get-together. The

Yorktown finish has historically had a group of Trail Angels that meet riders at the finish but the D.C. riders typically arrive alone or if they are lucky to a friend or family member awaiting them.”

It turns out that the end of the race is just like the beginning – with little fanfare except for saddle sores, lingering pain and hard earned self-satisfaction. Combining the Trans Am Bike Race with the Tour Divide, Felix’s goal was to become one of the first people in the world to successfully race both north to south and west to east across the United States in a self-supported manner. “From my research, I was the 10th person to have done so,” he said.

Felix said, after all was said and done, he’s glad for it all, no matter the hardships along the way.

“It gave me an opportunity to see the beautiful landscapes across 10 states from sea to shining sea.”



COURTESY/ANNIE HESELBACH

Despite Shermer’s Neck, a condition that can afflict ultra-marathon cyclists, Felix Wong finished in Yorktown, Virginia in 23 days, 23 hours and 17 minutes smiling through the pain.