

EARLY HISTORY OF THE YACHATS COMMONS

Compiled 2020

By Joanne Kittel and Michael Hempen, Co-Chair & Board Member, View the Future

Acknowledgments

Information in this history was obtained from oral interviews with people who were involved with the development of the Commons and Yachats Youth and Family Program, specifically: Jim Adler, Billie Jo Smith, Stacey Smith, Chis Graamans, Blythe Collins, Karl Christensen, Carl Miller, Leon Sterner, Phil Schuster, Susan Stoddard, Valeria Tutrinoli, Caroline Bauman, Jessica Waddell, Joan Stephens, Kathy Smith, Quinton Smith, Jackie Martine, Debbie Jackson, Lynn Chamberlin, and David H. Chamberlin, Jr. Most of those interviewed continue to call Yachats their home.

Thank you to Quinton Smith for his research. Appreciation to Rose Valentine, last president of the Friends of the Commons, and to the Little Log Church and Museum for the loan of all the Friends of the Yachats Commons' records.

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Introduction

Accurate history is always relevant because it educates and promotes understanding of why something did or did not happen. We can celebrate the gifts given to us by those who came before us and learn from the mistakes they made to avoid repeating them. Yachats local history is very relevant in this regard. Learning more about our history can deepen our appreciation of what attracts so many to the Yachats community.

Articles have been written about our local Indian history, rehabilitation of the wetlands, and development of our trail system. Marjorie Hays' book, *The Land That Kept Its Promise*, written in 1976, tells the history of Yachats' early majority culture. A more recent book, *Saving Big Creek* by Andrea Scharf (2018), describes the herculean efforts that a bunch of "hippies" (some of whom were interviewed for this article) gave for 35 years to save 120 acres of pristine wilderness 8 miles south of Yachats. Members of the Yachats Ladies Club and Little Log Church and Museum have written their own remarkable histories. Those who have read the books and articles have developed a deep appreciation of what has evolved, been saved, and what has been lost. These written documents also have described the challenging and rewarding journeys of those who came before us to make our community and surrounding areas better.

At the time this article was written, there is a division about whether we have lost the essence of what defined our warmth and cohesive nature. How does one define a sense of community? We thought documenting the Yachats Commons history describes the type of community-building efforts that have greatly contributed to create what attracts people to Yachats.

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Not many people who live in the 97498-area code know about the creation of Yachats Commons, Yachats Youth and Family Activities Program (YYFAP), and Whale Park? Has anyone heard of *Big Mouth*? (The History of Whale Park, the early years of YYFAP and *Big Mouth* are found in separate articles.)

This is not an article to describe a nostalgic time, and it is not about small town quirks. This article describes the process that occurred to build community through its centerpiece, Yachats Commons. Many of those who created the Commons and additional programs moved here with professional backgrounds and freely gave of their knowledge and experience. What they did not know, they learned. Their ingenuity, dedication, passion and creativity were insatiable. They were “The Commons Pioneers”.

Learning about this history calls upon all of us to reflect on which role each of us plays in this community, and, more importantly, can play if we want to make the Commons a hub of community cohesiveness and spirit again. We hope that making known some of the history of the Commons will aid in bringing back the valuable role it has played.

Relevant History Before The Acquisition of the Yachats School

The “Newbies”

Interviews with long-term locals revealed that in the late 1960s and early 70s Yachats valley received new residents: younger people escaping to what they felt was a simpler life, some of whom came for the “hippie” lifestyle. They wanted seclusion and a place to live off the land. Their lack of experience led to most, if not all, leaving after a short time. A severe winter probably was a factor. Later, in the mid-70s, a different type of individuals moved to Yachats River Valley and Tenmile Creek Area. They also were inexperienced about how to live in this pristine and wild area, but they came from professional backgrounds with valuable skills and knowledge to offer. More importantly, they realized they were inexperienced, were open to learning, and, most of all, desired a sense of community.

At the outset, the established residents and the “newbies” seemed to have little in common. Established residents had limited traditional education, were fairly entrenched in their ways, and were generally more conservative, but they knew a great deal about living in this area. Some had been here for generations. The “newbies” were mostly liberals and brought in new ideas. Unlikely, but lasting, friendships were formed. Jim Adler speculated that the established residents were curious about the new residents and felt their knowledge and expertise were appreciated.

“Newbies” learned from the long-term residents who helped them establish a sustainable way of life, and “newbies” offered needed help to the established residents. Neighbor helping neighbor was the norm. There was no problem or emergency that could not be worked out or solved with these friendships. The one rule was that it was a good idea not to talk politics.

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Stacy Smith and Chris Graamans' wedding reception at Tenmile was an example of the community coming together. Everyone was invited and came. Long-term residents wore their finest church garb and watched, fascinated, as belly dancers entertained. Even the county sheriff deputy stopped by to find out what the racket was all about, joined in the celebration and partook of the delicious potluck.

For a short while a buying club was formed to serve the needs of interested residents in the area. The only place for the truck to park with the food for residents to pick up was in the grocery store parking lot. Not wanting to compete with the grocery store, the buying club stopped only to return bigger and better after the City of Yachats purchased the building.

As the newcomers established themselves as part of the greater Yachats community, they rallied to welcome more "newbies" who moved here. Tom Smith and Leon Sterner were always the first to seek out these newcomers, greet them, and help them. Tom Smith's name came up again and again in these interviews as the first to help, first to lead, first to solve problems. His name is paramount in the book *Saving Big Creek*, and his leadership is evident in the saving the Yachats Elementary School and the establishment of the Commons.

Yachats Elementary School

Prior to 1930, local historian Lee Green stated a one-room schoolhouse existed east of Highway 101 and a one-room school for high schoolers existed one mile up the Yachats River Road. In 1927 and again in 1929, the Lincoln County School District was bequeathed two pieces of property for the purpose of building and operating a public school, grades 1 through 12. That initial two pieces were about .7 acres. The 3-room building was erected in 1930 and was expanded several times through 1968 to accommodate the student numbers and academic needs. The final acreage to the west of the school (38 lots) was acquired for \$4,799 in 1948. By the early 1970's the 9th through 12 grades did not enroll enough students and the older students were bused to high school in Waldport. (Tom Smith of Tenmile was the last bus driver.) The elementary school continued but by 1976 dwindling enrollments caused the School District to question keeping the elementary school open.

Each classroom contained two grade levels. The library was what is now room 3 in the Commons. One of the interviewees, Billie Jo Smith, taught 5th and 6th grades at the Commons. Billie Jo was also the music teacher. She played piano, but teaching music was not her professional background. She winged it. Her teaching assistant Jackie Martine said, "Billie Jo became my mentor." Tom Smith, Billie Jo's husband, drove the school bus from what is now the Oregon House to Waldport and back with their toddler in tow until she started first grade. They also put together the Christmas pageant. Every student participated and more than 200 people came. It was a most popular event and brought together locals from all around south county.

Maintenance of the Commons building was a constant challenge. When the school needed to be repainted Lions Club stepped up. The name of the paint color was "Surprise," and it was a bright chartreuse literally glowing in the dark. With the extra paint, they painted the bathrooms chartreuse too. It was frightening. Yes, the Lions repainted it, but the bathrooms stayed that color years after the city bought the building.

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The school building had always been a place to hold events and bring community together. Few people today are aware that the first Yachats Arts and Crafts Festival was held in 1971. Back then it was called the “Bottle Benders Fair”. Home crafts were featured. (Bottle bending is technically a glass-slumping art.) One artist glued rocks together and called his art, “rock groups”. Another sold boxes that said on the cover, “three-piece chicken dinner”. When opened, there were three kernels of corn in them. All sold. These early fairs, like now, occupied every classroom in the school. When Jim Adler and his wife, Ursula, moved to the Yachats River Valley in the mid-70’s, he and artist, Garrett Smith, whose shop is now the Mercantile, took on the task of “professionalizing” the fair and hence, the Arts and Crafts Festival came to be.

In 1983, with only 35 students attending the elementary school, the district closed the school. Protests from the community ensued with even the children picketing, but it did not change the school board’s decision. (Information for this section, in part, is from Claire Hall’s talk, “The History of Yachats” presented for the 50th/100th anniversary of Yachats, July 17, 2016.)

Wonderful parties were held, many at Tenmile. Led by Tom and Billie Jo Smith, the favorites were the Halloween and Thanksgiving celebrations. Planning for Halloween went on for months. A scary scenario was set up between the Smiths and “newbie” Don Niskanen, who was renting a property to the north. These events were well attended

From the mid 80’s to 1990 the school district continued rent the building to locales for events and parties. The “newbies” arranged to rent Yachats Elementary School space sponsoring events including dances and potlucks, Halloween parties and Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas celebrations and New Year’s parties. The Arts and Crafts Festival organizers also continued to rent the space. Active and socially conscious community members, they wanted to make use of the building for community purposes. These creative and motivated locals envisioned a future for the building even as it continued to deteriorate.

Save Yachats Elementary School

The Campaign

During the years the school was operating, it was used as a gathering place for popular and well attended family and holiday events and occasional festivals. Tom Smith, Dick and Nancy Reynolds, Leon Sterner, and many others from the Yachats River Valley and Tenmile discussed whether the City should purchase the elementary school as a community center.

The school district had no intention of opening the school again nor did it want to maintain it. Whoever donated the property to the school district in the 1930’s put in the sale document that in the future if the Yachats Elementary School closed and the building was put up for sale, the City had first right to buy it for a community center. Otherwise, the money from the sale was to go to the inheritors.

Dick Reynolds and his wife Nancy moved to Yachats fulltime in 1984. Dick was the manager of public entertainment facilities in Portland and Eugene; his responsibilities included the Memorial Coliseum (1974-80) and overseeing the construction of the Hult Center in Eugene. Dick, along with Nancy and Tom Smith took leading roles to assure that the elementary school was acquired and would become a vibrant community center. (Nancy was elected mayor in 1991.)

In 1990, Mayor H. David Chamberlin and City Council members (Russ Barney, Burd Bicksler, Nancy Reynolds, and Arthur Roberts) began negotiations with the School Board on the purchase of the school. They were inundated by negative feedback about such a purchase. In order to better assess if purchase is what the citizens wanted, or not, the mayor and council initiated a special election for an advisory vote.

A vigorous campaign ensued with the creation and distribution of buttons that said, "Save the Elementary School". The logo was created by local artist, Helen Pfeifle. Valeria Tutrinoli of Toad Hall silk screened the design on tee-shirts and sold them to support the campaign. There was vocal opposition to the City acquiring the Commons, some of which came from an active minority of realtors who wanted that land for development. Those opposed also perceived the majority of active support was from people who did not live in the city. They didn't see the worth of a community building. But that group was proven wrong. In a special election June 26, 1990, the measure to whether the City should acquire Yachats Elementary School and its 3.5 acres for a price of \$195,000 passed by a vote of 209 to 100. With such strong advisory mandate from the citizenry, the mayor and council voted to purchase the Commons. *

On September 1, 1990 Yachats celebrated the acquisition with a dedication, open house and community picnic. A poem was written by Fred Harrison to commemorate the occasion.

For this occasion, august
A poem to write, I must;
'Tis nothing fancy that I do,
But try to make it proud and true.

This noble school now passeth hands,
So fitting tribute should ring our lands;
Worthy spirits now gather 'round
Let our future her abound.

These Commons now are for delight
For woman man, and child alike;
Promises long before our dust, This poem I give to thee in trust.

*At that time the City had three public works employees and one city staff member, the recorder. Karen Schuster who was hired in 1988. Prior to her hiring, David Chamberlin said Michiko Ryan was the recorder for ten years and held the city government together. Until 1993, City Council meetings were held in what is presently the children's reading room at the Yachats Library. Prior to the Library being built, irregular public meetings were held in the Lions Club.

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SAMPLE BALLOT

For Special Election, Lincoln County, Oregon
June 26, 1990

- LINTY

OFFICIAL BALLOT - SPECIAL ELECTION - LINCOLN COUNTY
STATE OF OREGON - TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 1990

BALLOT
CARD
NUMBER

OFFICIAL BALLOT - SPECIAL ELECTION - LINCOLN COUNTY
STATE OF OREGON - TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 1990

BALLOT
CARD
NUMBER

OREGON COAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICE DISTRICT

CITY OF YACHATS

MEASURE NO. 21-1 - THREE-YEAR OPERATING SERIAL LEVY - OREGON COAST COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERVICE DISTRICT

QUESTION: SHALL OCCSD LEVY \$0.33 PER \$1,000 OF ASSESSED VALUE FOR THREE YEARS OUTSIDE TAX BASE FOR OPERATIONS BEGINNING 1990-1991?

EXPLANATION: OCCSD'S CURRENT OPERATING LEVY EXPIRES JUNE 30, 1990. THE PROPOSED LEVY BEGINS JULY 1, 1990. THE PROPOSED LEVY IS SEEKING ESTIMATED NET TOTAL LEVIES NOT TO EXCEED \$621,482.12 FOR 1990-1991, \$639,505.11 FOR 1991-1992, \$658,050.75 FOR 1992-1993. FOR AN OWNER OF REAL ESTATE WITH A CURRENT ASSESSED VALUE OF \$30,000, THIS SERIAL LEVY WOULD COST A TOTAL OF \$16.50 PER YEAR, OR \$1.38 PER MONTH. OCCSD DOES NOT HAVE A TAX BASE. COMMUNITY COLLEGES, UNLIKE SCHOOL DISTRICTS, ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE SAFETY NET LEGISLATION.

YES →
NO →

LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

MEASURE NO. 21-2 - SCHOOL DISTRICT OPERATING LEVY

QUESTION: SHALL LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVY \$2,063,109 IN 1990/91 IN EXCESS OF THE AMOUNT LEVIED FOR OPERATING PURPOSES IN 1989/90 AND OUTSIDE ITS TAX BASE?

EXPLANATION: THE LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT REQUIRES A TOTAL GENERAL FUND OPERATING LEVY OF \$24,037,017 TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS REQUIRED BY STATUTE AND FOR THE GENERAL OPERATIONS OF SCHOOLS AS APPROVED BY THE BUDGET COMMITTEE FOR THE 1990/91 SCHOOL YEAR. THE CURRENT TAX BASE, APPROVED IN THE 1920'S, IS \$1,876,011. THE TOTAL OF ALL REVENUES AND THE INADEQUATE TAX BASE DOES NOT PROVIDE ENOUGH REVENUES TO OPERATE SCHOOLS. THE DISTRICT NEEDS A ONE-YEAR OPERATING LEVY OF \$2,063,109 IN EXCESS OF THE AMOUNT LEVIED FOR OPERATING PURPOSES IN 1989/90 AND OUTSIDE ITS TAX BASE TO RAISE ADDITIONAL MONIES TO MEET THE ADDITIONAL AMOUNT REQUIRED.

YES →
NO →

MEASURE NO. 21-4 - PURCHASE THE YACHATS SCHOOL PROPERTY BY THE CITY OF YACHATS

QUESTION: SHOULD THE YACHATS CITY COUNCIL PROCEED WITH THE PURCHASE OF THE YACHATS SCHOOL PROPERTY? (ADVISORY)

EXPLANATION: LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT HAS ACCEPTED YACHATS' OFFER TO PURCHASE THE 4.85 ACRE YACHATS SCHOOL PROPERTY FOR \$195,000: \$25,000 DOWN, \$25,000 PAYMENT, 6% INTEREST, AND PROFIT SHARING SHOULD CERTAIN LOTS BE RE-SOLD.

PURPOSES:

PRESERVE THIS PROPERTY, UNDER CONTINUING PUBLIC TRUST, FOR EDUCATION, CIVIC, CULTURAL, AND RECREATIONAL USE.

PROVIDE A COMMUNITY COMMONS FOR ENJOYMENT OF OPEN SPACE AND SCENERY.

RESERVE SPACE FOR POSSIBLE FUTURE PUBLIC SCHOOL USE.

THESE PURPOSES CONFORM TO YACHATS COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

PURCHASE MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHIN BUDGET LIMITS.

YES →
NO →

CITY OF TOLEDO

MEASURE NO. 21-3 - REQUIRE VOTER APPROVAL BEFORE ANY SALE OF MEMORIAL FIELD

QUESTION: SHOULD THE CITY COUNCIL BE REQUIRED TO SUBMIT TO THE VOTERS ANY PROPOSED SALE OF MEMORIAL FIELD?

EXPLANATION: THE CITY COUNCIL CAN NOW SELL MEMORIAL FIELD AFTER A PUBLIC HEARING. THE CITY COUNCIL HAS INCLUDED MEMORIAL FIELD, IF NEEDED, TO BE USED FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AS PART OF THE TOLEDO INDUSTRIAL PARK. THIS INITIATIVE WOULD PROHIBIT A SALE OF MEMORIAL FIELD BY THE CITY OF TOLEDO UNTIL AFTER THE CITY COUNCIL SUBMITTED THE PROPOSED SALE TO THE VOTERS, WHICH COULD HAVE AN IMPACT ON THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE.

YES →
NO →

WARNING

Any person who, by use of force or other means, unduly influences an elector to vote in any particular manner OR TO REFRAIN FROM VOTING, is subject, upon conviction, to imprisonment or to a fine, or both.

IMPORTANT

Please read your official ballot carefully.

Published in accordance ORS 255.095.

Gloria McEwen, Lincoln County Clerk

The City of Yachats Owns the School - Now What?

The condition of the Commons building had deteriorated by the time that the City took ownership. The City Council discussed passing it on to another nonprofit entity. Ultimately the City Council sought a group to form a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to help raise funds to support the building and promote its community use. Dick Reynolds, Bob and Karen Dale, Tom Smith among a number of community members stepped up to the task.

The first objectives were to come up with a name and mission. A number of names were thrown around for discussion before “the Commons” was brought up. Who brought up that name? Some speculated it was Don Niskanen, an early supporter. Former mayor David Chamberlin stated it was former mayor Arthur Roberts. Why “the Commons?” The name is adopted from its meaning in England and refers to land that belongs to the common people and is open to everyone to use. The name was intended to convey inclusiveness. The Commons’ mission, in addition to improving the building’s infrastructure and other immediate needs, was to promote and build community by being accessible and open to all community members. The organization was named The Friends of the Yachats Commons Foundation (better known by locals as The Friends). The Friends wrote the applications and applied to the State of Oregon and the IRS to become a temporary 501(c)(3) and received this designation in 1991. (In 1995, the permanent designation was received.) This nonprofit group was separate from the City of Yachats, and not a subsidiary of it.

Since the City owned and had the ultimate responsibility for the building and an active 501(c)(3) nonprofit to help raise funds, they wanted a designated commission to oversee their property. The City established one. Then in 1992, the City expanded one of their commissions, then called the “Parks and Museum Commission”, to include the Commons and grounds and changed the name to the “Parks and Commons Commission”. The decision noted that the museum was still a part of the commission’s oversight. Nevertheless, at that time, the daily management of the Commons was left to the Friends.

There were initially 22 documented board members of the Friends of which 7 were also members of what became the Parks and Commons Commission. Members were Jim Adler, Tom Smith, Martha Gleason, Don Niskanen, Jessica Waddell, Li Jackson, Valeria Tutrinoli, Jack Mitchell, Dick Reynolds, Susan Stoddart, Portia Foster, Billie Curry, Ellie Ewan, Grethe Cooper, Lorraine Limardi, Ivan Smith, Barb Norris, Kathy Plunk, Bill Powell, Carl Shelley, Wendy Smyth, and Alta Laufer.

The board changed as people’s interest. Bob and Karen Dale were actively involved, and Bob became board president when Dick Reynolds moved to the newly named Parks and Commons Commission. By 1992, Betty Bahn, Greta Cooper, Mary Welch and Sally Carr also joined the board. Caroline Bauman became involved in 1992 writing grants and participating in fundraising events. She became board president from 1998-2008.

One of the first long-term renters in the building was the newly formed Oregon Coast Community College, Janet Rackleff, one of Yachats’ local residents, worked for the college then. In the late 90’s, the county sheriff worked part time in the space where the food bank now is.

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John O'Brien, sheriff at the time, spent a few hours at the Commons each week answering questions and helping citizens with concerns. In 1993, the City moved its office into the Commons from the public works building.

Early Years

Fundraising Is the Priority

With so many needed repairs and maintenance issues facing the building, creative fundraising became the priority. One of the first and very successful series of events was *Clean Sweep*, a massive garage sale of donated items from all over mid-to-south county. A variety of media donated advertising, Li Jackson and Valeria Tutrinoli offered to pick up items people no longer wanted and deliver them to the Commons. Others organized and set up this weekend event, which was held for three years and brought in thousands of dollars.

Susan Stoddard created a 30+ minute video as the first PR effort to promote the Yachats community and Commons. Featuring some of the active volunteers and lots of footage of the ocean and seagulls, the purpose was to draw people to events and rent space. Susan still has the video. Because of its fragility, Milo Graamans created a digital copy of it.

Planning meetings were usually held at the New Morning Coffee House next door (now the guitar shop) that Don and Blythe Collins owned. Don Niskanen brought in the musical events because he had worked for First Artist and his background and knowledge of the music groups were extensive. (First Artists, which became Four Seasons, sponsored all classical Yachats Music Festivals for its 38-year run!)

Events and dances were held. Live Reggae was very popular and attracted people from Newport and farther. A "lawless" band from Jamaica also played. (The details of that event have been omitted from the article.) Rick Bartow and his band played. Some of the bands came from Portland and Eugene like Electric Coconuts, Cool Aid Testers, Babes with Axes, Zaybuko Marimba Beets, Art Grooveau, and the Sugar Beets. Polk-a-Dots also became a fixture, starring locals Caroline Bauman, Susan McEneny and Pasha. For years monthly square dances organized in part by locals Peggy and Tom Grey brought people in for the weekend from all over the state. Other popular events included line dancing, comedy shows, spaghetti feeds partnering with the Lions and Ladies Club, and, the early flag-ship fundraiser, the huge Halloween bash that brought bands in from Eugene. Big Band originally led by Bob Farrell got its start. It was unusual that dances brought in fewer than 100 people. Sometimes it reached past fire code. Three-day Earth Day events were also immensely popular. Sometimes unique fundraisers were presented like the installation of the inside of an airplane made out of paper and cardboard. However, for years, the community Thanksgiving, open to everybody, was the most popular.

The "One of Us" variety shows also played an important role. These performances dominated the first five years of the Commons. There was a lot of spontaneity in their creativity. And everyone "worked their butts off." "One of Us" started as the "Mildew Review" and drew on the talents of the entire community with artists like Phil Schuster in charge of scenery. Skits and

musical numbers developed by a wide variety of people. Leon Sterner, in Yachats since 1985, was an integral part of each production filling the gaps whenever needed, which included acting in many scenes as male or female. No one was turned down, and children were encouraged to participate. Fun examples were Blythe Collins and Carl Miller doing a tap dance with Flippers under the theme of the “Smelt Melt.” Don Niskanen and Carl did a dance number wearing tutus, less believable dressed as women with their beards, but very funny. Leon actually looked pretty sexy. At one performance, with a pirates’ theme, Don was shot out of a canon. The Umbrella Drill team was so popular it became the impetus for the La De Da Parade, which actually got its start as part of the entertainment in the variety shows. There were lots of rehearsals too. Each rehearsal took a different turn as did the final performance.

At the beginning of each show, the performers came on stage one at a time and announced what they had done before coming to Yachats. For example, “one of us used to be an astrophysicist,” or, “one of us used to be a playboy bunny,” and so forth. That piece morphed into renaming the variety show; “One of Us” (OOU).

Most popular of these variety shows was the “Eye-TwitNESS News,” written by Jim Adler, Kate Miller, Andrea Scharf, Jim Bowers, and Karen Schuster. Jim and Kate played co-anchors relaying local Yachats news and making fun of all of us locals. These variety shows began with full multi-course meals, all homemade. The Commons had no kitchen, so all the cooking was done using the kitchens of New Morning Coffee House, the Lions and Ladies Clubs. The performers often cooked, served the food, and ran off to change into costumes in time for their part of the performance. Then they changed back to serve more food. It was truly a full evening of great eating and entertainment. All of those variety shows were sold out and made money for the Commons improvements. All of the food, drink, labor, and other assistance were donated. About 50 or more community members from inside and outside of the city participated in these events. It is worth noting that the majority of these community members were not retirees, but younger people who worked one or more jobs to make ends meet, were parents, and still volunteered their time to build community.

Those productions became popular, and when OOU started doing play productions, it spun off to form its own 501(c)(3). One of the first plays was “Sordid Lives”. It was so popular, that more than a decade later, that production was repeated. It was amazing to watch the amazing local talent. Similar to the Friend’s mission, all profits went back into the community including the Commons including buying a new stage curtain, kitchen equipment, chairs, lighting, etc. Profits also were dedicated to Yachats Youth and Family Activities Program and Yachats Health Clinic.

Early OOU records contain a poignant poem written by Jim Adler and was given on a card to audience members at the beginning of OOU variety shows.

We were drawn here by a beauty
Which can take your breath away
But the beauty of each other
Is what made us want to stay.
There is wisdom in our craziness
It’s finally coming clear

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That One of Us
Is All of Us
And all of us
Are here.

Chantelle Van Wey, in the May 2001 South Lincoln County News, acknowledged the commons role: “Commons became the cultural and entertainment hub of Yachats and it’s all due to the village effort.”

Caroline Bauman stated that during her tenure as chair of the Friends, in excess of \$250,000 was raised to benefit the Commons directly not including the fundraisers they did for the Youth Group, which eventually grew into the Yachats Youth and Family Program. (See separate article.) Yachats Health Clinic, special community and individual needs and disaster relief. Even though the volunteers did not have prior experience writing grant applications, their passion motivated them to learn. Countless grants were sought and successfully awarded.

So Much More Happened at the Commons

The planned purpose for the Commons was to be for everyone; the Friends said “yes” to anyone who wanted to use it for the public good. All aspects of the arts were represented from shows to classes. It was a location for music lessons and youth recitals. Drama, drumming, ballroom, tap, Celtic, and ballet classes were held as were classes in basketry, painting, model making, cooking, and chess. Exercise, yoga, and Zumba were also well attended. This went on for a while without liability insurance. The Friends finally acquired insurance and started to umbrella additional groups like Big Band. The Friends partnered with the Chamber of Commerce for the La de Da parade and Mushroom Festivals, and with the Lions and Ladies Clubs who used the Commons or grounds for larger events they were sponsoring like the Smelt Festival and Independence Day Pie Social. Oregon Coast Chamber Orchestra came regularly. For years, Greg and Nan Scott had monthly movie night with popcorn served. The bell ringers’ events organized and funded by Cheryl (Kraft) Waide were well attended. Yachats Academy of Arts and Sciences (YAAS) started in 2011 and brought in countless interesting educational speakers. The Solstice bonfire, held since the 1990s, eventually was adopted by Yachats Academy of Arts Sciences.

The Writers Series workshops went on for years. One of the special workshops was called *Moonfish*. (The name was taken from the sculpture that once stood at Smelt Sands State Park. Created by Jim Adler, it slowly eroded away.) Famous writers came to mentor, lecture and give workshops. The most popular was Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and *Sometimes a Great Notion* who had a home a few miles south of Yachats. Bob Welch, columnist for the Register Guard and author of a number of publications including *My Oregon* and *Healing Wounds* was another popular presenter. He has a home in the area and is now retired.

And Yachats had an International Film Festival devoted to showing such films as its own, *Ghoul from the Tidal Pool*, a feature-length, tongue-in-cheek version of the 1950’s horror movie, *The Blob*, written, directed and produced by Burgundy Featherkile with a local cast of more than 100.

Political activities also took place at the Commons including during the spotted owl and Marble Murrelet controversies. Candidates for political office used the Commons to debate or rented it for presentations. U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley kicked off his first senatorial campaign at the Yachats Commons in 2008. Room 8 was overflowing.

The Buying Club was resurrected after the Commons was acquired and ran from that location for four to five years. Food was bought from Applegate and Mountain People out of California. Many signed up. The group handled huge order and large amounts of money. The leaders were Ann Thompson, Jessica Waddell and Jim Bowers. Volunteers received only a five percent mark-up and all others, a 10 percent mark-up. It ended because it grew too big to adequately coordinate.

Collaborations occurred throughout the Friends' history with interest groups and other local organizations. The Lions built what is now the Pavilion on the Common grounds. For years it was called the Lions Picnic Shelter. The Friends helped raise money for that project and later funded the glass enclosure. The Friends donated \$5,000 for start-up funds for the Wetland Restoration Project and were the umbrella organization for both donations and grant writing. The Friends raised the funds and organized the building of the skate park and its beautiful mural.

Until the City had a regular monthly newsletter, the Friends published a quarterly newsletter called *Commons Sense*. It included upcoming events, calls for volunteers, activities, programs, projects, fundraising efforts, and grant awards.

During interviews with 18 people for this article, the name that came up most often was Leon Sterner. Linda Hetzler called him; "The de facto mayor, the one that kept us all together, at a very deep level, logically, energetically, [and] spiritually." Leon was involved in every aspect of the community from the time he moved to Yachats including the Commons (1985-2017) fundraising, problem-solving, organizing volunteer work sessions and so much more. The majority of his work was done as a volunteer, but later he was hired to oversee the operations of the Commons under the auspices of the Friends for about seven years, but he continued to perform volunteer work for the Commons, Parks and YYFAP. (The City paid the Friends for this contract position.) He exuded passion and purpose, and freely gave warmth to friends and strangers alike. Leon is described more than anyone else as the embodiment of a community soul. In 2017, Leon lost his position when the City terminated the contract with the Friends and hired their own employee. In Linda Hetzler's words, "The city administration did not just cut down a tree; they killed our community ecosystem."

The Strife

All who were interviewed for this history acknowledged the years of tension that existed between those on City Council (primarily business oriented) who wanted the Commons to be financially self-sufficient, and the members of the community and Park and Commons Commission who wanted it to remain for all to enjoy and who advocated for the city to support an inclusive mission.

In 1995 a joint meeting was held involving the Friends, the Commission and the City Council to settle the “quibbling.” The result was that the Commons was to be a community center first and foremost and needed to be supported by the City. This was achieved, in part, because of the strong advocacy by Parks and Commons Commission members.

In 2007, the City Council officially declared the Commons first and foremost a community center that should be supported by the City. That was a reflection of who the Council members and mayor were at that time.

The Friends continued during this time to have dedicated volunteers who created fun fundraising events, relevant educational forums, programs, and additional community endeavors. Writing grant applications was a constant, requiring new projects and challenges in partnership with Commission.

In recent years, the Parks and Commons Commission and City administration became at odds with the missions of the Friends and, eventually OOU. As a result of this conflict, the Friends disbanded in 2017 (after 29 years), and with additional barriers, OOU also disbanded in 2019.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Friends and OOU, activities in the Commons still occur like exercise, yoga, ping pong, YFFAP, individual meetings, and occasional private events. With the termination of the Friends, Polly Plumb Productions, a 501(c)(3) acquired Big Band, Art Guild, YAAS, and the Banner Project. Polly Plumb also conducts their own events like the quilt shows and brings in musical groups. They adopted and have enriched the ever-popular Celtic Music Festival.

At the time of this article, (October 2020) was written and distributed, the Commons building had been shut down since March 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic. All programs, events and activities ceased. However, well before this crisis occurred, with the loss of the synergy between the Friends and the Parks and Commons Commission there was a visible reduction in fundraising efforts for the Commons (and its surrounding park land) and their collaborative efforts to build community spirit.

Perhaps the new direction the City government is taking with the Commons will re-establish ways to raise funds creatively and build community cohesion once again. The future will tell. Will the Commons be supported as a community center inclusive of the larger community or promoted for primarily events and private gatherings to financially support itself? Can both occur? As history attests, the Commons had both. The future will be up to the citizens, those they elect to represent their interests, and the broader community who have all benefited from the gifts the Commons and its park land, their programs, projects and events have given us. In other words, **it is up to EVERY “ONE OF US.”**

The authors leave you with this quote from Billie Jo Smith, “It is nice to share our history with those who live in the community now, but it is going to take those citizens to take that information and decide what you want to do, what do you value and want [this community] to be

for yourselves. This history shows it was done, and therefore, can be done. It provides seeds to create what those present may want now.”

November 4, 2020