

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
Florence, OR 97439

Opinion

Showing support for our Coast Guard

Florence hosts Lane County's only sea port and we have an active Coast Guard unit stationed on the Siuslaw River. We have approximately 34 active duty personnel and their families as well as some extended families.

We feel that they make a significant contribution to our community both in terms of community involvement as well as economically and that their contribution is often not recognized.

The U.S. Coast Guard has

a "Coast Guard Cities" program to recognize a city that makes special efforts to acknowledge the professional work of the Coast Guard men and women assigned to its area. I believe that Florence could and should be designated as a "Coast Guard City" and our City Council recently approved the submission of an application on behalf of the City of Florence to work toward that achievement.

GUEST VIEWPOINT

By JOE HENRY
FLORENCE MAYOR



One important aspect of the application is letters of support from elected officials, local businesses, military support groups and community members. We would like to ask the community to help with this effort by writing a letter of support for Florence to become a "Coast Guard City."

Letters can be addressed "To whom it may concern" and sent to me c/o the City of Florence, 250 Highway 101, Florence, OR 97439.

Letters could include actual experiences with the Coast Guard and mention things that the community has done to support the Coast Guard.

Another thing that we will be doing to show our support is to sponsor a Coast Guard

appreciation dinner for Coast Guard personnel and their guests. It will be a formal affair and will be funded by donations from these same elected officials, local businesses, military support groups and community members and organizations.

We will be asking for donations to support this event and tickets will be available once the event has been scheduled. Any donations in support of this event will be greatly appreciated. Thanks for your support.



EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

Gilmar Ortiz

said. "But it teaches you the most important life skills... like how to get along with anyone."

In a culture that idolizes academic degrees and mighty suffixes behind a name, that shuns manual labor and reduces it to the bottom of the workplace hierarchy, most people aspire to white collar "professions" in prestigious industries. Not Gilmar.

Instead, the native Guatemalan, who moved to the United States with his family at age 6, yearned for a steady income instead of years of student debt. Fueled by determination and good old-fashioned hard work, he took low-wage jobs as a teen growing up in Los Angeles.

"I have no regrets about starting out as a dishwasher," Gilmar said. "It was very humbling, but I wanted to learn an industry from the ground floor."

Gilmar got what he asked for and ended up in the basement, with piles of dirty dishes, long shifts on his feet, plus plenty of the hot grease and tempers of the trade. But he also got something else: a "PhD in human psychology, without the college loans."

"Restaurants offer such a great education," Gilmar said. "They have taught me everything about life ... to stay flexible and adapt to every person and circumstance."

"I want to inspire people that they can always do better as long as they stay focused on their dream."

—GILMAR ORTIZ

Now his diligence has paid off with a business providing a steady pipeline. But the journey actually began with pipes of another sort.

Long before scrubbing plates on Bay Street, Gilmar worked as a jour-

neyman plumber in Southern California, earning a good income to support his wife, Angela, and two children. Then the economy crashed and his plumbing business "went down the drain."

"We lost everything we had worked so hard for," he said. "It was devastating."

With nowhere else to turn, Gilmar and Angela moved in with relatives who had resided in Florence for 20 years.

"We came here with nothing but our bed and a garage to stay in," Gilmar said. "I knew I would have to start from the bottom all over again."

Living in a garage with two kids for a year wasn't easy, but the family endured hard times with hard work. Instead of wallowing in regret, Gilmar saw dishwashing as a springboard to move forward.

"People told me that I was going backwards," he said. "There were times I felt like I was in the gutter, but I knew that this was the catapult to propel me forward. That's how I kept my spirits up."

After a year, Gilmar moved to the front of the house, rotating as a busser between the Waterfront Depot, Restobar and Spice. Two years later he advanced to bartender and then became a host and food server.

"I had to know three different menus at the same time," he said. "It was physically and mentally intense. We saved every penny and paid and paid and paid. Florence was a huge turning point in our financial recovery."

Finally, after settling their debts, the couple felt ready to purchase a home in 2015. Then a business venture appeared last December with a turnkey opportunity.

"Instead of buying a house, we bought a restaurant," he said.



PHOTO BY CATHERINE ROURKE

Fresh Harvest Cafe owner Gilmar Ortiz worked his way to success from the bottom up with a great education in the dish pit.

"Angela and I feel overwhelmed at how the community has supported us. And we are very thankful to Marianne for her mentorship."

Understanding the ebb and flow of restaurant tides — the feast and famine, the back of the house and the front of the house, the best purveyors and suppliers, the subtle nuances of pleasing customers and the qualities to look for in hiring his crew — provided Gilmar with a crash course in success.

"You have to leave your ego and problems at the door," he said. "You have to believe in yourself even when everything falls apart. It's the toughest business but also the most rewarding."

If you've dined on Bay Street in recent years, chances are that Gilmar showed you to your seat, poured your beverage, took your order, served your meal, removed your

soiled utensils, packed your doggie bag or washed your dirty plate.

Continuing that enthusiastic service, Gilmar still works long days that begin at 5 a.m., and he still rolls up his sleeves in the dish pit when necessary. But now he enjoys a long-held goal: sharing dinnertime with his family.

"Caring for others is the most important thing in my life," he said. "If I can make a good life for my kids, I'll have a good life. I want to inspire people that they can always do better as long as they stay focused on their dream."

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning writer, journalist and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. She may be contacted at CJRditor@gmail.com.

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The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor concerning issues affecting the Florence area and Lane County. Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed.

All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity.

Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Libelous and anonymous letters as well as poetry will not be published. All submissions become the property of Siuslaw News and will not be returned.

Write to: Editor@TheSiuslawNews.com.