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## of Cabbages and Kings



10/21/2010

## Of Cabbages and Kings: Astor Street Opry Co. defies the odds

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By **STEVE FORRESTER** The Daily Astorian

The longevity of the Astor Street Opry Company is rare in the performing arts. Few small town acting troupes endure for more than a quarter century. Astor Street is 27 years old.

My wife and I caught the opening of ASOC's Arsenic and Old Lace last Thursday night. It is a delight.

The transformation of the former Roy's Maytag space at 129 W. Bond St. gives new meaning to the Irving Berlin line that, "There's no business like show business."

When we arrived here 23 years ago, the Opry Co. was performing Shanghaied in Astoria in the lobby of the Astor Hotel, a fabulous venue.

The challenge for performing arts organizations is to separate artistic concerns from business concerns. ASOC has handled this brilliantly by creating two boards. One handles performing issues and the other handles business issues. It was the latter board that raised the money to purchase the building. That is no mean feat. Thursday's event marked the completion of its capital campaign.

While the Grantmakers of Oregon and Southwest Washington were in Astoria last week, I spoke on a panel at the Columbia River Maritime Museum. One grantmaker asked our panel (which also included Sam Johnson of the Maritime Museum and McAndrew Burns of the county Historical Society) how organizations could make their operations and facilities "sustainable."

Sustainable has become the buzzword of our era. The word has different meanings in different settings. A sustainable crop is quite different than a sustainable fish species or a sustainable organization.

My response to the grantmakers was that new blood is what makes nonprofit organizations sustainable. Without a constant infusion of new talent, ideas and money, nonprofits lose energy and die.

Astor Street Opry Company has succeeded in attracting new blood. As we looked around the performing space last Thursday, the faces behind the counter and onstage Guide were different than who you would have seen at the Astor Hotel in the summer of 1988. Holiday Guides Of course, Judy Niland has been the thread that's moved through those 23 years.

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• Columns  
• Letters  
to the Editor

Elections  
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Lifestyle / A&E  
Obituaries  
Closures

Fishing Visitors'  
Guide

Coastal Menu

[home](#) : [opinion](#) : [COLUMNS](#)

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