

A wave of mirth rolls through Manzanita every week

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MANZANITA -- Lunchtime on a Thursday at the coast: The sun is shining, the sky is clearing, ocean waves are lapping the sand. Down Laneda Avenue, the town's main drag, comes a young man with a stuffed flamingo perched on his shoulder.

At the intersection of Third Street, he turns into a courtyard where an older man, a respected architect who designed the Bank of Astoria and several other buildings in this community of 600 residents, steps out of Mother Nature's Natural Foods store. On his head sits a sequined hat with tasseled silk streamers, like something you'd find on a court jester.

Then comes his wife, a community activist and former magazine publisher. She wears a curly clown wig in a lurid rainbow of colors. A bookstore owner rounds the corner next; someone hands her a mullet wig, and she puts it on without hesitation.

A few dozen people have gathered by 12:05, when a woman in a witch's hat begins a countdown. At the count of one, they erupt in laughter.

They giggle. They guffaw. They snort and snicker and squeal. One chuckles. One chortles. They hoot and howl. They double over in hysterics. For three minutes, they crack themselves up.

The sound of their laughter drifts south down Laneda toward the Sea Level Gallery and Sunset Vacation Rentals. It spreads north toward the San Dune Inn and the Manzanita Seafood and Chowder House.

Three tourists passing by on the sidewalk stop to stare.

At precisely 12:08, someone blows a whistle and the laughter winds down. The bookstore owner takes off the mullet wig and returns to her shop. The architect removes his jester's crown. His wife puts away her clown wig.

Andy Norris, a gardener, writer and filmmaker, leaves the stuffed flamingo on his shoulder.

A few weeks ago he was talking to another [Manzanita](#) resident, a masseuse, when they agreed that everyone, whether it's because of the bad economy, the lingering winter or whatever, could use a laugh these days.

Norris had read about "a laugh-in" in Mumbai, India, and figured they could transplant the idea into Manzanita, a community that has always prided itself on healing and creativity.

Norris sent a community e-mail, and the idea spread. Two dozen people showed at the first and enjoyed the respite so much that they came back for the second. They plan to gather weekly at Howell's Square for as long as people come. Townspeople, tourists, anyone in Manzanita at 12:05 p.m. Thursdays -- anyone who could use a laugh -- is invited.

Silly hats are optional.

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