

Fires, business news highlight 2023

January 9, 2024



A massive complex of fires in the fall, businesses closing and opening and other stories highlighted the news in Del Norte County in 2023.

Some were good news, others devastating loss, but together they tell the story of a community that was resilient and strong for another year.

The top stories of 2023 were chosen based on how many times they were viewed on our website, www.triplicate.com.

1 – Smith River Complex of fires

In late September and early October, a series of fires broke out in Del Norte County. When the fires grew together, the combined blazes became known as the Smith River Complex of fires.

For weeks, the fires ravaged Del Norte County, spewing smoke over almost the entire county, causing electricity to be shut off in Crescent City and many other places and burning thousands of acres of land, both private and public.

Hundreds and hundreds of firefighters from throughout the nation converged to battle the blazes, which caused havoc for weeks before finally being controlled.

Throughout the natural disaster, the community rallied together to support those who were evacuated, the firefighters and those at greatest risk due to the power being shut off.

2 – Walgreens to close, Chipotle to open

Two major businesses announced opposite plans in Crescent City, and the two stories were among the most viewed in the year. Early in the year, Walgreens announced it was closing its store in Crescent City. The company did not cite a reason, but did make plans to move its pharmacy files to Safeway.

Just days after Walgreens closed, the Chipotle Mexican Grill announced it was opening a restaurant in the city. The nationwide chain began construction late in the year at its new location, where the two sections of Highway 101 meet.

3 – Crescent City loses a beautiful shining star

On the last day of May, 19-year-old Kirsten Jean King was trying to turn onto Highway 101 when her vehicle was hit by a logging truck and she later died from her injuries at the hospital.

Her death was a shock to Crescent City, as the community mourned the loss of a young woman who moved to Crescent City with plans to become a nurse.

4 – New ownership of award-winning brewery

In March, news broke that the popular Port'O Pints Brewing company had new owners after Rick and Carol White sold the brewery to Dr. John Kirk and his wife Cynthia Parenteau.

The new owners said they hoped to keep the traditional beer that drew crowds while expanding the kitchen and food services.

Port'O Pints has been a huge success in Crescent City as the brewery has been bestowed with 89 international and national awards of excellence.

5 – Fashion Blacksmith wins lawsuit against harbor district

Over the summer, news broke that a long-simmering dispute between Fashion Blacksmith and the Crescent City Harbor District had been decided in arbitration with the arbitrator ruling in favor of Fashion Blacksmith.

When the courts accepted the decision, the harbor district was hit with a ruling saying it must pay almost \$2 million along with requirements to make improvements to the building and dredge the inner harbor.

6 – Tragedy narrowly avoided on the jetty

In November, the King Tides brought big crowds out to watch the water, but two visitors almost faced tragedy when they decided to avoid warning signs and venture out on to the jetty.

13-year-old T.J. and his mother Shalice Nielson of Utah were hit by the waves and pushed off the jetty. Quick action by local paramedic Trevor Mortenson saved the day, but the narrow escape served as another warning of the danger of being on the jetty.

7 – Assessor sues Del Norte County

In April, news broke that Del Norte County Assessor Jennifer Perry had filed a lawsuit against the county. The suit came after the Del Norte Assessment Appeals Board agreed to lower the property value of a parcel that was improved to build housing for Sutter Coast Hospital.

After Perry set an assessed value of the property, the AAB agreed to lower the value, which led to the lawsuit.

8 – Del Norte murder suspect apprehended

In October, a member of the Del Norte County Sheriff's Office was found murdered, which began a manhunt for a suspect. The suspect, her estranged boyfriend Daniel James Walter, went on the run.

He was captured shortly after the murder after the sheriff's office went online and shared photos of the suspect.

9 – Abandoned carts foul Crescent City

In March, a story was released showcasing the ongoing problem of abandoned shopping carts being dumped throughout Crescent City.

Retired paramedic Mario Westphal and his wife Jeannie donated a lot of their time to collect the carts and return them to the proper stores.

10 – Nuisance building finally comes down

For years, an abandoned medical center on A Street had been a blight on the community. Over the summer, the building was finally torn down after the county and a court receiver worked to remove it.

The building was successfully removed, leaving an empty lot that can be developed in the future.