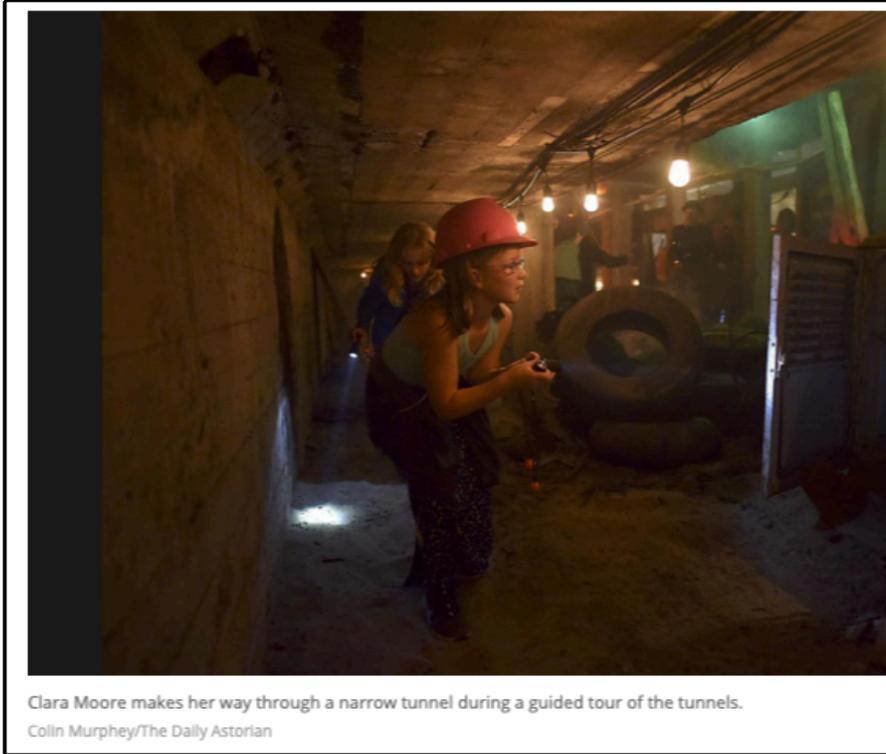


Tours take Astoria's history underground



Clara Moore makes her way through a narrow tunnel during a guided tour of the tunnels.
Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

A group makes their way through the gate of a cyclone fence to go underneath the sidewalk on Marine Drive, aching to see the underbelly of Astoria.

Tour guide Chad Gallup gave them a peek into the dark, gravel-lined passageway ending in a makeshift squatters camp piled with wood

and half-buried tires, where some in the city used to lay their heads at night.

A tour on Saturday provided a preview of the new self-guided Underground Astoria Tours set to debut in full by Jeff Daly, a retired videographer and Astoria native known for his eccentric projects (Glam Tram, JoyTrain, backwards Clown Car, IlluminArt Astoria) highlighting quirky points of the city's history.

Three years ago, Daly leased a subterranean garage at the corner of 11th Street and Marine Drive to use as his personal workshop. He received constant inquiries from people anxious to explore the city's extensive underground network of tunnels and chairwalls, built in the early 20th century to elevate downtown above the Columbia River tidal flats, he said. "We all used to go here as kids," Daly said. "The entire underground was our playground."



Daly's tours start underneath the sidewalk of Marine Drive and meander along a rough gravel path past buried tires, car parts and other detritus left behind through the years. He and his fellow guides tell visitors about the city's history, such as the fires that burned much of downtown in the 1920s and the concrete underbelly keeping downtown above water. Off to the sides are smaller tunnels, blocked by gates, leading to the city's extensive underground chairwall network lined with live electrical lines, gas pipes and other dangers. Jeff Harrington, the city's public works director, said the city's only concern was that Daly restrict the tour to his space.

After touring over 2000 guests in 2019, Daly and Gallup, Ray Merritt and Emily Rivera are constantly testing new ideas out on select groups and evolving the experience based on people's interests with their introduction of *self-guided covid respectful tours now available to anyone, a single, couple and private tours for groups following the current corona virus safety rules.*

"When we finally got people down here, the dynamics of it changed, because we were able to play off their energy and their responses," Daly said. "Nobody's in charge of what we tell people or don't tell people, as long as it's the truth, to the best of our ability. So we can tell them whatever we want. This is our tour, and we want them to have fun. That's the goal."

The tour passes a re-created underground squatter's wall and touches on quirky characters from the city's past. One is Jack the Cat, who Daly described as an African-American former Navy submariner who used to give \$1 shoe shines underground below a former barber shop. "He never went above," Daly said. "This guy lived underground and didn't experience sunrise or sunsets for nine years."

The tour stops by an exhibit on the Astoria Clowns, a former civic group that included Daly's father. It snakes around Daly's workshop under the sidewalk on 11th Street to hear stories of the shanghaiing of unsuspecting sailors onto ships.

A tour guide will set you up with a playback recorder, will give you an introduction to the underground and then you are off on your own, in your own private space doing your own private tour. And then a tour guide will meet you at the end to give you a wrap-up and answer any questions. The charge is \$15 a person with discounts for kids, pre-teenager. The tour time is about 45 minutes.