



WASHINGTON'S WORKING PORT

AAPA 2017 COMMUNICATION AWARDS

CATEGORY: OVERALL CAMPAIGN

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Port of Longview assumed ownership of a local park and boat launch from the county, which was financially unable to maintain the facility. What was once a sparkling community asset was turned over to the Port of Longview as a dilapidated, rundown park best known for illegal activity after dark.

Willow Grove Park and Boat Launch is situated directly on the Columbia River, which links the Port of Longview to trading partners around the Pacific Rim. The Port's newly acquired asset was now an opportunity to educate the community on the value of the Port and generate goodwill toward the community by providing enjoyable waterfront access.

After assuming ownership, the Port immediately began addressing health and safety issues – including dredging the boat launch, which posed significant threats to boaters. The Port planned dredging the boat launch for the same “in water work window” as its commercial dock front dredging. Because there was only one dredge contractor working in the river in 2016, and with boat launch the last of multiple facilities along the river to dredge, we were unable to solidify dates to close the launch for dredging – but forced to be ready and wait for the contractor's notice of launch closure just days prior to closing.

1. WHAT ARE/WERE THE ENTRY'S SPECIFIC COMMUNICATIONS CHALLENGES OR OPPORTUNITIES?

After the Port of Longview inherited Willow Grove Park, it became clear that the boat launch desperately needed maintenance for it to be considered safe and user friendly. With high volumes of daily usage, the Boat Launch had accumulated 2-9 feet of dredge material on its river bottom, causing congestion and hang ups for fishermen launching there. It became a top priority to dredge the Boat Launch basin, and repair the dock so that boat launch users could safely access and use the Launch. To complete dredging and repairs, Willow Grove Boat Launch needed to be closed for seven to ten days to the public. Upon news of the closure, Port staff recognized multiple opportunities:

1. Fulfilling the Port's mission of enhancing public access to waterfront recreation
2. Create a safer and more user-friendly boat launch for the citizens of Cowlitz County to use
3. Opportunity to educate the community on the value of the Port and generate goodwill toward the community by providing enjoyable waterfront access

With dredging already taking place at the Port's waterfront, and due to the high volume of use the boat launch was currently receiving, it became evident that we had several challenges to address throughout the campaign:

1. Find the most appropriate avenue of reaching our primary market
2. The dates in which the Boat Launch would be dredged were tentative, due to other dredge work being done at the Port.
3. Potential negative perception of Port due to Boat Launch closure.

2. HOW DOES THE COMMUNICATION USED IN THE ENTRY COMPLEMENT THE ORGANIZATION'S OVERALL MISSION?

One aspect of the Port of Longview's mission is to "enhance public access to waterfront recreation."

The *Look Before you Launch* campaign creates a safe place where citizens of the Port District can access the Columbia River for fishing and other recreational purposes. The campaign not only allows citizens safe access to the waterfront, but also offers information about alternative boat launch locations and access points to the river that are available for public use.

This campaign complements the Port's mission by enhancing public access to waterfront recreation and improving an already established, yet dilapidated, boat launch. *Look Before You Launch* informs members of the public of alternative waterfront access options that they may not have been aware of prior to the campaign and provides insight on why dredging waterfront areas is important to the community.

3. WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMPONENTS USED FOR THIS ENTRY?

The goal of the *Look Before You Launch* campaign was to communicate the upcoming closure of the Willow Grove Boat Launch to deter use and encourage users to check status of dredging prior to attempting to use the launch during a specified time period.

To best achieve our goal, we established four key objectives that we could implement leading up to, and throughout the boat launch closure.

Objective 1: Minimize the number of people denied launch access during the boat launch closure.

Objective 2: Generate community goodwill by performing long-overdue maintenance on a community asset.

Objective 3: Communicate that health and safety of WGBL patrons is a top priority at the Port of Longview.

The primary audience is recreational boaters and fishermen, sport fishermen and guides. Dredging the Willow Grove Boat Launch directly impacts these individuals, and the temporary closure could potentially have serious impacts on their daily and work lives. Our campaign was specifically designed to reach the fishermen and guides who use the Boat Launch and to accommodate them during the closure.

We found that our secondary audience, local sporting good and outdoor stores and the local media, positively influenced and assisted in reach our primary audience. Many individuals that fell into our primary audience frequently read the local newspaper and listened to our local radio station. This allowed us to further push our message to our primary audience, as well as reach other individuals who may be impacted by the boat launch closure, such as small outdoor businesses. By spreading our message to these audiences, as well as our primary audience, we felt we could best reach our overall goal and deter use of the Boat Launch during dredging.

4. WHAT ACTIONS WERE TAKEN AND WHAT COMMUNICATION OUTPUTS WERE EMPLOYED IN THIS ENTRY?

We employed multiple strategies to ensure that our campaign was as thorough as possible and reached our entire audience multiple times.

Strategy 1: Establish a *Look Before You Launch* campaign

Strategy 2: Proactively communicate the upcoming closure beginning November 1st

Strategy 3: Provide multiple resources for audience to check status of dredging/closure

Strategy 4: Communicate closure through already established outlets used by boaters

We chose these strategies because we knew that our campaign needed to be flexible due to our fluctuating dates leading up to the dredging. By creating a campaign that could be easily shared across a variety of platforms, we were able to constantly update our messaging. We proactively engaged our audience in the weeks leading up to the actual closure to create awareness that the boat launch would close and to allow boat launch users to plan accordingly. Instead of re-inventing the wheel and creating a new forum for boat launch users to find Willow Grove information, we were able to go to the boaters directly with the information of the closure and keep them updated and informed throughout the entire dredging process.

Look Before You Launch tactics:

1. Create a fishing style logo and branded title
2. Design and print rack cards to distribute to specific community businesses
3. Design large posters to be placed at community boat launches and businesses
4. Create a social media campaign to inform Facebook users of closure
5. Design strip ads with *Look Before You Launch* tagline to distribute to local newspaper
6. Utilize "Willow Grove Community Information Line" to inform and update public
7. Distribute press release to local media outlets
8. Work with local fishing associations to distribute closure messaging to members
9. Create closure notice on Port of Longview website
10. Work with local radio to share closure messaging and dates

Our timeline consisted of weekly checks on a variety of aspects of our campaign starting the week of October 24th, and was completed the week of December 12th.

Planning of this campaign began as soon as dredging of the boat launch was confirmed in October, and a campaign tag line, graphics and material was created. The material ranged from rack cards for local businesses, large posters to be displayed at the Boat Launch, local businesses and other boat launches in the area, strip ads to be run three time per week in the local newspaper, and a script was prepared to be recorded on the local radio station, as well as on our Willow Grove Community Information phone line. These scripts were updated weekly as new information about dredging became available, and dates were firmed up.

Once all of the materials were developed and produced, a list of local outdoor businesses was created and contacted, and rack cards and posters were distributed. Throughout the campaign, weekly checks were made to ensure that rack cards were still available and that posters were displayed. Additionally, a press release

was distributed to local media outlets, forming the public of the upcoming Boat Launch closure and approximate dates of closure. Once dates were firmly established, a second press release was distributed to the same outlets.

A social media campaign was launched to reach online boat launch users, including graphics and specific messaging informing audiences of the closure and providing other resources for further information. These posts were not only shared on the Port of Longview's Facebook page, but also to other Facebook pages that were specifically designated for fishermen and fishing tour groups. These posts were shared three times a week and comments and questions regarding dredging were responded to within 24 hours.

The Port of Longview's website was also updated twice a week with the most up to date information regarding boat launch closure, dredging and contact information.

The Communications Associate and Communications Coordinator were each assigned various local businesses to distribute rack cards and posters ahead of the closure to create awareness, as well as answer public questions as they came into the Port.

The Communications Coordinator was also tasked with creating and providing the graphics and logo for the campaign, posting updates to the Port's Facebook page and other fishing and recreational Facebook pages, and updated the Port website with the latest closure updates.

The Communications Associate was tasked with maintaining steady contact with the local news outlets, providing any updates and changes as the dredging and maintenance happened. Additionally, the Communications Associate frequently checked local businesses to replenish rack cards and posters, and received updates from park staff and the maintenance crew regarding civilian disturbances and progress. The Director of External Affairs oversaw and approved graphics, timelines, messaging and plans used during this campaign and provided feedback and instruction through each step in the creation and implementation of the campaign.

5. WHAT WERE THE COMMUNICATIONS OUTCOMES FROM THIS ENTRY AND WHAT EVALUATION METHODS WERE USED TO ASSESS THEM?

Throughout our *Look Before You Launch* campaign, we were able to reach nearly 10,000 individuals via social media. This accumulated nearly 200 likes and 23 shares from individuals all of the state of Washington.

Through observation and discussion with employees performing the maintenance at Willow Grove Boat Launch, we were able to gather that only two individuals attempted to use the Boat Launch during Launch closure. As phone calls and messages were received throughout the campaign, we were able to determine that our public service announcements and Facebook posts were reaching our desired audience and that they were interested in learning more about dredging, maintenance, and alternative sites for launching.

Overall, feedback and public perception of the Boat Launch dredging was positive. Park patrons were able to see a clear improvement to the Boat Launch, as up to 9 feet of dredge material was removed in the most problematic areas of the Boat Launch Basin. This glaring improvement demonstrated that the Port values the local community's ability to have access to, and enjoy, waterfront property.

“LOOK BEFORE YOU LAUNCH” CAMPAIGN LOGO, RACK CARD + NEWSPAPER AD

UPCOMING WILLOW GROVE LAUNCH CLOSURE



LOOK



BEFORE YOU LAUNCH

WILLOW GROVE BOAT LAUNCH
MAINTENANCE DREDGING CLOSURE

**WILLOW GROVE BOAT LAUNCH
WILL BE CLOSED FROM
NOVEMBER 28 TO DECEMBER 2**

As part of the Port of Longview's ongoing effort to improve safety and usability of the boat launch, maintenance dredging will take place between the dates of November 28th and December 2nd.

The nearest boat launch is the Rainier Boat Launch located across the Lewis and Clark bridge.



WASHINGTON'S WORKING PORT



LOOK



BEFORE YOU LAUNCH

**WILLOW GROVE BOAT LAUNCH DREDGING
“LOOK BEFORE YOU LAUNCH” NOV. 28-DEC. 2**

Call our hotline for more info: (360) 703-0270, www.PORTOFLONGVIEW.COM, or follow us on **FACEBOOK**