

PHILOSOPHICAL FORUM

Enlightenment returns with modern gr

BY JEFFREY DURHAM
For the News-Times

YACHATS – When a small group of people gather to talk, it is astonishing how many subjects, thoughts and views fly by in just two hours. And at the Philosophical Forum held here every other Sunday, name-calling or vicious arguments are not on the agenda.

The founder and calm moderator of the forum – Maxine Sheets-Johnstone – runs the proceedings with a light touch, although she must occasionally steer the procession back to the stated main topic.

“We like the free exchange of respectful, civil discussion,” said forum participant Sandra Gangle, whose husband Gene also attends. “It is reminiscent of after-dinner discussions we remember with college and grad-school friends many years ago.”

Sheets-Johnstone launched the forum in Yachats in 2012. First, it was held at the Yachats Commons, but in 2014 they moved to the home shared by her and her husband, Albert Johnstone. They have faithfully welcomed regular and new faces ever since — the key word being “welcomed.”

“We always welcome new



Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, right, founder and moderator of the philosophical forum, and Albert Johnstone during the Sunday, Aug. 8 meeting of the group. (Photo by Jeffrey Durham)

people. It gives us a broader perspective,” said Sheets-Johnstone. “We don’t really get many from the conserva-

tive point of view. We have tried. It’s too bad, with this being an open discussion.”

The Philosophical Forum is reminiscent of the French salons and English coffeehouses during the Enlightenment period of the 18th century. Women had a central role in those proceedings, hosting the authors, intellectuals and grandees of the time and helping to orchestrate smooth discussions. Many of the most famous scholars, authors, philosophers and artists of the time took part.

Participants in the Yachats forum are not aristocratic grandees as in that age, but they do enjoy this outlet to explore subjects in a friendly atmosphere. Many drive from Newport, Waldport, Denoe Bay, Seal Rock and

Eugene to talk about literally anything under the sun, including probably the sun itself.

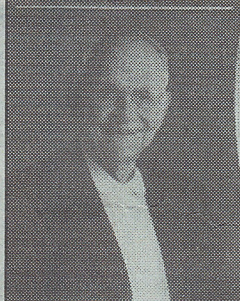
Some past forum topics include:

- What does it mean to be moral and what motivates immorality?
- The ways we describe ourselves, such as “I am,” “I am an American,” “I am tired,” “I am in love,” and “I am out of butter.”
- Capitalism: Its advantages and disadvantages.
- Are values you hold universal values or simply personal commitments or both?

Other subjects in just the past three years included emotions, forgiveness, personal philosophy of life, trust, pacifism and the use of force, and death.

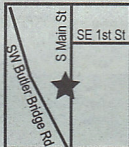
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