

Your Independent Hometown Award-winning Newspaper

LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

VOL. 16 • NO. 45

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024

www.laconnerweeklynews.com \$1.25

Let's dance, shall we?



LET IT BE A DANCE – What a treat, for dad to dance with his daughter. That is what Jim Montgomery did on Valentine's Day, taking Amaya in hand, as he has done for decades. This year they twirled at the La Conner Retirement Inn. Story page 5.

– Photo by Ken Sten

Anacortes plans events center to replace Port's Transit Shed

By Judy Booth

The closure of the Transit Shed by the Port of Anacortes at the end of 2023 left this event-centered, artistic, music loving, car-show stopping town without a large-scale program venue.

Anacortes City Councilmembers Ryan Walters, Christine Cleland-McGrath and Bruce McDougall proposed building a new event center at R Avenue and Ninth Street south of the dog park in a Feb 3 memorandum to the city council, mayor, city staff and Port of Anacortes commissioners.

"We envision building a marine/industrial aesthetic, potentially similar to the Cannery Building, to attempt to capture some of the rustic charm that embodied the Transit Shed," said Walters.

The 7,400-square-foot building's waterfront location will support the downtown core, be capable of seating 400 people, have a kitchen for outside caterers, storage for tables and chairs, a portable stage, dance floor and a plaza.

Construction funding could be by the City through lodging tax revenue. The City has a fund balance of \$1.5 million that can be tapped. State law allows municipalities to support "operations and capital expenditures

of tourism-related facilities."

Expecting building costs to be around \$6 million, the balance could be made up in bond revenue and grants from the state's Recreation and Conservation Office. Assuming a 4.5% interest rate on a general obligation bond with a 20-year term, the City could take out a \$4.5 million bond with annual payments of \$345,000 – well below its average annual lodging tax revenue of about \$600,000, the memorandum states.

Walters noted, "Several Anacortes City and Port staff – though not a quorum that can make decisions – agreed to pursue the next step in replacing the Transit Shed by drafting an Interlocal Agreement in 60 days or so – doing a conceptual design for 400-seated capacity space, square footage based on the capacity, the other components that we think we might need – kitchen, storage. I have drafted that Interlocal Agreement. I've looked it over with the Port and have sent it to our legal counsel and we are going to talk about it at our next Port and City liaison committee meeting Feb. 23.

"I expect that we will agree. We will schedule a joint Port and City meeting, include everybody where we can debate the agreement, take com-

ments and roll out to the public. That would kick off that 60-day period working with the consultant and get a budget number."

The memo lists numerous benefits. Anacortes will again have an event center. The location provides parking while still separated from residential neighborhoods. It benefits the RV park. The revenue comes from existing lodging tax, grants and bonds. Local dollars stay local.

The Port will own the center and manage it.

At its Feb. 12 Council meeting, Walters emphasized the next step is to settle on a process for conceptual design and move the Interlocal Agreement to the City Council and Port for approval.

"Our concept is to fast track the process to be able to get to a place where we could have an event center near term, but also do it in a methodical fashion so that the first Interlocal would commit very little money and it would be only conceptual design assuming we would like the outcome of that process. We would propose a second Interlocal and – off to the races. Next meeting is Feb. 23 so we can hash out more terms," said Walters.

Public participation will be included, said Councilmember T.J. Fantini.

Port hikes moorage at marina

By Ken Sten

Boaters and campers tying up their boats or parking their RVs at the La Conner Marina will be paying 5% and 10% more starting in April. Port of Skagit Commissioners passed a resolution updating Marina moorage fees and "miscellaneous charges" at their Feb. 6 meeting. Staff recommended the increase. Director of Facilities and Marina Operations Brady Rowe reported it was based on a survey of moorage rates from the Ports of Everett, Anacortes, Bellingham, and the Oak Harbor Marina and considered the federal consumer price index.

The Port has annually raised rates to stay current with marinas regionally, with an 8% increase in 2023 after a 6% increase in 2022. Director of Communications Linda Tyler observed, "in most recent years rates have been increasing." Staff matched the increase to the fees raised at the Port's Burlington airport this year.

The marina has six sets of slips, ranging in size from 26 feet to 50 feet for covered docks and from 30 feet to 60 feet for open slips. The monthly 26 foot covered space increases to \$335 from \$318. The 50 foot covered dock is \$1022, up from \$970 monthly. The monthly open 30 foot dock will be \$340, up from \$323 and the monthly 60 foot open slip becomes \$902, from \$859.

The April-September nightly rates at the RV park increase to \$51, from \$46 for back-in sites. Off season rates become \$40, from \$36 for those sites.

Unchanged are guest moorage and parking rates.

Rate changes take effect April 1. Tenants paying in advance for the year gain a 5% discount. They will be notified 30 days ahead of the changes.

2 Mavrik ferries done, 2 more to go

By Anne Basye

The high-speed passenger ferry MV Delphinus has joined the San Francisco Bay Ferry system after breezing through builder trials and two weeks of sea trials that tested speed, endurance and maneuverability in different marine conditions.

The vessel left La Conner on Friday, Feb. 10 and arrived in San Francisco at 9 a.m. Feb. 12. It has been "accepted" by its new owner, Water Emergency Transportation Authority, the operator of the ferry fleet, and will be christened in early March.

The trip down was delayed from Jan. 14, first canceled by a pineapple express and heavy oceans. Continued strong coastal storm systems scratched another January and a Feb. 4 departure.

MV Delphinus is the second of four Dorado-class ferries Mavrik Marine is building for WETA. Each one carries 320 passengers and operates at 32 knots.

The hull and superstructure of the third ferry

(continued on page 8)

Journalist Tim Egan to talk libraries, politics at Lincoln Theatre

By Judy Booth

Feisty National Book Award winner Timothy Egan writes about some of the most pressing issues of American life. He speaks at the Lincoln Theatre March 2 to raise funds for the new Mount Vernon library.

Egan, a Pacific Northwest native, New York Times correspondent and best-selling author, will share his views on the importance of libraries.

In an email last week, Egan responded, "Importance of libraries? Where do I start? They're gateways to citizenship for thousands of people learning about our laws, our customs, our governing documents, our cul-

ture, what makes us tick. They're fire starters for the brain – from finding out about your ancestors to finding a recipe that warms a cold Sunday afternoon to stumbling on a poem or portrait. They're warehouses for wonder. They're the reason that Andrew Carnegie, when he decided to give away his fortune more than a hundred years ago, decided to build libraries – and now those wonderful monuments are everywhere, especially in underserved areas."

Writer Tom Robbins had this to say about Egan's first book "The Good Rain: Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest." "When it comes to this spectacularly mildewed

corner of the American linoleum, Timothy Egan gets it right. Then he fords another rain puddle, throws another clam on the fire and gets it right again."

Egan won a National Book Award in 2006 for "The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl." Ken Burns based a documentary series on it.

The 2023 title "A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over America and the Woman Who Stopped Them" is itself the shortest book review and parallels the MAGA movement.

A spiritual crisis in 2017 triggered partly by his dwindling

Catholic faith challenged Egan to a pilgrimage of over 1,200 miles across the Via Francigena while practicing deep-walking – meditating while walking.

One foot after another, Egan plodded along this medieval trail, starting in Canterbury in England, shuffled through searing heat in France, hiked over mountain tops, endured blizzards and injuries and on to Rome. For comparison, the better-known Camino de Santiago in Spain is 500 miles long. In "A Pilgrimage to Eternity," the fruit of this endeavor, he wrote he hoped to find "a stiff shot of no-bullshit spirituality."

"I found that mindful walking, even with the distraction of

blisters, sore muscles and feral French dogs, was a great way to force my thinking into the spiritual realm," he noted.

Instead of that stiff shot, he found, "amazement and surprise in ways... never allowed before."

Asked about the country's present dysfunction, he replied: "Future of democracy? I'm very, very worried, more so than I ever have been and I'm an optimist by nature. Why? The primary reason is misinformation, which has spread far and deep through social media and has allowed many mistruths and much hateful bile, to fester. We need to teach media literacy in high school, so

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Editorial —

Build a bridge to the future

The one project and institution that, indisputably, all people in our community and on both sides of the channel rallied around and supported with time, ongoing work and money, was the building of the La Conner Swinomish Library. That became a dream realized over many years. It is now a reality being shaped into our future hopes. One step, one day, one hour reached for after another brought us to its opening in 2022. Now with that base built, more good deeds will be realized, continuously, on into the future.

The library's vision may be "a place of discovery, connection and inspiration for all in our diverse community." That is repeated throughout its December newsletter.

The library newsletter is titled, "Bridge to the Future." That offer a vision, a stretch, rather than a specific destination. Look to Anacortes and see the hard work of city Councilmember Ryan Walters. He responded — stretching — to the Port of Anacortes closing the much needed, used and loved iconic Transit Shed by taking the initiative and crafting specific plans for an events center building on the waterfront, strategically placed south of the Train Depot and the W.T. Preston on R Avenue. Read Judy Booth's page 1 story for more.

Two months after losing the Transit Shed, Walters has a draft agreement between the City and its Port. That is reaching toward Anacortes' sustainable future, serving the needs and hopes of its citizens and its tourist economy, which that city very much has. Note the fine fit with its state designation as a Creative District, which opens the doors to future funding.

Anacortes is a city of 18,000 with a much bigger budget and departments with full-time staffing to plan and execute projects. Still, La Conner cannot hide behind its size as a town of less than 1,000 residents. The town's government, staff and elected officials alike, do a great job of maintaining the present moment, striping streets, painting curbs and responding to generational flooding. But figuring out how to, well, bridge, to the future? Something is missing.

It is almost two years since Port of Skagit staff and consultants presented concepts for developing 13 acres at the La Conner Marina. That Port's staff are at the Burlington airport, not headquartered here. Their staff and commissioners are moving at the glacial pace of an institution. While there was a summer 2023 meeting between Port and Town officials, our side is not publicly advocating for the difficult sustainable future needed. Community and economic development on that site offers the promise of public channel access, working-class housing, recreation, entertainment, jobs and the incredibly hard decision to build an east-west point of entry road across farmland for a northern gateway to La Conner-Whitney Road.

That is a near literal bridge to the future. If you build it they will come is the cliché. But before that, a century ago, Carl Sandburg wrote in a poem, "nothing exists but first a dream." Small dreams, little vision, daily maintenance keeps us stuck in a status quo present moment.

But, challenged Eleanor Roosevelt, "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." That is where we, and our children and grandchildren will all live, in the future. Our brave dreaming and hard work will make it a reality.

See its manifestation in our library. Watch Anacortes create the dream they need for themselves.

And here?

— Ken Stern

La Conner could shine with art-themed energy infrastructure

By Greg Whiting

Viewing parts of the electric grid, such as transmission towers and substations as public art is actually a decades old concept. The colored glass used in high-rise buildings since the early 1960s isn't just for aesthetics. That technology was initially developed to help control the heat in the buildings.

The use of energy systems in art isn't limited to very large structures like high-rises and transmission towers. Smaller pieces of energy infrastructure are visible to the public and offer surfaces on which art can be created and readily displayed.

By consistently making use of that fact, a community like La Conner could become a leader in public energy art. The town, the Chamber of Commerce, local galleries and individual artists could work together to create guidelines and incentives to encourage artistic uses of innovative energy systems. This concept encourages using infrastructure to create an art theme, similar to the way in which Leavenworth has consistently used its infrastructure to create a Bavarian village theme.

Public electric vehicle



charging stations don't have to be simple aluminum bollards. Posts for Level 2 chargers, and the larger boxes that cover Level 3 chargers, can be painted with motifs reflecting local culture and history. They could also be used as structures to support sculptures.

Modern light-emitting diodes, low-cost rechargeable batteries, and solar panels (or other sources of renewable energy capable of being installed without a grid connection) can be combined to create three-dimensional art. Simple kinetic sculptures, with moving and/or lit parts, can be made and installed without having to hook the sculptures up to grid electricity.

That particular group of technologies can also be integrated into functional, artistic public lighting structures. Although virtually any theme can be used, a concept that seems to be gaining

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Your democracy does work

By Rep. Dave Paul

Here's an inside look at how your democracy works in Olympia.

We just passed the deadline for bills to make it out of the House of Origin, meaning House bills needed to pass the House and Senate bills had to get voted out of the Senate.

That meant we spent all day debating bills for about a week. More than once, we voted until about 2 a.m.

I'm proud to report that we actually agree far more often than we disagree. Of the 270 bills we passed this year in the House, 76% received strong bipartisan support and 54% were passed unanimously. Those agreements simply don't make the front page of the paper.

Now, we're back in committees, considering all the bills the Senate passed. Across the rotunda, senators are doing the same thing with our House bills.

Bills I introduced that passed the House include:

Capping the costs of inhalers and epi-pens (House Bill 1979): Many people rely on inhalers for asthma and epinephrine injectors for deadly allergies. It's more common than you think, and these two medical devices have become very expensive when the costs to produce them are cheap.

To give people a break, my legislation caps the cost of these devices at \$35. It matches the cap



we placed on insulin last year.

Portable orders for life-sustaining treatment (House Bill 2166): People, often with serious health conditions, may decide to limit aggressive care options or elect to not receive CPR. This is a difficult decision made with their doctor, and we should respect that. Right now, it's hard for those wishes to be known outside of hospitals. This legislation helps paramedics and EMTs recognize medical jewelry linked to these directives and creates a statewide database of people who have them.

Dual Credit (House Bill 1146): It's easier than ever for students to earn college and high-school credit at the same time, but few families know about all their options. This law requires public schools to make students and their families aware of dual enrollment programs.

Ferries: Ferries are essential lifelines for our region. I've worked hard to expand programs to recruit and train new ferry staff, while also protecting the preservation and construction

budgets for ferries.

What's next?

There's a small window of time for the House to consider policy bills from the Senate and for the Senate to pass our bills out of committee and their floor.

The House and the Senate will release their operating, transportation and capital construction budgets soon.

Much of the rest of this session revolves around negotiating differences between those budgets and disagreements to any changes made to bills sent to the other chamber.

I'll keep you informed when those budget proposals get released and tell you about major actions on issues as we near the end of the 2024 session.

As always, it is an honor to serve as your representative, and I encourage you to contact me with your ideas, stories or comments.

Rep. Dave Paul lives in Oak Harbor. He's Deputy Floor Leader and Vice Chair of the House Transportation Committee.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Response to Sen. Muzall's column

The Oxford English dictionary defines progressivism as "advocacy of progress, reform, change or innovation." I think all of us can agree that these efforts are vital to our society if it is to succeed as time and circumstance proceed and change. Sen. Muzall's ("The problem with Progressivism," Feb. 7, Weekly New) characterization of progressivism is in most part purposely crafted to obscure and demonize those citizens that are attempting to identify and correct the social problems facing our country today.

Progressives don't seek to cast off the valuable lessons of the past but rather to embrace them and use them as a foundation to improve the lives of every member of society. Conversely, progressives do not want to keep making the same costly mistakes or to maintain outdated policies that, at least in part, have failed to promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

Please listen. There is little doubt that most Washingtonians agree behavioral health and substance abuse are major problems for us all; however the reality is

that these are also national problems manifesting themselves in all 50 states, not just Washington. The fact is there are many states run by conservatives that are in no better shape than we are. Some are in markedly worse situations.

The only way forward to resolve these social maladies is for everyone involved to work together. This becomes difficult when some of the participants paint a whole group of citizens with such a broad brush of negativity that it creates unnecessary divisiveness.

Not all policies work for all the people all the time in all the states. However, we have to do the best we can within the democratically created political structure of Washington. This is where true constructive dialogue becomes critical. Or, one could move to Tennessee instead.

Jack Jones
La Conner

The other side of the Boldt story

On Feb 13, 2024, the Skagit Valley Herald printed a story titled "Effects of the Boldt Decision Felt 50 Years Later," showing the same bias Judge Boldt had to begin with in 1974. Article 5 of the 1855 Point

Elliott Treaty had one sentence dealing with fishing rights for Indians. There are twenty-six words in that sentence. The Herald chose to print the first 13 words which states "Tribes reserved the right to fish at usual and accustomed grounds and stations" The last eight words the Herald wouldn't print say, "... in common with all citizens of the Territory."

The dictionary says, "in common" means "equal," not one percent of the populace gets 50 percent of the resource. If the writer of the treaty wanted the tribes to have half of anything, they would have said so. The present quota for the tribes on the Skagit River for steelhead is 261 fish. The present quota for the rest of the citizens is zero and if you get caught trying to keep one to eat, the state will confiscate your gear, boat, truck and everything else used in catching it.

That's the effect of the Boldt Decision 50 years later.
Denny Sather
Pleasant Ridge

(The first 26 words of the treaty's Article 5 are: "The right of taking fish at usual and accustomed grounds and stations is further secured to said Indians in common with all citizens of the Territory." — ed.)

Take state's salmon recovery grant survey soon

The Washington state Department of Commerce seeks responses through a 10 questions survey on a new Salmon Grant Program to advance salmon recovery efforts across the state.

Funds from the state's Climate Commitment Act are launching a new grant program that incorporates salmon recovery efforts into local planning efforts. As Commerce develops this new program it requests input

to incorporate into the design and implementation of the grant program.

As cities, counties, and tribes update their plans and regulations, the new grant program will provide support to incorporate ecosystem protection, water quality improvement, enhancement of salmon habitat and environmental justice into their planning efforts.

Residents' responses are

important for Commerce to gather information about salmon recovery needs.

The Salmon Recovery Grant Survey is a tool for this effort: app.smartsheet.com/b/form/915b03ca390d-48178837b8e7d98f7281

The survey closes at 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 29.

For more information, email Angela Sanfilippo at angela.sanfilippo@commerce.wa.gov.

La Conner Weekly News

An adjudicated Skagit County Newspaper. Published every Wednesday in La Conner, WA

Subscriptions

- Skagit County Print & Online: \$60
- Out of County Print & Online: \$75
- Online only: \$60



Member of Washington Newspaper Publishers Association

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Ken Stern, Publisher & Editor

editor@laconnernews.com

Continuing the tradition of weekly publishing in La Conner since 1878

The Weekly News sits on the original homelands of the Coastal Salish peoples

La Conner News Publishing Co., LLC

119 N. Third St., La Conner, WA 98257
USPS 363-550

360-466-3315 • Fax: 360-466-1195

www.laconnerweeklynews.com

Postmaster:

Send change of address to:

La Conner Weekly News

PO Box 1465, La Conner, WA 98257

Bill Reynolds, News Editor
news@laconnernews.com

Rhonda Hundertmark, Design and Layout Editor
production@laconnernews.com

Kurt Batdorf, Production Manager
production@laconnernews.com

Eileen Engelstad, Proofreader
Rick Shorten, Special Projects

Contributors:

Anne Basye, Judy Booth, Don Coyote, Mel Damski, Kylee Fortygin, Janna Gage, Bob Hamblin, Madoc Hiller, Ollie Iversen, Bobbi Krebs-McMullen, Patricia Paul, Aven Sowards, Claire Swedberg, Sarah Walls, Adam Wright-McIntosh

LETTER POLICY

Please write! Letters up to 350 words are welcome as are longer analyses and statements. Write a 450 word guest column. Deadline: 5 p.m. Sunday for next issue. Include your name, address and phone number for verification. Letters are edited for civility clarity and style. Send to: editor@laconnernews.com

OBITUARY



Shannon Lee Bowerman February 5, 1964 February 1, 2024

Shannon Lee Bowerman (O'Fallon) passed unexpectedly but peacefully on February 1, 2024, surrounded by her family. Shannon was the first born daughter of Thomas "Tom" Edward O'Fallon and Diane Marie O'Fallon (now Keller). She was born in Huntsville, Alabama, where her father worked for the Boeing Company. Tom's work with Boeing moved the family from Huntsville to Slidell, LA, and then to the Northwest.

By the time the O'Fallon family settled on the blueberry farm in Kent, WA, three sisters had joined Shannon: Dawn, Colleen, and Heather. While on the farm, Shannon enjoyed participating in 4-H with her horse "Stardust" and her sheep "Pipi".

The family later relocated in Kent, where Shannon attended Kent Meridian High School and competed on the diving team. She went on to attend Clark Community College in Vancouver, Washington, in preparation for her career as a dental hygienist.

While in Vancouver, Shannon met and married Steven Bowerman. Their home on Pete's Mountain in Oregon was a beautiful retreat where many happy times were spent with friends and family.

Shannon and Steven later divorced and she moved north to be closer to her family, while continuing her career as a dental hygienist. She finally settled in La Conner, where she lived together with her mother and worked as a dental hygienist at the office of Dr. Fischer.

Shannon cherished her friends and family. She loved music, aqua blue, early morning iced lattes, Cabo, skiing, golfing, gardening, being outside, white flowers, stylish clothes, and sparkly things. She loved animals, especially her dogs, Madison and Roxy, and the neighbor cats. She had many gifts and talents, as well as a particularly green thumb. She created stunning gardens wherever she lived.

Shannon was described by those who met her over the years as conscientious, compassionate, trustworthy, hardworking, talented, thoughtful, beautiful, kind, sweet, loving, magical, joyful, funny and fun.

Shannon is survived by her mother, Diane Keller, sisters Dawn (Damon) Laird, Colleen (Damon) Stewart, and Heather (Kelly) Devlin, and nieces and nephews, Cameron and Ashley Laird, and Arin and Owen Stewart. She was preceded in death by her father, Tom O'Fallon.

There will be a private celebration of life for Shannon in the Spring of 2024. To share memories and condolences, please visit www.evanschapel.com/obituary/

Council considers bond for fire boat

By Bill Reynolds

If February's first town council meeting was any indication, new La Conner Mayor Marna Hanneman is in it for the long haul.

The marathon Feb. 13 session covered new and old business and multiple discussion and action items before concluding with a closed executive session.

"I thought after the first month," said Hanneman, who took office Jan. 1, "that things would be kind of calm. Then February came."

The 95-minute meeting began on a pair of somber notes.

Resident Debbie Aldrich shared that former La Conner singer-songwriter and community theater director Holly Graham, involved in numerous civic projects here in the 1980s and 1990s, had passed away recently at her Olympia residence.

Graham visited La Conner last September to attend Tom Robbins Day festivities, Aldrich said.

Under questioning from Councilmember Ivan Carlson, a member of the fire department, Fire Chief Aaron Reinstra confirmed there was a suicide earlier this month involving a man who jumped from Rainbow Bridge.

Carlson lamented that La Conner does not have a functioning fire boat and wondered if the person would have been rescued given the rapid response time of

a local emergency vessel.

Carlson was part of an official Town delegation that lobbied district lawmakers in Olympia earlier this month for funding to acquire a fire boat, primarily to protect historic waterfront and marina areas.

"It doesn't seem like we'll get any money," Carlson reported. "Sen. (Ron) Muzzall gave us a little hope, suggesting we might get the money from DNR (the state Department of Natural Resources)."

Carlson noted that DNR administers tideland leases along the La Conner waterfront.

"If we can't get the money from DNR, we need to look into bonding rates," he said.

Town Administrator Scott Thomas committed to finding current bond terms and rates.

Carlson noted ever rising construction costs and wished the initiative had been taken earlier, saying, "We should've started the process for the fire boat five years ago."

Thomas said the Town's strong cash reserves are due to postponing 2023 projects when bids came in higher than expected.

"We didn't do some of the projects we wanted to do," said Thomas, "because costs doubled or tripled. It would've drawn down those funds significantly."

Building prospects

Planning Director Michael Davolio reported Town and Port

of Skagit staffs had a productive meeting that morning.

Davolio announced progress between the Town and KSA Investments on the 306 Center Street project, a planned multi-unit residential building approved in 2022 under a conditional use permit and a source of controversy with residents of the adjoining neighborhood.

Thomas suggested a community meeting to gather public input on what to do with the Jenson property, which is nestled near Pioneer Park and the approach to Rainbow Bridge.

The property could be a topic for a Saturday morning with the mayor meeting, he suggested.

Hanneman was supportive.

"The more we get it out there, the more we can get discussions going around town," she said.

Other council actions

Council voted unanimously to approve an ordinance authorizing them operate as the transportation benefit district they agreed to in 2023. The district can generate revenue – probably through a small hike in the sales tax – for street repairs and upgrades.

It approved planning commission-recommended changes to Chapter 10 of the Town Comprehensive Plan designating La Conner Swinomish Library, Maple Hall and Town Hall as essential public facilities.

"The library wanted to be designated as an essential public entity to help it with the grant ap-

plication process," Davolio said.

Members approved a bid of just under \$300,000 for installation of a replacement roof at the La Conner fire station.

"I don't think (the price) is going to come down," said Town Public Works Director Brian Lease. "We don't have control over that."

Lease said the new roof is guaranteed for 30 years.

After a lengthy discussion, the council agreed to drop Zoom for hybrid meetings and pursue options for those unable to attend in-person.

The Town's monthly Zoom subscription runs nearly \$300 and several meetings have been marred by profane language.

Council recognized Bill Stokes, who guided the Emergency Management Commission through its initial year. Jerry George will chair the advisory group in 2024.

Councilmember MaryLee Chamberlain brought up the options to improve safety and reduce traffic and parking congestion on First Street south of the post office.

"It's very dangerous for our guys," agreed Reinstra. "We've had some close calls."

Downtown parking was the major theme of a community "mingle" last night at the Civic Garden Club.

The 10-minute executive session that followed the public meeting dealt with a personnel item. No action was taken.

Sinclair Refinery gift helps Fire Dist. 13 heavy lifts

By Bill Reynolds

Fire District 13 emergency responders are used to pulling their weight – and then some.

Now they're getting much appreciated help.

The added muscle is in the form of a new power loader gurney system purchased with funds from the HF Sinclair Refinery of Anacortes.

"These run in the \$30,000 range," said Fire Chief Wood Weiss. "So, I reached out to Sinclair and Andrea Petrich found the funding for us."

Petrich is the refinery's head of communications and external relations advisor. She and other HF Sinclair representatives attended the fire district's Feb. 8 hybrid meeting at the Snee Oosh Road station, where the new equipment was demonstrated.

District medical officer Drew Farrell and firefighter Jackson Grande showed the ease with which the power loader can lift a patient – in this case role-played by firefighter Nick Mardesich – into an awaiting ambulance.

Powered gurneys are deemed more efficient than manual models, requiring fewer responders to

safely place patients in emergency vehicles.

Weiss said District 13 is the first rural fire department in Skagit County with a power loader, which can support patients weighing up to 400 pounds.

Petrich said Sinclair was more than happy to provide that help.

"We want to thank you guys for what you do for our community," she said.

Weiss returned the compliment.

"We really want to thank you guys," he said to the Sinclair contingent. "This will save a lot of backs and Labor and Industries claims in the future."

Weiss is hopeful the fire district can add additional equipment – a small boat for rapid water rescues near local shorelines tops his list. He noted that Swinomish Police Officer Brian Geer recently had to commandeer a private watercraft to rescue a capsized kayak in Skagit Bay near the Thousand Trails RV Resort.

"It would be nice to have a small boat that we can get in the water quickly with someone in a Mustang (Survival) suit who has been trained for that kind

of rescue," Weiss said. "We've had lots of water stuff going on. We need to get the appropriate training and small boats."

Fire District Capt. Gary Ladd, who is also an officer with Skagit Bay Search and Rescue, estimated it would have taken a total of 25 minutes for SBSR personnel to pilot their moored boat to the Lone Tree Point area.

"It would be nice," agreed Commission Chair Bruce Shellhamer, "to have something that can be carried and put in the water or a have a small boat that

can be trailered."

"Volunteers are being organized to help with the effort," said Ladd.

Weiss said a joint District 13 and Town of La Conner committee has been meeting to reduce duplication of services and equipment purchases by the two neighboring fire departments. Weiss said he had written a letter in support of La Conner's bid to obtain state funds for a fire boat.

"I believe they're in Olympia this week," said Weiss, "hoping to get a boat."

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La Conner girls claim NW 2B bi-district crown

By Bill Reynolds

The La Conner High School girls' basketball team took two different routes last week to reach the same destination – Victory Lane at Coupeville. The Lady Braves netted top honors on the girls' side of the NW2B bi-district tournament with a lopsided 52-15 win at home over Northwest Christian of Lacey on Feb. 13 followed by a tense 46-42 triumph over league rival Friday Harbor last Thursday in Coupeville. They were two totally different games that produced a single result. La Conner, 16-7 overall and with no seniors on its roster in an expected rebuilding year, advances to the regional round of the state playoffs. The team adds a new piece of hardware to the school's trophy case. The teammates, six of whom are eighth graders, took turns

posing with the bi-district championship trophy after surviving what they knew going in would be a tough playoff test against a taller Friday Harbor team that the Lady Braves had edged twice before.

"Beating a team three times in a year is very tough," La Conner head coach Joe Harper had told the Weekly News prior to the Feb. 15 tipoff, "and they will be ready."

And indeed, they were. Friday Harbor bolted to a quick 5-0 lead courtesy of a layup from 5-11 freshman post Vera Shoultz and a three-pointer by senior guard Sheya Welty.

La Conner was held scoreless for the first 3:15 of the game until Izzy Villard broke the drought with a corner jumper off a feed from Maeve McCormick.

La Conner trailed by as much as seven points, at 12-5, when

(continued on page 6)

Braves rebound from Coupeville loss to secure regional berth

By Bill Reynolds

Home sweet home. That time-honored phrase perfectly served the La Conner Braves well at last week's Northwest 2B bi-district basketball tournament where they sandwiched triumphs on their home floor over Northwest Christian of Lacey and Auburn Adventist Academy around a tough loss to league rival Coupeville on the Wolves' court.

The 68-57 win over Auburn Adventist last Saturday secured for La Conner (16-7) a berth in the regional round of the state playoffs.

Junior guard Brayden Pedroza, who had erupted for 43 points in the Braves' 74-29 bi-district

opener against NWC, tallied 26 to lead La Conner past Auburn Adventist.

The game was played at a frenetic pace, which first-year coach Lance Lopez said afterward was to his club's advantage.

"That's the way we like it," he said of the team's embrace of up-tempo basketball. "That's what we do."

Playing before a large and enthusiastic crowd at Landy James Gym, La Conner was able to offset Auburn Adventist's inside-outside combo of guard Gabe Delgadillo and post Jonathan Russell.

Delgadillo scored 22 points, including five of eight free throws. Russell worked inside for 14 points, six coming in the

fourth quarter.

But with the game on the line and La Conner leading just 32-31 early in the third period, the hosts responded with a decisive 19-12 run capped by back-to-back three-pointers from Jimbo Bobb and Pedroza.

The spurt was ignited by point guard C.J. Edwards stretching the margin to 38-33 on successive three-point plays. Edwards was fouled hitting a layup off a deft feed from Pedroza, then meshed the free throw. Moments later he knocked down a jumper from behind the trey arc.

Auburn Adventist closed to within 45-41 before Bobb and Pedroza struck from long range and gave the Braves a comfortable eight-point lead entering the final stanza.

Junior forward Tyler Cicotte provided an early boost, working the boards hard, and finished with a season-high 13 points, all but three in the first quarter. He hit a pair of perimeter treys as the Braves built an 18-12 edge.

Senior guard Ivory Damien shook off first half foul trouble to join Pedroza and Cicotte in double-figure scoring, meshing

(continued on page 6)

Regional round basketball details

By Bill Reynolds

It's Sweet Sixteen time for La Conner High School's basketball teams.

Both boys and girls teams have qualified for the round of 16 of the state 2B hoops playoffs.

The girls' team drew a No. 13 seed and have drawn No. 12 Toutle Lake in a first round, loser-out regional pairing.

The winner will advance to

the Round of 12 at the Spokane Arena on Feb. 28.

The boys' team won two of three bi-district tests and is seeded 15th. It faces a loser-out contest with No. 10 Adna. The La Conner-Adna winner also moves on to Spokane for the round of 12.

The girls' game tip off is 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24, at W.F. West High School in Chehalis. The boys meet at 6 p.m., at the same site.

Football's future meeting Feb. 20

Due to small number of students participating in football, La Conner High School petitioned to play 8-man football only. This petition was denied. The athletic department is seeking input from the community about the possibilities for this sport moving forward. A meeting 6 p.m. Feb. 20 at the Swinomish Gym offers more information and an opportunity to provide input. This is not a decision-making meeting but an opportunity for concerned parties to provide input which will be considered in the final decision.

Contact Christine Tripp, principal/athletic director, with questions at ctripp@lc.k12.wa.us. Thank you for supporting La Conner athletics. Go Braves!

Source: La Conner Schools

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Attracting more garden pollinators

By Patty Puckett Tingler

Gardening is a wonderful way to connect with nature, and it's even better when you can use it to help support the local pollinator populations. Bees, butterflies and other insects play a crucial role in pollinating plants, which helps to ensure that we have a bountiful harvest of fruits, vegetables and flowers each year. By creating a garden that is welcoming to these creatures, you can not only help support their populations but also enjoy the beauty of your very own pollinator garden.

One of the best ways to attract pollinators is to plant flowers that are rich in nectar and pollen. Some of the best flowers for pollinators include sunflowers, lavender, wildflowers and herbs like thyme and oregano. When choosing your plants, try to select a variety of sizes, shapes and colors, as this will help to attract a diverse range of pollinators. Additionally, try to choose plants that bloom at different times of the year, so that there is always a food source available for your pollinators.

Another important consideration when planting a pollinator garden is the location. Bees and butterflies need plenty of sunshine to thrive, so choose a spot that gets at least six hours of direct sunlight daily. Try to provide a source of shallow water near your pollinator plants, such as a bird-bath or shallow dish filled with water. This will help to keep your pollinators hydrated and healthy, especially during the hot summer months.

If you don't have a lot of space in your yard, don't worry! You can still create a pollinator-friendly garden on your patio or balcony. Recycle pots or repurpose other containers to create a small garden of scented, open flowers that will attract bees and other pollinators. Just be sure to choose plants that are suitable for container gardening and that they get plenty of sunlight each day.

When choosing plants for your pollinator garden, it's important to consider the needs of your local pollinators. Look online for native Pacific Northwest plants, shrubs, or seeds that are well-suited to your area. These plants have evolved to support the local pollinator populations, so they are more likely to thrive in your garden and attract the pollinators that you want to support.

If you're not sure where to start, consider visiting a local nursery or attending gardening classes. These resources can help you learn more about which plants are best for your area, how to care for them and how to create a welcoming habitat.

Gardening for pollinators is a journey of learning, patience and understanding. It's not just about growing plants but also about creating a welcoming space for our winged friends. By providing suitable habitat and choosing the right plants, we can contribute to the well-being of pollinators and enjoy a bountiful garden for years to come.

For more information and helpful tips on pollinator gardening, visit the "Ask a Master Gardener Blog:" skagitmg.org/pollinators.

Patty Puckett Tingler became a certified Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener in 2022.

Open your eyes to spy short-eared owls

The short-eared owls are migrating birds visiting this area from October through April. They are not nocturnal birds like other owls, but hunt during day-time hours. They look for voles and field mice in open fields with bordering or scattered shrubs and trees. Their short ear tufts are seldom visible, but their light colored face mask and yellow eyes are good identifiers.

You can see them in the Samish Flats in an area that is known to birders as the East 90 and also sometimes on the Padilla shore trail, or at the end of Rawlins Road or on Whidbey Island by Crocket Lake.

Many photographers take their photos and they're always advised to keep their distance and let these birds hunt so they can be strong enough to make their long flight back north to the tundra where they nest in spring.

— Photo and text by Rosi Jansen



Valentine's Day dance at La Conner Retirement Inn

By Judy Booth

Salsa, waltz, swing, cha-cha – take your pick. The La Conner Retirement Inn was hopping on Valentine's Day to ballroom dance.

The most romantic day of the year – Valentine's Day – is celebrated at the Inn most every

year – viruses allowing. Taylor Winningham demonstrated the dances with local dance student Charlotte Decker accompanied by champagne, strawberries and chocolate.

Over 30 residents sipped, tapped their feet and got up on the floor to swing and cha-cha. "One of the reasons I like this

town is because I grew up here," remarked Inn resident Mary Ann Hoover.

Kudos to Allie Kester, Director of the Life Enrichment Program. Good job!

"I really like it here – it's true!" said Jim Montgomery, who moved to the Inn last year with his wife Kathy.

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POLICE BLOTTER

SKAGIT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Thursday, Feb. 15

11:19 a.m. Be cautious about calls – Medicare scam where someone called and stated they needed to issue a new card, but the victim would need to verify all the personal information first. The victim did not fall for this and did not provide any information. Finley Ln., La Conner.

Friday, Feb. 16

4:59 a.m. Dog taken in – Deputy on patrol found a dog running loose that was dragging a leash. The deputy could not locate an owner and the dog was transported to the humane society. La Conner Whitney / Flats Rds., greater La Conner.

10:38 a.m. Stripped away – Abandoned vehicle that had been in the area for several days and subjects were starting to strip it for parts. A deputy responded and impounded the car. Best / Dodge Valley Rds., greater La Conner.

3:38 p.m. Burglary in the Valley – Rexville Grange broken into but caller unsure of when it happened. Unknown what if any items were taken. Rexville Grange Rd., greater La Conner.

3:39 p.m. Headed for Seattle – Red Ferrari driving at a high rate and weaving in and out of traffic. Vehicle last seen towards I-5 and call transferred to WSPBest / Fir Island Rds., greater La Conner.

6:08 p.m. Two bad drivers – Two car collision that blocked Morris Street. Minor injuries and both drivers cited for violations related to the collision. Maple Ave / Morris St., La Conner.

Saturday, Feb. 17

3:33 p.m. What is going on here? – Possible fraud. Caller bought a motorcycle engine off Instagram that was being shipped. The package is now being held at the border and the seller will no longer respond. Unknown if actual fraud or just shipping issue with customs. Channel Dr., greater La Conner.

Meet Nizhoni Slowman, January Soroptimist student of month

Nizhoni Slowman, a senior at La Conner High School, is the Soroptimist International of La Conner January Honored Student.

She has a varied range of interests. She loves to experience the outdoors for play and to learn more about science and her environment. She is a passionate reader for pleasure and science. Her constant companion is her 19-year-old Dachshund whom she has grown up with. He is a lucky dog who gets to go everywhere in a front snuggly pack.

Nizhoni's favorite subjects are biology and chemistry, which she plans to major in at college while



Nizhoni Slowman

she studies to become a veterinarian. Her junior year she attended the Northwest Career and Technical Academy and earned her vet assistant certificate with honors. She likes to teach and help others about animals and aspires to serve families and pets who have fewer resources.

She is the daughter of Renee Stevens and has a younger brother. She will receive a gift certificate to Vintage Thrift, a shop run by local volunteers to support women and girls in the community, and enabled by the generous donations from the community.

Source: Soroptimist International of La Conner

Brodie Coyote, La Conner's 'greeter'

Brodie Coyote, the winsome and engaging golden retriever who served as the town's goodwill ambassador and whose image graced calendar pages and numerous editions of the Weekly News, died Thursday, Feb. 15.

Brodie passed away peacefully with his human, noted La Conner news and lifestyle photographer Don Zieger Coyote, at his side, according to a social media post by longtime local music promoter and former mayoral candidate Marc "Zappa" Daniel.

Brodie Coyote was 14 and retired from being the town's newshound. He was born Aug. 28, 2009.

His death has sparked an outpouring of condolences, with many admirers variously referring to him as a "rock star" and "godly creature."

Don Coyote rarely missed an opportunity to proudly introduce Brodie to those with whom he encountered over the years



during their daily walks around town. Brodie never failed to impress.

"Brodie was a friend to all who met him," said Zappa, who described Brodie as "La Conner's official greeter."

Zappa said his three past dogs

– Nala, Babbaghanoioush, and Allie Babba – were playmates with Brodie.

"I've known him since his puppy days," Zappa said. "He will be missed."

Amen to that.

– Bill Reynolds

Presidential primary format gets a review

By Bill Reynolds

The League of Women Voters of Skagit County dares to venture into the weeds of the democratic process while refusing to wallow in the mud that has stained American politics. Last week they hosted a public forum on the sometimes complex "ins and outs" of the 2024 Washington state presidential primary.

The hour-long hybrid event at the Skagit PUD Meeting Room in Mount Vernon, billed specifically as a non-campaign event, featured four guest speakers – Skagit County Elections Manager Gabrielle Clay, Skagit County Republican Party Chair Bill Bruch and Skagit County Democratic Party Chair and Vice-Chair Lynn Campbell and Nathaniel Block.

Washington's March 12 presidential primary has voters choose their parties' presidential nominees.

Clay stressed that the primary is unlike regular elections.

"The presidential primary," said Clay, who has managed Skagit County elections for 13 years, "tells parties who you want them to nominate for the general election.

"We don't know how you personally voted," she assured the audience, "but we do know

which are 'R' and which are 'D' ballots."

Clay noted that voters will find on their ballots names of candidates who have withdrawn from the race due to firmly established procedural timelines.

Washington formerly used a caucus system for presidential nominee hopefuls.

The parties will use caucuses to choose convention delegates.

The panel fielded an array of questions from the 50-person audience.

Clay was asked how elections officials verify voter signatures with mail-in voting.

"We compare the signature on the election envelope with the signature on their driver's license," she said, considering as well how aging can change one's handwriting.

The Feb. 12 event, which the Weekly News co-sponsored, was the first in a series of League of Women Voters public meetings scheduled this year. The next will be April 29 and focus on the media and news literacy.

"We're committed to strengthening local news in the Skagit Valley," Sanderson said, insisting that is in keeping with the league's dual mission of promoting civic responsibility and encouraging the public to become informed on issues.

Mavrik ferry

■ ■ ■ (from page 1)

are about to be "mated" inside Mavrik's larger building and the hull and superstructure for the fourth ferry are under construction. These two ferries will feature quad-engine jet drives rather than the twin-engine jet drives that propel the MV Delphinus and its twin MV Dorado.

"Quad-engine jet drives are more energy efficient and environmentally friendly," said Bailey Shewchuk, president of Mavrik and chairman of its board of directors. Shewchuk stepped into his role after founder Zachery Battle died in November, shortly after the MV Delphinus was moved into the water.

Each ferry has been built in less time. "The processes that we go through become more repeatable," said Shewchuk. "There was a learning curve on MV Dorado, but we refined our processes for MV Delphinus and will refine them again for the next ferries."

That's good, because the market for efficient, high-speed ferries is growing. Environmental Protection Agency regulations for fuel efficiency mean that WETA and other ferry operators must upgrade their fleets. Several large operators will issue requests for proposals for new ferries this year. "That's good for Mavrik and other shipyards across the west coast," said Shewchuk. "We see potential for another 10 to 12 vessels between 2024 and 2030."

Some RFPs may be for electric-powered ferries. Mavrik will rise to the challenge. Its dual- and quad-engine jet drives already come from a third-party vendor, so a supplier for electric jet drives will be easy to find.

Mavrik's enthusiastic workforce is a big asset in the company's success, says Shewchuk. "Quality is our top priority," he said. "At the end of every day what people have accomplished is standing right in front of them. That sense of accomplishment and pride in the quality of the product is infectious.

"We want to be a part of La Conner," he said. "We don't want to be the Starbucks, we want to be the little coffee place on the corner. We are quite happy being a small shipyard in La Conner, producing outstanding boats."

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By: Faith Jenkins
LaConner Middle School-7th grade

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