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# LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

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## All hail King Tom!



THIS KING LIVES FOREVER IN THE HEARTS OF HIS FANS – Author Tom Robbins was celebrated Saturday with – what else? – a parade and proclaimed king for the day in La Conner. Of course there was a Spam carving contest. Joining Robbins in the La Conner Fire Department parade truck is his wife, Alexa Robbins. — Photo by Nancy Crowell

## Festive celebration writes a new chapter for author Tom Robbins

By Bill Reynolds

A master storyteller, La Conner author Tom Robbins lent his name to another well-received work here Saturday.

Only this time he did so not with his pen, but with his mere presence. And it had everything to do with fun rather than work.

That's because a large crowd – many dressed as characters from his best-selling novels – descended on town for a festive, sun-splashed afternoon celebrating the La Conner wordsmith's decades-long mastery of wit, wisdom and eclectic thought.

The timing couldn't have been better. Twenty-four hours later La Conner was shrouded in heavy overcast, a cool mist dampening spirits of those longing for an endless summer.

But there was no rain on the Tom Robbins Day parade.

Or, thankfully, on any of the day's other activities, which raised funds for children's art and reading programs at La Conner Swinomish Library.

Conditions were perfect for what many hope will become an annual celebration.

"I'd like to see this become a yearly thing," said Skagit Valley resident Glen Johnson, one of several hundred people gathered at First and Morris

**See more Tom Robbins Day parade photos and stories on pages 6, 7 and 12.**

for the parade. "I've been talking with (Mayor) Ramon (Hayes) and (La Conner Chamber of Commerce Director) Mark Hulst about it."

The parade, with Robbins, now 91, seated next to his wife, Alexa, on La Conner's vintage white 1941 fire engine while wearing a royal crown – in keeping with the event's King for a Day theme – went past onlookers lining both sides of First Street.

"It's hard to say, but I'd guess there are probably a couple thousand people in town," said Skagit County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Brad Holmes. "There are probably about 400-500 people around Gilkey Square alone."

Town Administrator Scott Thomas, who had his pooch "Beau Doodle" in tow, likewise said it was hard to estimate how many people were here Saturday to honor the author of acclaimed releases, including "Another Roadside Attraction" and "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues."

Parade participants and attendees arrived from as far as Ireland, upstate New York and Phoenix, said La Conner photographer and Weekly

News contributor Nancy Crowell.

"We met people who said they went to school with Tom and wanted to be here because they hadn't seen him in years," said Gary Ladd of Skagit Bay Search & Rescue, helping at the festivities.

"I'm a long-time Tom Robbins fan," said Ryan Boudinot, of Seattle, who took in the scene with members of the author's family, including his son, Seattle-based freelance writer and editor Fleetwood Robbins.

Retired radio personality Don Wick, who viewed the parade from the sidewalk in front of the Seaport Building, recounted an interview he conducted with Robbins for KBRC some four decades ago.

"I remember that it was in the late '70s or early '80s and that it was a one-hour interview," Wick said. "He was very nice and very cooperative to be interviewed."

All either had personal connections with Robbins, a native North Carolinian who worked as a Seattle journalist before moving to town in 1970, or were inspired by his books.

A loud ovation erupted once the parade began and spectators had caught sight of Robbins extending peace signs and flashing his trademark grin.

(continued on page 12)

## La Conner gets Braves Club grant

By Bill Reynolds

Hard work and perseverance paid dividends for La Conner Schools ahead of the Labor Day weekend.

District officials learned Friday that their application for a 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant to support the Braves Club after-school program has been approved. Past proposals had not been selected.

The award recommends funding of up to \$450,000 annually for five years, for a total of \$2.5 million, a district news release states.

A final funding level decision is expected in mid-September.

"After three years of applying," school board president Susie Deyo told the Weekly News Friday afternoon, "we are thrilled to be awarded this grant as we look to take our Braves Club to the next level with more resources for our families and community."

The funding comes at a most opportune time: The district has made painful budget cuts compelled by declining student enrollment and loss of COVID-19 pandemic emergency funding.

"This is great news for the district as we look for new revenue sources," Deyo noted.

"We are quite excited about the grant, as you

(continued on page 9)

## 0.5 inch rain fell in August

By Ken Stern

The almost quarter inch of rain Sunday, like the 0.43 inch of rain that fell Aug. 29-30, with 0.4 inches the 29th and 0.03 the 30th, may end Skagit County's summer burn ban but is not alleviating the region's drought. The 0.5 inch August rainfall total was 0.7 inches below the century's average of 1.2 inches, making it the eighth driest since 2000 and one of 14 with less than an inch of precipitation.

August rainfall was 0.7 inches below the century average of 1.2 inches, 57.8%.

Seven of the driest years have been since 2014. Last year only 0.2 inches of rain fell in August. Still, four of the wettest Augusts since 2000 have been since 2013. In 2016 2.9 inches of rain fell.

(continued on page 9)

### Rain Report: August 2023

Rain last week, Aug. 27-Sept. 2: 0.43  
 Rainfall for month: 0.49  
 Number of rain days: 4  
 Average rainfall 2000-2023: 1.2  
 Least rain: 0.01, 2012  
 Most rain: 6.29, 2004  
 Rainfall last month, July: 0.6  
 All totals in inches. Data from WSU Mount Vernon, Memorial Highway.

## La Conner farm protected by County Farmland Legacy Program

Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program has finalized two farmland preservation projects this August, permanently protecting another 60 acres of farmland from development.

The La Conner farmland is managed by two families – the Rings and the Lillquists – each of whom are descendants of Isaac Dunlap who served as Skagit County's first County Commissioner in 1889. Together, all 60 acres are leased to Thulen Farms.

Landowner Karl Lillquist, along with his nieces, nephews and uncle, John Ring, expressed their commitment to the viability of local agriculture. "Protecting the land as farmland into perpetuity is something that both families are committed to," Karl says. "This is something that our parents would also have wanted. And now the land is protected," he adds.

"The Ring and Lillquist families' decision honors their forebearers and it protects this productive farmland for the benefit of us all,"

says Commissioner Ron Wesen, who represents the northwest district of Skagit County.

"Agricultural conservation easements ensure prime farmland is not developed, help to keep it affordable for the next generation of farmers and provide a capital boost to local farm businesses," says Commissioner Lisa Janicki. "We are indebted to farmland owners like the Dunlap family's descendants and what they have done here today," says Commissioner Peter Browning.

Farmland under conservation easement protection through the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program now totals 14,375 acres.

**Ring and Lillquist Farms**

The 60 acres of farmland in La Conner have been in the family since the late 1800s when the Dunlap family arrived in the Skagit Valley from California as a pioneer farming family.

(continued on page 9)



FARMLAND FOREVER PRESERVED – This Ring and Lillquist Farm property's 60 acres south of La Conner has been preserved in the Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program. The Skagit River is east, Skagit Bay and Sullivan Slough are south and the Swinomish Channel to the west. — Photo courtesy of Skagit County

From the editor —

## La Conner loved this parade

Saturday saw the residents of La Conner at their best, gathering for what we all love, a parade. It was made better in that it was organized by us, for us. On this day author Tom Robbins was heralded as a king. The world-famous writer has been living quietly among us for decades. Residents who have known him for a long time and those who have never met him gathered to celebrate, as did those — primarily women — who came from as far away as Ireland, upstate New York, California and everywhere in between, including Indiana and Missouri.

Robbins' readers know he advocates believing in magic and nourishing our imaginations and getting in harmony with nature by looking for beauty and poetry in everything in life. As he told high school graduates in 1974, ignore the system, the status quo, "walk away from it. Turn your backs on it, laugh at it. Don't be outraged, be outrageous!"

La Connerites and out-of-town fans took Robbins up on his creed Saturday, dressing up as cowgirls, of course, and carrying and wearing pyramids on their heads, but also parading down First Street as beets, mushrooms, perfume bottles and wearing frog pajamas. There was a Santa Claus, too, for good measure.

We love our costumes. Some of us did not recognize each other, though. Thank you, Gina McCarthy, for the wigs and a whole lot more, for your initiative, inspiration and organizing energy.

Thank you Susan Macek, Jean Markert, Mary Wohleb and other cowgirls whose props did not give them away.

There were folks wearing and folks waving favorite Robbins quotations, funny and profound and not normal.

Thank you to the organizers of the Spam carving contest and its judges and the people who organized and prepared the contest. Thanks to the judges of the parade costume contest.

Thanks to the intrepid Spam carving contestants There were contest carver sponsors, too, donating funds to the future middle school age targeted library program, proposed for challenging and encouraging our kids creativity.

Thanks to the cowgirls, the few cowboys, the beets and beet-like participants, the frog pajama wearers, the mushrooms and all the other characters whom Robbins' words written decades ago inspired them to dress up as, perhaps, their true selves..

Thanks to members of the fire department, who closed off streets and drove the trucks and chaperoned Tom and Alexa Robbins, leading the parade.

Thanks to Christine Hill and Marilynn Olson for waving Robbins' 1974 commencement address up for everyone to see and read.

This was a day to promote thinking outside the box. It was a chance to champion the unthinkable and praise those who make the impossible possible. It was about inspiration leading to joy. It was about bringing to life and sharing in real time in one very real place the imagination, creativity and hope of one writer.

It was about yet another La Conner parade, original and unique, stemming from the creativity Robbins inspired and the efforts of specific people in our little town.

The celebration is a testimony to the love that specific people, Meg Holgate and Gina McCarthy, have for Tom and Alexa Robbins. It speaks to the power of literature and the importance of true words. True words are not the common clay of popularizing lies that any momentarily prominent media figure airs, but ideas that speak to the possibilities of a more hopeful future for us as individuals and all of us as a society.

Tom Robbins somehow figured out and conveyed in his writing the optimism to go on despite the odds that reality presents. The people he touched so deeply thanked him and thank him for his inspiring bon mots.

— Ken Stern

## Burn ban allows recreational fires

Due to the increase in moisture levels, recreational fires are now allowed in unincorporated areas of Skagit County, the County posted on Sept. 1. Residential yard and land-clearing fires continue to be banned until further notice.

Recreational fires are those used for cooking or pleasure, consist only of charcoal or seasoned firewood, and meet the following requirements:

Burn restrictions are still in

effect on all Washington State Department of Natural Resources lands. No fires are allowed on DNR-managed recreational sites in Skagit County.

La Conner residents need to call for current burn restrictions: 360-466-3125.

For open burning questions in Skagit County, contact the Skagit County Fire Marshal's Office: 360-416-1840; skagitcounty.net/Departments/FireMarshal/burning.htm

### LETTER POLICY

Please write! Letters to the editor of up to 350 words are welcome, as are longer analyses and statements.

Write a 500-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

## Do your part to preserve birds and habitat

I love birds. I have feeders in the front and the back of my house and my office and I refill them every day so that I can continually enjoy watching them in large numbers.

Which brings me to a very sad fact that the numbers of birds are severely decreasing. Since the 1500s, birds have been declining both in terms of species numbers (by about 500 species) and numbers of individuals (by about 20-25%). The numbers are staggering — three years after 3 billion birds were lost, America's birds are still declining.

The biggest threat is habitat loss as humans continue to spread their wings. The next biggest threat to birds is glass on buildings, which has caused many millions more of losses.

The good news is that here in the northwest, we are still surrounded by so many birds. My friend Libby Mills is a bird expert and she takes people on wonderful observation outings. She leads field trips for Skagit Audubon for the Padilla Bay Foundation. These are around Skagit and Samish Flats. If you want to join in, go to the website SkagitAudubon.org.

March to July is the best bird song breeding season and even in winter the Skagit has many swans and songbirds flying around and entertaining us.

### If I ran the zoo

By MEL DAMSKI



Support legislation that protects wildlife habitat and do your part to limit climate change. Think about the effects of your actions.

I am so inspired by how many birds I now have surrounding my house and causing me to refill their feeders every day. So inspired that I have decided I will become a bird in my next life. When I get to Heaven's Gate and have to choose where I'm going next, I'm definitely going to become a bird.

I can just see myself sitting in a tree, watching with dismay as crazy humans continue to destroy the planet and kill each other along with many other species. And how great will it be to see something really stupid and just take off and find another landing place that ain't as crazy.

And I will be surrounding myself with so many wonderful other birds who will agree with me that humans are just getting weirder and weirder.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Toasting the town's pioneers

There is order in the establishment of frontier towns like La Conner. Religion usually precedes law enforcement and the saloon precedes either religion or law enforcement. Opportunity is the single lure of the frontier, though opportunity is not the same for all. Some come to make a new life for themselves and family. Some come for a quick buck, however it might be acquired. Some come to escape and remake themselves. No two pioneers are the same; neither are they different. They want to get ahead and make something of themselves.

Some succeed marvelously and become Pioneers in the town's history books. (please note the newly acquired capital letter on the term "Pioneer.") Others rate a page in the family's scrapbook. All made a significant difference in the town's perseverance. There was the boatman who ferried folks across the channel before the Rainbow Bridge, the generations' run family lumber yard on First Street, and the livery on Fifth and Center streets, which aren't mentioned in the general history. There are the uncounted volunteer firefolk who have and continue to make our

little piece of paradise safe.

To the south two cities grew faster than local resources could support. Fires were common and the lumber to rebuild had to come from somewhere. And there had to be beer to rehydrate all the thirsty carpenters. Brewing beer requires hops. Lots of hops for lots of carpenters. Hops grew well in the Skagit soils. But there was a problem — a massive log jam upstream at the river bend in Mount Vernon blocked the paddle wheeled steamers of the times from reaching the hop fields. La Conner became the shipping point for the critical resources — log booms and beer making.

That may not be the sanctified tale in the history books, that rough-neck log boomers and copious quantities of beer plants, but they certainly made their difference.

Well, here's to all the unheralded citizens of tiny La Conner that have made and continue to make this remarkable wee town the wonderful home it is. Thank you!

Jerry George  
La Conner

#### Championing Clyde Shavers

In mid-August Bob Raymond and I met with Rep. Clyde Shavers over coffee. Wow, what an impressive guy! He thinks five years ahead. Green hydrogen. Agritourism. Affordable housing. Financial education in our high schools. Investing in our rural communities. Services to our veterans. The environment. Electrification of school buses.

He is working on 13 bills right now that he will push forward in the next session. He knows how to get things done in Olympia. Where does he get the energy?

When he asked for input, I handed him my study of the tax shift and its effect on the taxpayers of La Conner and surrounding areas. The study calls for the elimination of this practice. He volunteered that he would work with the Department of Revenue.

Bob asked about affordable housing and reviewed how we screwed up the development of the ballfield on Maple Avenue.

Clyde Shavers is the right person for duty in the state legislature. He deserves our votes next year.

Sincerely,  
Dan O'Donnell  
La Conner

## Smart electric meters offer way to cut costs

By Greg Whiting

Electricity and natural gas are very unusual products. The end-use customers, homeowners, use these products without knowing how much they've used, or how much the products will cost, till they get the bills.

In our state, retail electric and gas prices don't change quickly when wholesale prices change. Instead, wholesale price changes are absorbed by the retailer (the utility) in the short term. High wholesale costs do eventually get passed on to the customer, in increases that the utilities request when making rate cases.

Rarely, as in Texas, consumers can be exposed to changes in wholesale prices. However, those customers don't have any way to know that wholesale prices changed until their next utility bill arrives, days or weeks later.

Wholesale prices can change dramatically within hours, especially electricity. Consumers often don't know that retail bills can go up by a factor of 100 when they sign up for rates that expose them to wholesale prices. There have been several cases in which people who typically paid a few hundred dollars for



electricity have been billed for tens of thousands of dollars.

Until the late 1990s, there wasn't anything that could be done to address these issues. Utility meters were devices that recorded electric and gas use mechanically. They had to be manually read by a person every metering cycle.

Now, new meters that can be read electronically are widely available. These meters can communicate with the utility via a one-way data connection. One-way electronic meters eliminate the cost of manual meter reading. They can also be read at any time, thus enabling utilities to offer customers the option of receiving bills on any particular day of the month.

A newer generation of smart meters are being phased in. They're capable of two-way communication. With smart meters, and appropriate utility

regulations, utilities and energy consumers can work together so that customers can have more control over their energy bills.

For instance, a home with a smart meter could, if the utility was allowed to offer the option, add an in-house display that would show the customer how much energy has been used since the last bill and a close estimate of the current amount due.

About 20 years ago, independent studies in Newfoundland and Arizona found that consumers trained to use an in-house monitor permanently reduced their energy use by as much as 7% simply by changing the way they used energy once they tracked specific appliances costs.

Additional innovations are underway. Some utilities are experimenting with smart rates, which allow the meter communication circuit to automate the process of reducing consumer bills by enabling consumers to turn on appliances like water heaters preferentially during the hours when electric costs are lowest. Electric vehicle charging and whole-house batteries can also reduce consumer bills when appropriate rates and smart meters are available.

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**OBITUARY**



**Merlin James "Jim" Hanson  
April 17, 1936 - August 23, 2023**

Merlin James "Jim" Hanson, 87, died peacefully on Aug. 23, 2023 from complications of congestive heart failure surrounded by his wife Margaret (Midge) and daughters Brit, Laura and Kari.

Jim was born in McGregor, N.D., the sixth-born child of Minnie and Erwin Hanson. His life journey included the roles of Lincoln Lynx, UW Husky; U.S. Army officer; and insurance man. Jim was a member of the 101 Club, found golf late in life at the Skagit Golf Club; an adventurous salmon fisherman and boater; and an avid fan of all sports played by daughters, grandkids, Storm, Seahawks and Mariners but especially his Huskies. As a father of three girls, he became an enthusiastic supporter of women's athletics, both Husky and pro. Sadly, he never got to meet his idol, Sue Bird.

The family moved to Seattle in 1944. His first job was a paperboy in Fremont. He graduated from Lincoln High School in 1954 and went on to attend the UW, where he was a member of Theta Chi fraternity; he graduated from the UW in 1958. After college, Jim served in the U.S. Army as a training officer in New Jersey. He made a few months' salary betting on the Huskies in the Rose Bowl against Minnesota.

After military service, Jim returned to Seattle and began a career in the insurance busi-

ness. After a few years he met his soon-to-be wife, Margaret Citron. They moved to northwest Seattle and raised three girls, Brit, Laura and Kari. This was the beginning of many years of family adventures boating, fishing, crabbing and camping throughout the Salish Sea.

It was through boating that Jim and Midge found their summer home in Shelter Bay. This became the jumping off point for those adventures, and their home after Jim's retirement. Jim loved his home in the trees next to the Rainbow Bridge, right on the La Conner Channel.

In retirement, Jim and Midge spent many Novembers in Arizona with his brother, Erwin, and the dreary days of January and February in Cabo with a crew of friends and family.

He was known by many names to those who knew and loved him: Jaime, El Presidente, Jefe, Papa, Hot Pad, HP, Jim and James (when Midge was mad).

Jim was preceded in death by both parents; brothers Oliver of Seattle and Erwin of McGregor, N.D.; and sisters Pearl Bjodstrup of Edmonds, Fern Barkley of Gig Harbor, and Elene Duncan of Sequim.

He is survived by his wife, Midge; daughters Brit (Doug Kramer), and their children Megan, Douglas and Tara; Laura (Rowland Morgan), and their children Owen and Jane; and Kari (Jeff Belevender), and their sons Jaxon and Kevon. In addition, he is survived by his sister-in-law Janice Hanson of McGregor, N.D., and Sun City, Ariz., and numerous nieces and nephews.

Family and friends are invited to celebrate his life on Saturday, Sept. 16, 1- 3:30 p.m., at the Skagit County Golf Club and to sign his online guestbook at: [www.kernfuneralhome.com/obituaries/Merlin-James-Hanson?obId=28825979#/obituaryInfo](http://www.kernfuneralhome.com/obituaries/Merlin-James-Hanson?obId=28825979#/obituaryInfo).

Flowers are welcome, and other contributions can be sent to the Wounded Warrior Project: <https://support.woundedwarrior-project.org/>.

**Larsen brings congressional committee to Port airport**

Four members of the U.S. House of Representatives visited the Port of Skagit Aug. 8 to learn more about Skagit Regional Airport and projects supported by federal grant dollars.

Representative Rick Larsen (D-Everett) coordinated the visit, which included four members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and several staff. Rep. Larsen, as ranking member of the committee, was joined by Committee Chairman Sam Graves of Missouri, Rep. Julia Brownley and Rep. Mark Desaulnier, both of California.

The visit to Skagit Regional Airport was an excellent opportunity to highlight the Port of Skagit's success in utilizing federal dollars, primarily grant funding from the Federal Aviation Administration. These funded airport improvements and in turn have served as a catalyst for business growth and private development on the airport. The Port

of Skagit has received more than \$38-million from the FAA since 2009 for airport capital projects. This significant public investment has been matched nearly dollar for dollar with private investment in recent years, with more than \$40-million in private development on the airfield.

Key to the airport's success is support from the community and local government..

"We wish to thank Representative Larsen and the federal delegation for their continued support of Skagit Regional Airport," Port of Skagit Executive Director Sara Young said.

**La Conner Landing Marine Services**  
541 North 3rd Street, La Conner, WA



**HOMES ABOVE FOR SALE** – Last month this sign went up at Maple Avenue and Hill Street for the two homes under construction in what is being marketed as the La Conner Heights development. The list price is in the \$1.4 million range for the four- and five-bedroom houses. — Photo by Ken Stern

**July Skagit home sales down slightly**

By Ken Stern

The median price of the 126 homes that closed in Skagit County in July was \$545,000, slightly down in the five months since March. Anacortes home prices continue to influence values county wide. The median sold home price in that market was down considerably from June and July 2022, over \$100,000 and \$150,000 respectively.

Nine of the 10 homes sold in the La Conner market were in Shelter Bay or on the Fidalgo peninsula. Homes are generally selling at or within 10% of the list price, either above or below, each dependent, typically, on the condition of the structure and the lot size.

The highest priced home was on Cowichan Place. The

5,716-square-foot home on a half-acre lot sold for \$893,000 while a 1,445-square-foot home on Cowlitz Place on a 9,000-square-foot lot went for \$312,500. The one address in La Conner proper, on Center Street, a 1905, 1,560-square-foot home, sold for \$590,000, near the list price.

The 39 homes that closed in Mount Vernon had a median price of \$578,000, \$33,000 above the countywide median July sales price and \$28,000 higher than the market's June sold home prices

The 11 homes sold in Burlington is eight fewer than the 19 sold in June. The \$539,000 median home price was down \$40,000 from last month and \$25,000 from last year.

Median sold home prices in the upriver markets of Sedro-Woolly, Concrete and Lyman/Hamilton

are \$80,000 to \$120,000 below the other markets.

Countywide, the median sold home has moved generally upward in 2023 with many fewer homes on the market on a monthly basis than 2022.

Countywide, the months of inventory is under 60 days, though it is about 75 days in Anacortes and La Conner. That estimates the days to sell all homes if no new properties came on the market.

Data are from the Kirkland-based Northwest Multiple Listing Service and Don Elliott, managing broker, Coldwell Banker Bain Real Estate.

**Shellfish toxins close all Skagit beaches to harvesting**

Unsafe levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning toxins have prompted the Washington Department of Health to close all beaches in Skagit County to recreational harvesting of all species of shellfish.

This includes clams, geoduck, oysters, mussels, scallops and other invertebrates such as the moon snail. Crab meat is not affected, but "crab butter" and crab entrails can harbor biotoxins and should be discarded during PSP advisories. PSP and other naturally occurring biotoxins are not destroyed by cooking or freezing. Algae that contain the toxins cannot be seen and must be detected by laboratory testing.

Continued sampling will determine when closures will be lifted, and the public will be notified when there is an update.

Paralytic shellfish poisoning can cause severe illness and death. Early symptoms of PSP can set in within 30 minutes of

shellfish consumption.

Questions, contact Samantha Russell, [srussell@co.skagit.wa.us](mailto:srussell@co.skagit.wa.us); 360 416-1500.

Beach closure information: Marine Biotoxin Hotline: 800-562-5632 or Shellfish Safety Map: [fortress.wa.gov/doh/biotoxin/biotoxin.html](http://fortress.wa.gov/doh/biotoxin/biotoxin.html).

Source: Skagit County Public Health

**KERN**

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**A NEW TAX CREDIT FOR WASHINGTON WORKERS**  
UN NUEVO PAGO PARA TRABAJADORES DE WASHINGTON

**Who is eligible for a tax credit?**

- Lived in Washington a minimum of 183 days.
- Are at least 25 and under 65 years of age OR have a qualifying child in 2022.
- Filed a 2022 federal tax return with a SSN or ITIN.
- Low to moderate income families who meet the income thresholds.

**¿Quién es elegible para recibir un pago?**

- Haber vivido en Washington durante 183 días como mínimo
- Tener entre 25 y 65 años o tener un hijo que cumpla con los requisitos en 2022
- Haber presentado una declaración de impuestos federales en 2022 usando un SSN or ITIN
- Cumplir con los límites de ingresos

You can apply online, by paper, or through a tax preparer company.

Puede solicitarlo por Internet, en papel o a través de una empresa de preparación de impuestos.

Number of Children Número de hijos	Annual Income Ingresos Anuales		Maximum refund Pago máximo
	Single Soltero(a)	Married Casado(a)	
0	\$16,480	\$22,610	\$300
1	\$43,492	\$49,622	\$600
2	\$49,399	\$55,529	\$900
3+	\$53,057	\$59,187	\$1,200

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[WorkingFamiliesCredit.wa.gov](http://WorkingFamiliesCredit.wa.gov)

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**Emergency preparedness fair on Sept. 9**

Emergency preparedness is serious stuff. One need only look at this summer's headlines, from accounts of wildland fires on Maui to hurricane activity in Florida.

Bracing for the "big one" or getting ready to deal with tsunamis doesn't have to be entirely grim.

A case in point is the disaster preparedness fair Saturday, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. at John K. Bob Ball Park on Swinomish Reservation.

The Sept. 9 event will blend emergency training and demonstrations with food, raffles and giveaways.

In addition, Fire District 13, which serves Swinomish and rural La Conner, will coordinate emergency management events this fall, including annual Great ShakeOut drills on Oct. 19 addressing earthquake readiness.

# Ashley Watkins promoted to head of Cougar grid operations

By Bill Reynolds

The vibe coming out of the Pac-12 Conference this summer couldn't have been more grim. But a La Conner High School alum is providing a rare bit of good news, especially in her hometown, ahead of what will be the final year of the Conference of Champions as it is known. Ashley Watkins, a 2017 La Conner grad, has been elevated to director of football operations at Washington State University, the youngest sports administrator to serve in that capacity within the Pac-12.

Her promotion was confirmed earlier this year when WSU head football coach Jake Dickert announced 2023 Cougar football and support staff assignments. "I look forward to developing a connected staff to build the foundation of championship football here at WSU," Dickert said then.

While the football team is coming off a 6-3 conference finish a year ago, the program's future athletics alliance is uncertain following decisions by eight other schools – including the University of Washington – to leave the Pac-12 in 2024 for more lucrative TV revenue opportunities.

The commissioner of the Mountain West Conference told WSU's athletics advisory com-



ASHLEY WATKINS

mittee last week that the Cougars would be welcomed "with open arms" into that league, which features several schools that, like Washington State, are land-grant institutions.

In the meantime, Watkins is focused on the 2023 grid campaign, which opened Saturday with a 50-24 win at Colorado State. The Cougars host Wisconsin of the Big-10 in a key non-conference test at Martin Stadium Saturday.

Watkins is ideally suited to tackle her present duties. She served nearly two years as WSU's assistant director of football operations. That followed a stint as a lead official of intramural programs, where Watkins majored dually in sport management and business and hospitality business management.

In addition to her work with intramurals, Watkins

was also actively involved in the university's athletics marketing and promotions and as an operations assistant with the Pac-12 Network while an undergraduate.

Watkins distinguished herself as a student and athlete at La Conner, earning an associate of arts degree at Skagit Valley College with her high school diploma.

She earned varsity letters in four sports – volleyball, basketball, softball and track-and-field – and garnered several individual awards and was named the Skagit Valley region's high school volleyball player of the year in 2016-2017, the same season in which she received NW2B Volleyball Most Valuable Player recognition. She was also tabbed in 2016 as a Washington Interscholastic Activities Association Player of the Week.

Retired La Conner Schools administrator Peg Seeling, who coached Watkins in softball, isn't surprised by her success as an emerging leader in intercollegiate athletics.

"I really enjoyed coaching Ashley," Seeling told the Weekly News, "because not only was she an amazing athlete, she was also a great leader. I'm thrilled that she has chosen to work in the athletic realm."

# Students and new staff enjoy robust welcome back to school

By Bill Reynolds

After slogging through a spring and summer beset with budget woes, La Conner Schools officials and staff shifted gears last week to focus on what they do best – create priceless memories for local students and families.

The 2023-2024 year launched with a soft-start half-week of instruction beginning with Aug. 29 Braves Day orientation activities.

Building principals Heather Fakkema-Hovde and Christine Tripp said Braves Day, which provided a relaxed atmosphere for students to meet teachers and advisors, obtain class schedules, pose for photos and complete related first-day tasks, went exceptionally well despite being moved indoors due to rain.

"I thought it was a fantastic day," said Fakkema-Hovde of the elementary school. "We had a really good turnout. About every family came. I know our teachers appreciated connecting with our families in a low-stress environment and it helped our kids feel more comfortable. So, it was a really good day."

Starting classes ahead of Labor Day weekend rather than the day after also had its advantages, Fakkema-Hovde believes.

"I think it helped everybody build up their stamina after summer vacation," she said, "and the kids have responded really well to being back in school."

"The best feedback we've had on Braves Day has come from our teachers," Tripp, principal of the middle and high school, told the Weekly News. "Our staff has said they really liked making connections with students in a relaxed format prior to the first day of classes."

It was the same for new staff, some of whom will fill part-time roles, as the district copes with reduced state and federal funding due to declining enrollment and loss of COVID-19 pandemic monies.

Elementary students greeted music teacher Karen Rentko, who will be on campus mornings Monday through Friday.

"We're very excited about her," Fakkema-Hovde said. She's been a music educator for over 20 years. She brings a lot of experience in vocal and instrumental instruction. So, she's been able to hit the ground running." Rentko formerly taught in the Marysville district. "Eric Crinklaw succeeds retired longtime middle and high school counselor Lori Buher. Crinklaw's previous assignment was at Bonney Lake in Pierce County, but he hails from Friday Harbor.

"He has an NW2B background," Tripp said, "so he's a good fit for us."

Aaron Gruber arrives from Arizona. He will teach physical education, taking the teaching position vacated by C.J. Woods.

"We're glad to have him," Tripp said. "He has a passion for physical education and a passion to help others. One of the things he'll do is help students develop lifetime fitness plans."

Julia Johnson will serve as a part-time math teacher, focusing on statistics, business math and algebra.

"She taught in Kent a long time and has a strong math background," Tripp said.

Johnson's math colleague will be Dan Hansen, who has taught here previously and will carry a diverse workload teaching pre-calculus, geometry and algebra, plus serving as yearbook advisor.

"We're happy to have him back because he can do so many things," said Tripp.

Julienne Wall, who has substitute taught in the district, joins the faculty as the high school's special education teacher.

"We're glad to have her here at the secondary level," Tripp said, "and she's doing great."

Sheena Jones moves over from the elementary level, where she was a para-educator, to succeed the retired Juli Olson as the secondary office and administrative assistant.

"She has a great personality and knows the kids and families," said Tripp.

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# Miniature donkeys raised as companion animals

By Mel Damski

When you drive around Skagit County, you see lots of animals: horses, cows, goats and more. One small farm on Best Road that immediately caught my attention has a sign stating JF Miniature Donkeys.

The owners are Julie and Todd Jones and they gave me a tour of the property that enabled me to interact with many of the donkeys, who it turns out are very friendly, much more like pet dogs than horses or cows.

My question as a reporter was, “What do you do with all of these donkeys?” The answer was very, very heartwarming. These animals are mostly sold to families to create companionship for their challenged children. They are good companions from the time they are born.

The Jones met on horseback and share a common love of animals. They drove past a donkey farm in the late 1990s and since then have become the owners of

the largest number of miniature donkeys in the Northwest.

When Julie Jones led me through the property, almost all of the donkeys approached me looking to make contact. I rubbed their necks and their backs as I do with my golden retrievers and they thoroughly enjoyed the attention. Unlike my golden retrievers, who hopefully live to be 14 years old, these donkeys have a life expectancy of 35 to 40 years.

The Jones were inspired by the Thurston County Juvenile Center, which hosts children with social challenges and disciplinary issues. Miniature donkeys were the perfect companions for kids with challenges. Animals were imported from Sudan and Sardinia starting in the 1920s.

Because of their size and affability, they were perfect matches for children of all sizes.

The donkeys are handy starting at a very young age, and they are led on ropes when they are just a few weeks old. They pick up

where they left off in ongoing training sessions and they are much more social than horses, really enjoying their interaction with humans, especially young kids.

Lauren Waite, who raises moose and reindeer in Alaska, looked for the best miniature donkeys to adopt for several years and finally heard good things about the JF Ranch and adopted two in 2022, Yukon in January and Yeti in October. They were quick learners and are able to hop in and out of trailers and they are totally comfortable having people pet and brush them.

Waite said, “I love them,” emphasizing “love,” and she is very grateful to have them as companions.

If you have needy kids in need of companions in your family or you just want to enjoy some wonderful companionship yourselves, stop by JF Miniature Donkeys on Best Road and say hello.



GENTLE AS A LAMB – Julie and Todd Jones raise miniature donkeys on their Best Road farm. Their size and affability make them perfect matches for children who need calming support.

— Photo by Mel Damski

## ‘Re Building’ celebrates MoNA’s permanent collection

The Museum of Northwest Art’s permanent collection takes center stage in the exhibit “Re Building: Celebrating the Role of the Permanent Collection in Building Up MoNA’s Significance, Past and Present.” That mouthful of a title identifies the 40 year commitment to “building up and cementing the reputation of the institution as a remarkable repository of the modern and contemporary trajectory of Northwest art” as the website states.

Through September visitors can view a sampling of over 2,400 artworks ranging across all media and spanning from the early 1900s to the present. The “core of the collection is the seminal work of the ‘Big Four:’ Guy Anderson, Kenneth Callahan, Morris Graves and Mark Tobey, who, inspired by the landscape and unique quality of the light of the Skagit Valley, between the 1930s-1950s created works of lyrical beauty – as well as the work of a cadre of younger artists who felt (their) mystique,” the exhibit summary notes.

The directors who made the collection possible through acquisitions and curating, Art Hupy at the founding and then Susan Parke, are also heralded.

The exhibit summary notes that collecting priorities the last 15 years have been influenced by factors from world events to our evolving cultural and social values due to the accelerating interconnectedness between the regional art scenes and global realities.”

See for yourself. The galleries are open daily. Information: monamuseum.org.

Source: MoNA

**GOT NEWS?**

Email:

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## La Conner pioneer reached labor’s pinnacle

By Bill Reynolds

Another day, another dollar. More than a familiar lament, it was truly a way of life for one of La Conner’s more famous – or infamous, depending on your political leanings – native sons.

Hulet M. Wells, born in 1878 on a farm near town, toiled in hayfields as a young man for a buck a day.

He also worked variously as a railway section hand, postal worker, street paver, logger, miner and shingle weaver.

And that’s just to name a few.

But his eventual calling was that of a labor activist, a role that led Wells in 1912 to run for mayor of Seattle. His name appeared on the ballot in that crossroads election beneath Socialist Party standard bearer Eugene V. Debs, who made four bids for the White House.

The 1912 presidential race also featured the political comeback of Theodore Roosevelt, running on the Progressive, or Bull Moose, ticket. Roosevelt’s campaign would siphon votes from Republican incumbent William Howard Taft and hand the election to Woodrow Wilson.

That would have dire consequences for Wells.

When Wilson committed the U.S. to World War I, both Wells and Debs were jailed for their opposition to American entry

into the conflict.

Wilson’s stance was effectively spelled out by George Kreele, who during the war chaired the U.S. Committee on Public Information, a public relations – some might term it propaganda – arm of the government.

Facing a prison term to be split between McNeil Island and Leavenworth, Wells responded with his trademark wit and wry humor in “Wilson and the Issues of Today,” a tract he penned in 1918.

“George (Kreele) received a good political job for writing the First Volume (“Wilson and the Issues”),” Wells noted, “and I have already had a federal position tendered to me, where I will be able to serve my country and I may soon don the uniform – which is furnished free to all inmates.”

By that point in his life, having just turned 40, Wells had already established himself as a leading voice for labor in the Pacific Northwest. He studied law at the University of Washington then drew national attention when he tried to unionize fellow Seattle postal workers.

U.S. Postmaster General Frank Hitchcock fired Wells for his efforts.

Wells earned the enmity of powerful Seattle Times publisher Alden Blethen, especially after a 1911 May Day parade became

particularly rowdy.

Arguably the public face of socialism in Seattle prior to his imprisonment, Wells drifted even further left following his release, embracing tenets of communism. He rebuked those who derided the radical International Workers of the World when they lampooned I.W.W. as standing for “I Won’t Work.”

Wells, who had held a host of jobs over the course of his life, pointedly chose “I Wanted to Work” as the title for his autobiography.

Wells had grown up working and working hard, at that. His parents, Hiram and Alfreda Wells, from eastern Canada, built a cabin and homesteaded outside La Conner, growing oats and barley, plus hay for silage.

Young Wells floated between family concerns in British Columbia and La Conner before

joining the Klondike Gold Rush in Alaska.

He is said to have lingered in the Yukon trying to pay off gambling debts. But his biggest gamble likely was enlisting in labor activism when it was hardly fashionable and sometimes dangerous.

Wells would rise to preside over the Seattle Central Labor Council, a wing of the Samuel Gompers-led American Federation of Labor.

In the 1920s and 1930s Wells continued to lecture on behalf of labor, ultimately founding the Unemployed Citizens League of Seattle.

Rarely at a loss for words, Wells was the acknowledged spokesman for Washington state’s free speech movement in the early 20th century.

He was silenced only by death, in 1970, at age 91.

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# King for a day, La Conner celebrates Tom Robbins



## Tom Robbins

By Nancy Crowell

La Conner showed its colors Saturday with a joyous celebration of famed local author Tom Robbins, named King for a Day and hailed by fans as he and wife Alexa led a parade down First Street perched atop the vintage La Conner fire truck. In a nod to his bestselling novels, fans showed up in outrageous costumes, the most popular of which were nods to Sissy, the hitchhiking model of "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues"

The day was a celebration of imagination and creativity in all its forms. Favorite Robbins' quotes were scrawled on the sidewalks, appeared on posters in shop windows and shared on signs held up during the parade. Raffle tickets were sold to benefit a planned

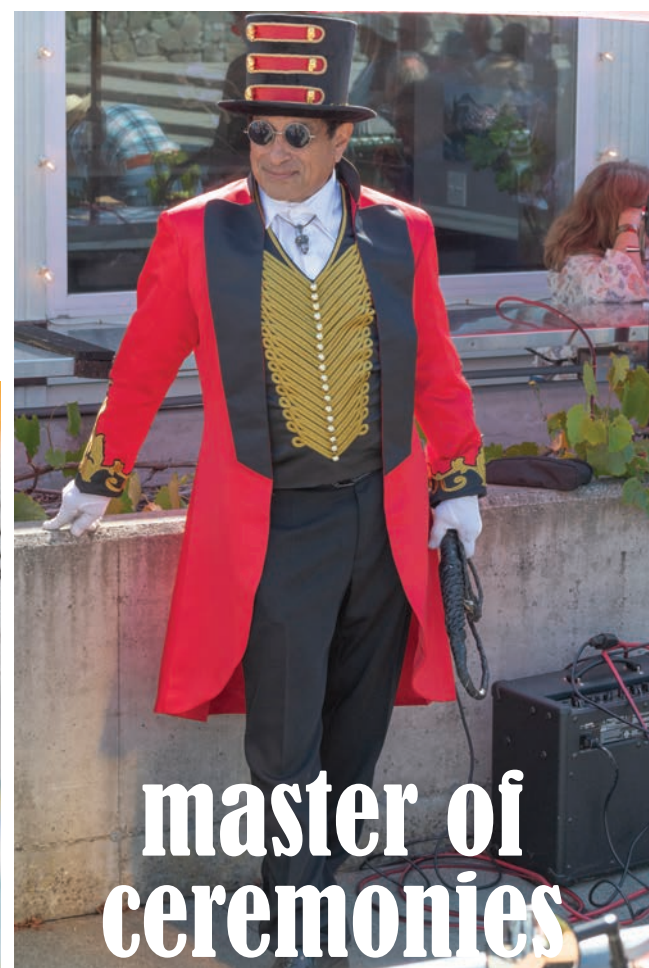
children's arts program at La Conner Swinomish Library.

A Spam carving competition attracted, among others, the likes of professional sculptors Peregrine O'Gormley, master Swinomish carver Kevin Paul and art teacher and designer of whimsical whirligigs Chris Theiss. A costume competition awarded the outrageous and the original. And fans traveled from as far and wide as Ireland, New York and Indiana to get a glimpse of and honor their favorite author.

It was as if the spirit of La Conner past, when the town was a rougher, untamed mix of hippies, artists, poets, oddballs and travelers, rose once again to declare its individuality – something Robbins himself emphatically believes everyone should embrace.

Hail to the King.

yum!



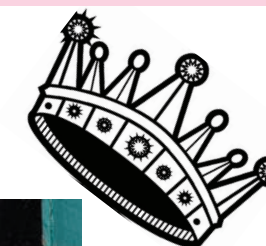
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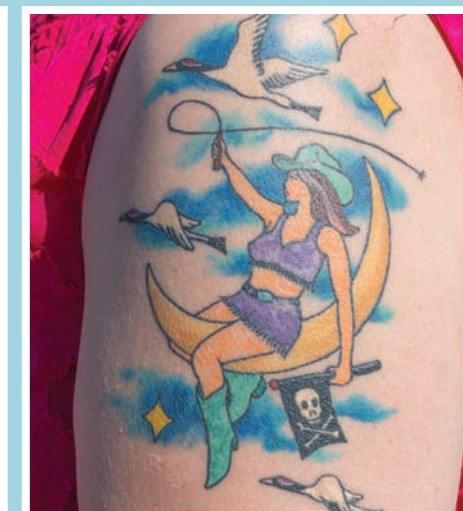
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Photos by  
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# Lawsuit filed to derail Dayton Library dissolution

By Courtney Flatt  
Northwest News Network

On Nov. 7, some voters will decide whether to dissolve the Columbia County Library in Dayton, Washington. If they choose to do so, librarians said it would be the first time in the country that a public library is dissolved following a book challenge. Everything in the building would go to the State Library, and the building would return to the City of Dayton.

A lawsuit is calling a ballot measure to dissolve a southeastern Washington library unconstitutional. The complaint aims to keep the measure off the November ballot.

It all started a little more than a year ago after some people called books in the Columbia County Rural Library District “pornographic” and “obscene.” Initially, they asked to take out or move 11 books.

When that didn’t happen, they asked for the entire young adult section to be merged with the adult section.

The public library, based in Dayton, is the only library in the county. If the ballot measure succeeds, librarians said this would be the first time in the nation that a library would be dissolved following book challenges.

Seth Murdock, who isn’t involved in the lawsuit, told Northwest News Network that he felt the library board should use more discretion when they bought or shelved books.

He said he objected to the “graphic sexual content” in certain books on display at a publicly-funded library, including “What’s the T?” by Juno Dawson.

“It felt like I was paying for something that I found completely wrong,” he said.

But others in town are pushing to

keep the library intact. That’s why the local political action committee, Neighbors United for Progress, as well as residents Elise Severe and Gerald Kaiser decided to sue to keep Measure 2 off the ballot.

The formal complaint names Columbia County, the county auditor’s office, Auditor Will Hutchens and Elections Director Cathy Abel, in their official capacities. It also names Jessica Ruffcorn, who initially headed up efforts to dissolve the Columbia County Rural Library District.

Attorney Ric Jacobs, who represents the PAC, Severe and Kaiser, called efforts to dissolve the rural library district unconstitutional. For one thing, he said, not all active voters in Columbia County will be allowed to vote.

Right now, only the 1,076 active voters living in unincorporated parts of Columbia County can decide the ballot measure. That

means 1,707 active voters who live in Dayton, where the library is built, can’t help decide the fate of the library.

The ballot measure follows state rules that guide the dissolution of a rural library district. But, Jacobs said, when the City of Dayton annexed the library in 2009, that meant Dayton became a part of the district. That’s all mentioned in a different part of the state rules, he said.

“Our position is the city is, at this point, inextricably part of the district, and city residents whose tax dollars support the library and whose library building and property are where the library is located have to be given a right to vote on its dissolution,” Jacobs said.

The complaint also alleges the petition to get the measure on the ballot fraudulently collected signatures – evidence that’s expected to come out in court documents.

Jacobs said he hasn’t found any evidence that “young children” ever checked out any of the 11 books that were initially challenged.

“It’s a two-story library,” Jacobs said. “The fact that some books that a handful of people objected to were merely on the same floor as the children’s section is a really important fact.”

At this point, nothing is changing on the ballot. Hutchens said, for now, the auditor’s office must keep the measure as it is. Military and overseas ballots will go out Sept. 23. The vote is scheduled for Nov. 7.

Hutchens said he couldn’t comment on the pending litigation. Other defendants didn’t respond to requests for interviews.

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# Oregon senators who walked off job can’t run for re-election

By Dirk VanderHart, OPB

Republican senators who walked away from this year’s legislative session will be barred from running for re-election next year, Secretary of State LaVonne Griffin-Valade announced Aug. 8.

The conclusion, announced after months of speculation, might not be a surprise to voters who overwhelmingly voted last year to create consequences for legislative walkouts via Measure 113.

But the decision drew an immediate promise of a court challenge from GOP lawmakers, who have said the measure was so sloppily worded that they are technically allowed to serve another term before consequences for a walkout begin. Ten conservative lawmakers ran afoul of Measure 113 this year, and six are up for reelection in 2024. The majority of those have said they plan to run.

“We believe the plain language of Measure 113 allows for members to run again in 2024 elections,” said Senate Minority Leader Tim Knopp, one of the 10 senators who walked. “We disagree with the Secretary of State’s determination and will challenge it

in court.”

Measure 113 sought to curtail legislative walkouts that have become increasingly common by imposing serious penalties for any lawmakers who accrue 10 or more unexcused absences in a single legislative session. As the measure was sold to voters, any such politician would be banned from running for re-election, or seeking election in the other chamber, once their current term expires.

No organized group opposed the measure, and it sailed through with more than 68% of the vote. But Republicans now say that it received so little scrutiny that a fatal flaw slipped past voters and government attorneys alike.

Under language the measure inserted into the state constitution, any lawmakers with at least 10 unexcused absences cannot hold office “for the term following the election after the member’s current term is completed.”

Since elections in Oregon are held before a lawmakers term is completed – not after – Republicans say the constitution allows them to serve another term before penalties take effect.

Democrats, including the attorney

who drafted the measure, have argued that the wording matters less than what voters intended when passing the new law. They point to an explanatory statement, crafted by the Oregon Department of Justice, that explicitly told voters that a “yes” vote would ensure truant lawmakers can’t hold their seat for “the term following the end of the legislator’s current term.”

Griffin-Valade appears to agree. Citing advice from the state DOJ, she’s directed her elections officials to implement an administrative rule clarifying how Measure 113 works in a manual for candidates.

“It is clear voters intended Measure 113 to disqualify legislators from running for re-election if they had 10 or more unexcused absences in a legislative session,” Griffin-Valade said in a statement. “My decision honors the voters’ intent by enforcing the measure the way it was commonly understood when Oregonians added it to our state constitution.”

While a statement from the secretary acknowledges there is a dispute over wording, she says courts have found that “the text of

adopted ballot measures must be interpreted in a way that is consistent with the voters’ intent.”

Advice from DOJ attorneys to the secretary determined the wording being disputed by Republicans was included in the ballot measure to clarify that lawmakers who accrue more than 10 unexcused absences “may complete their current term, even though the election occurs before it is over.”

Griffin-Valade’s conclusion will be tested quickly. Portland attorney John DiLorenzo, who is representing conservative lawmakers who launched the longest walkout in Oregon history this year, says his clients are planning to challenge the new ruling immediately.

Since Griffin-Valade has issued an administrative rule, DiLorenzo says, his clients can file a rule challenge in the Oregon Court of Appeals, skipping potentially lengthy proceedings at the lower circuit court level.

Republican senators recently received an opinion from elections officials that they say allows them to raise money for a court challenge via a political action committee established earlier this year, meaning they can access

deep-pocketed supporters for unlimited financial support for their legal fight. The lawmakers initially believed the challenge would have to be crowdfunding – a far less efficient means of raising money.

Republicans have suggested that they believe the penalties in Measure 113 could be ripe for a challenge on First Amendment grounds. But the fight over whether the law is ultimately constitutional will wait for another day, DiLorenzo said.

“Our most likely course is first to determine what Measure 113 means” by seeking clarity from the courts, he said.

One person who agrees with Griffin-Valade: Gov. Tina Kotek, who wrangled with a Republican walkout as House speaker in 2020.

“I think it’s clear what the voters intended: when people don’t show up for work that they will be held accountable,” Kotek said Aug. 8, adding: “Ultimately I think this will be decided by the court.”

OPB reporter Lauren Dake contributed to this report.

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## Braves Club

■ ■ ■ (from page 1)

can imagine,” added former Braves Club Director Marlene Brenton, now a member of the administrative team.

School officials were guardedly optimistic through the spring and summer that this grant application would be successful. Superintendent Will Nelson said during the board’s June 12 study session that the district had contracted with the Northwest Educational Services District for assistance for this application cycle.

Nelson said then that if awarded the grant would increase the scope of the Braves Club to include more community resources and partnerships.

“It could be so huge,” said Andy Wheeler in June. He reported to board members at their summer retreat that the application left nothing to chance and no detail was spared. Upon completion, it covered more than 150 pages in length, he said. He has since retired as the district’s director of special programs.

The district’s news release states that the funding increases the capacity to offer a broad array of academic enrichment opportunities aligning with K-12 scholastic programs.

“La Conner,” the Sept. 1 release says, “will prioritize and implement school-based and community-based activities that lead to measurable student growth in reading and math, increased engagement, increased well-being and stronger family-school partnerships through the after-school Braves Club.”

The 21st Century Community Learning Center mission has for more than a decade provided after-school and expanded learning programming to enhance the academic well-being of Washington state students.

“We’re thrilled to have been selected from among these competitive applicants,” school officials said in a prepared statement.

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction contracted with the American Institutes for Research to evaluate and support the state-wide 21st Century Community Learning Centers program.

The final La Conner Schools grant award determination later this month will be based on what the release terms as “reasonable and necessary funds to manage the projects.”

The Braves Club focus is to provide elementary and middle school students with a positive, safe and fun place to be after school. The program offers enrichment, extracurricular, academic, vocational, athletic and community engagement opportunities that support the development and wellness of each student.

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## Electric atmosphere: Shavers talks clean energy during La Conner visit

By Bill Reynolds

First term state lawmaker Clyde Shavers (D, Oak Harbor) brought plenty of energy to a downtown La Conner appearance last Thursday.

And for the 10th District Democrat it was a case of substance matching style.

That’s because Shavers also brought with him to the 75-minute afternoon stop at Ravens Cup Coffee & Art Gallery on First Street a detailed update on clean energy legislation and policy measures both in Olympia and around the country.

His audience, primarily founders of the La Conner-based Skagit Valley Clean Energy Co-Operative, was amped up over much of the dialogue.

“It was a fun session and a good opportunity to meet with him,” Greg Whiting of Ravens Cup and a Weekly News columnist, said afterward, “and for the co-op to share what we’re trying to do here in La Conner and the Skagit Valley to move these initiatives forward.”

Speaking without notes, Shavers addressed specific green energy bills that have gained support in the state legislature and with lawmakers at various levels elsewhere in the nation.

His message was appropriate here which, Whiting has noted in his column, boasts more electric vehicle charging stations than fuel pumps.

Shavers opened by noting

that he will soon visit Denmark to learn about decarbonization methods employed there.

“They are very good in terms of environmental protection,” Shavers said. “My fundamental philosophy is that we need to take a holistic approach when it comes to environmental protection.”

Shavers wants that approach used with land use issues, including bridging gaps between farmland preservation and salmon restoration. One priority is the need for a more robust effort to restore wild salmon runs.

In response to a question from SVCEC co-founder and town councilmember Mary Wohleb, Shavers expressed optimism that farm and fish interests – through well-crafted legislation and compromise – can coincide and not be mutually exclusive.

He said it is important that the farm community be an active partner in environmental protection. Shavers spoke in favor of prohibiting foreign entities from purchasing western Washington farmland, something he pursued legislatively earlier this year.

“Our local farmers protect the land,” said Shavers, who lamented instances in which foreign firms grow alfalfa that is shipped overseas.

“It sucks up our water,” he complained, adding that “foreign ownership threatens our state’s food security and environment” in addition to its water supplies.

Shavers also pointed to his



EMERGIZED BY CONSERVATION SUPPORTERS – State Rep. Clyde Shavers (D-Oak Harbor) met with members of the Skagit Valley Clean Energy Cooperative in La Conner Aug. 31. He wants to advance a green energy future. They pressed him to do even more.

– Photo by Bill Reynolds

support for a tax credit for farmers using less toxic, environmentally friendly pesticides.

He addressed at length “green hydrogen,” a clean energy source he said creates good-paying jobs.

“It’s a clean, alternative energy,” said Shavers, “but there are some challenges, mostly having to do with storage.”

Shavers shifted from energy and land use topics to summarize his advocacy on behalf of veterans, education, affordable housing, voting rights expansion, and services for the homeless before opening the floor to questions and comments.

Resident Bob Raymond suggested opportunities remain for the legislature to enhance recycling efforts, reinforcing areas where the private sector has lagged. Resident Joan Cross raised the prospect of adopting ranked voting which is used in Alaska and allows voters to rate candidates by preference.

“There would be challenges to implementing ranked voting,” Shavers acknowledged, “but it would encourage moderate voices.”

Cross also asked about legislative solutions to provide relief for community newspapers, whose traditional business model based on advertising revenue has struggled with the rise of social media and other digital outlets.

Shavers said Washington lawmakers have supported tax breaks for local journalism, the loss of which has created news deserts – particularly in rural areas – across America.

Whiting said Shavers’ local visit should prove valuable as time goes on.

“He invited the co-op to stay in touch,” said Whiting, “and follow up with concepts and opportunities that give the co-op an ability to work with the state and build community relationships.”

## Dry August

■ ■ ■ (from page 1)

The 10.4 inches of rain to date in 2023 is 7.9 inches below the century average of 18.2 inches for Jan.-Aug., 43% below the year’s century average. Monthly precipitation has been from 16% to 70% below normal except for July, when it was only 8.1% below the century average.

The average daily maximum temperature of 74.1 degrees was 1.6 degrees above the century average. The month’s high of 86.9 degrees Aug. 16 came the fourth

day of temperatures above 83.5 degrees, Aug. 13-17. Six days were above 80 degrees. Last year 12 days topped 80 degrees.

August’s daily average temperature of 67.7 degrees was 1.4 degrees above the century average. The month’s daily minimum of 52.3 degrees was 0.5 degrees above average for the last 24 years. Two record low temperatures were set for their day, 42.8 degrees the 19th and 45.2 degrees the 22nd.

Data measured at the WSU Mount Vernon Memorial Highway weather station.

## Farm preserved

■ ■ ■ (from page 1)

The land has been in a rotation of potatoes, grains and vegetable crops over the last decade. “It’s great ground with nice light soil and high, dry ground,” says John Thulen who farms the ground. Its Skagit Silt Loam soil, designated prime farmland by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is now protected from non-agricultural use. There are no buildings on the protected land. At least 95 percent of the acreage is estimated as farmable ground.

“Our families’ first goal is to protect the land as farmland,” says Ring, great-grandson of Isaac Dunlap, who owns the east parcel with his wife Berdean. “We want the land to stay the same for new generations who come to grow here.”

In addition to its agricultural value, the Swinomish Channel sits west of the land, the Skagit River is east and the Skagit Bay and Sullivan Slough to its south, which provide habitat for countless wildlife.

The Ring and Lillquist Farm property sits adjacent to other small- and mid-scale farmland parcels protected by Farmland Legacy over the last 25 years,

including the 154-acre Jennings Farm as well as the 173-acre Dunton farm property protected in 2021. The additional 60 acres of farmland creates a 700-acre block of prime protected farmland in La Conner.

Skagit County Farmland Legacy Program

The Farmland Legacy Program is a county-funded initiative that compensates landowners for placing a perpetual conservation easement on their land. Landowners retain ownership of their land and continue their farming operations as usual. The program’s primary goal is to protect Skagit County’s vital agricultural productivity and character.

Nearly 20% of land zoned Agriculture-Natural Resource land is protected from non-agricultural use through County farmland conservation easements.

Despite strong land-use planning, Washington state continues to lose farmland to development—nearly 100,000 acres between 2001 and 2016. Over 50% of the land lost was considered the state’s best quality farmland, according to the American Farmland Trust’s recent report.

Information: skagitcounty.net/farmland; 360 416-1417.

Source: Skagit County government

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# POLICE BLOTTER

SKAGIT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

## Sunday, Aug. 27

**10:17 a.m. Gassing off?** – Report by farm owner who believes some of his vehicles are low on gas and believes someone may be stealing it at night. No suspect information and no obvious signs of theft. Caller wants extra patrols at night. Moore Rd., Conway.

**2:51 p.m. Watering the bushes** – Hit and run MVA with a vehicle left behind. Deputies arrived to find a car in the bushes and a water line broken. Deputies searched the area but did not locate the driver. Tow removed the vehicle and further investigation needed to find the driver. Young / Best Rds., Greater La Conner.

## Monday, Aug. 28

**1:08 p.m. Need to call feds** – Caller called to report that she was a victim of fraud. She had fallen for a false email that she believed was from her credit company and provided accounts and access numbers. She has multiple fraud loans now taken out and thousands taken from her accounts. This is a federal crime taking part across state lines and the caller will be reported to federal authorities. Moore Rd., Conway.

## Tuesday, Aug. 29

**9:34 a.m. Dog and kids, gone** – Report of a loose dog near the rainbow bridge with a group of kids chasing it into the road. Caller concerned for the traffic hazard the dog was causing and the safety of the kids. Area

checked and no problems found. Rainbow Bridge, La Conner.

**2:02 p.m. Blonde trouble** – Caller had placed several checks in the mail and observed a blonde female in a white sedan take them. The caller did not get a plate but was able to contact his bank to cancel the checks and protect himself from any fraud that could occur. Best Rd., Greater La Conner.

## Thursday, Aug. 31

**2:48 p.m. Not linked in** – Caller concerned that he got an email saying he owed \$1,000 to PayPal but he does not have a PayPal account. Subject was warned that this was a mass phishing email and not to open any links. Subject had not fallen for it and was not out anything. Channel Dr., Greater La Conner.

## Saturday, Sept. 2

**10:21 a.m. Goat self-reliance** – Caller was driving by and saw a goat with its leg trapped in a fence. Goat was yelping and fighting to get free. A deputy arrived and found the goat was free and ok. McLean Rd., Greater La Conner.

**8:49 p.m. Dog gone quiet** – Barking dog in the area. Deputies found the owners were not home and the reporting party was not answering the phone for additional follow up. No further complaints and the dog was not barking later that night. Maple Ave., La Conner.



Chris Theiss puts the finishing touches on his Spam carving with a torch.

— Photo by Sayer Theiss

# Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam, SPAM!

*Is it meat? Is it art? Seems it's both on Tom Robbins' Day*

By Sayer Theiss

Can Spam, the ubiquitous low-cost processed meat, be more than just a pantry staple? This intriguing question took center stage at the Tom Robbins Day Spam-Carving Contest in Gilkey Square Saturday. Twelve talented carvers, generously sponsored by local organizations and community members, embraced the challenge of turning Spam into artistic masterpieces, captivating dozens of enthusiastic onlookers.

With a mere 15 minutes on the clock and two cans of Spam as their medium, participants wielded an array of creative tools to fashion their sculptures. This event stood out as a highlight of the Tom Robbins Day celebrations, a day dedicated to honoring the town's renowned resident author.

This creative idea had its roots in Robbins' legacy long before the local contest. Betsy Humphrey, its driving force, stumbled upon the concept after a friend and author, Jane Billingshurst, shared a visit to a Spam Museum in Minnesota on social media. A subsequent search led her to a 2019 article about the original Spam carving

contests in Seattle's Pioneer Square in the 1980s. Robbins judged at least nine of them. Inspired by this, Humphrey decided to recreate the event.

The primary goal of the competition was to raise funds in Tom and his wife Alexa's name for a new after-school program at the La Conner Swinomish Library. "It will encompass everything cool, from theater and dance to literature and art. All things weird and wonderful for teens!" Humphrey explained, "We asked for \$100 sponsorships ... The sponsorships brought in \$1,600 to kick off this program that Tom and Alexa have envisioned to be as fun as they are."

Peregrine O'Gormley brought five sponsors. He also won the contest's Slam Dunk Award.

Kathleen Faulkner, sponsored by the MoNA Board of Trustees, emphasized the importance of supporting local schools and expressed hope for the contest to become an annual tradition, stating, "Our schools need help and this is a great way to contribute."

Sponsoring the carvers were Skagit Cellars, the MoNA Trustees, Chop Shop, Cassera Galleries, Mary Rytland, Meg Holgate, Tower Arts Studio,

Cherie Ware Braley, the La Conner Weekly News, Dakota Arts Mount Vernon, Terramar Brewstillery and Alexa Robbins. They sponsored Jay Bowen, Kathleen Faulkner, Todd Horton, Eve McCauley Chomiak, Peregrine O'Gormley, Kevin Paul, Sue Roberts, Steve Klein, Chris Theiss, Mandy Turner and Pieter and Lucy VanZanden, respectively.

The audience was as excited as the carvers. Jenny Baker praised the event as "a unique idea" and noted that "some of the carvers were very prepared." Her mother Judy described the crowd as "enthusiastic."

The quirky prizes ranged from Spam T-shirts, Spam cookbooks, of course, to Spam itself. Humphrey envisions the contest becoming an annual fixture with more substantial awards. This endeavor aims to draw artists from far and wide to the La Conner for years to come.

The first Tom Robbins Day Spam-Carving Contest not only showcased the town's artistic talent but also underscored the inventive spirit that defines La Conner's vibrant community.

# MARINA MOORINGS

Port of Skagit

The Port was honored to host the Tom Robbins parade this past weekend! What a spectacle! It was a lot of fun, though, and many of our guests were able to see La Conner put on quite a show.

We found a rowboat in Sullivan Slough last week. It has some small damage in the stern but it is otherwise a beautiful little boat. If anyone knows whose it is, please have them call the office at 360-466-3118 and we will be happy to return it.

We met with the Army Corps of Engineers recently and they told us the dredge for the Swinomish Channel will be delayed until 2024, instead of this fall. This delay is due to the Corps being called to do emergency work on the McGlenn Island jetty this summer, which diverted staff and financial resources unexpectedly. Unfortunately, this emergency work impacts the Corps' ability to begin the channel dredge this year. While this is not the news we wanted, this may allow the Corps to budget for a lot more material to be pulled out of the channel than we would have gotten this year – which would be a highly beneficial outcome. The Army Corps of Engineers are great partners in keeping the channel maintained at a safe, navigable depth.

**Safety and Maintenance:** Checking fluids on your vessel is an expected part of maintenance. Checking the oil before starting the engine should be a regular part of the vessel's routine. Oil pans in the marine environment can rust through, so even if the level was fine yesterday that is not a guarantee that it is fine today. This is of course uncommon but it happened to a marina tenant this spring.

Another fluid to check is in your transmission. The type of fluid in your transmission is specified by the manufacturer – following this is the best idea. Many transmissions are installed with long hose runs to oil coolers. Many manufacturers have very specific requirements about how to check the fluid to account for these differing installations. For instance, most Twin Disc units should be checked with the engine idling and the transmission in neutral. This gets the oil flowing through the entire system, so the level in the transmission itself will be accurate.

See you on the Channel!

— Chris Omdal, harbormaster

# King Tom

■ ■ ■ (from page 1)

Following was a wildly entertaining serpentine that featured vintage vehicles, bagpipers, miniature donkeys, a costumed Santa Claus riding his beach cruiser bicycle, an orca decorated cycle, a car colorfully adorned with Barbie dolls and pink flamingos and dancing cowgirls in tribute to the novel that was adapted into a movie in 1993.

Hayes, who rode in one of the parade cars, had beforehand issued a Town proclamation in recognition of Tom Robbins Day that cited the novelist's prolific award-winning writing career and "devotion to optimism, joy and happiness."

Resident Marna Hanneman echoed those sentiments.

"The crowd was amazing," Hanneman said of the widespread support for Tom Robbins Day. "The parade really knocked it out of the park and I appreciated all the people who dressed in costume. Did you see Joan Cross? She was a beet and it was great."

Following the parade many continued to mill around to enjoy music played by the Skagit Brass Quintet and witness a true Robbins favorite: a Spam carving contest.

Event planners, spearheaded by Gina McCarthy and Meg Holgate, couldn't have been more pleased. The smiles sported by those in attendance confirmed the day's success.

Resident Brad Bradford summed it up best.

"La Conner," he predicted, "won't soon forget this day."

# Fans flock to La Conner to see Tom

By Ken Stern

Of course there is a Tom Robbins Fan Club on Facebook and of course King for a Day celebration organizer Gina McCarthy posted news of the Sept. 2 activities there and of course at least one Irishwoman came to La Conner Saturday.

Gerri Roche of Wexford, Ireland took it as a sign. She shared fellow Irish native McCarthy's post "a few weeks

ago" and at least half a dozen fans traveled to participate.

Kerry McGrath came from Palmyra, New York. "It's been on my bucket list," she said. "The universe opened a path for me and I took it."

Jen Innc flew in from Phoenix. Her outfit Saturday included her favorite quote "Joy in spite of everything" on her T-shirt, frog pajama bottoms and a tea box sign, "Tibetan Peach Pie," on her fedora.

Sunshine Hubbard came from Springfield, Missouri. All her friends know how Robbins' novels have influenced her, she said.

Phoenix Milligan drove up from Tacoma. "There's not too many people I can talk about Tom Robbins with," she said. Here she is meeting up with fellow fan club members.

And yes, Roche carried a stuffed parrot with her all day.

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