



Trees on school campus will be cut • p 4

Wildlife sanctuary art auction is success • p 5

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# LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

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## Heavy snowfall across county



DREAMING OF A WHITE CHRISTMAS – Through the early morning on Dec. 20, a blanket of snow engulfed the town of La Conner, including the community Christmas tree in Gilkey Square. – Photo by Sarah Walls

## 2023 Town budget tops \$6.9 million

By Ken Stern

The 2023 budget the La Conner Town Council passed Dec. 13 is robust in its expenditures, at \$6.97 million and modest in its increase in revenue, to \$5.6 million. It is a deficit budget of \$1.37 million, with reserves covering the difference.

Expenditures will be \$1.1 million more than projected for 2022, almost 19% higher. Five funds will increase by a total of \$1.1 million next year: The general fund increase of \$215,874 will include staff raises of 7.3% for administration and 3% for public works. Replacing the fire hall roof is \$180,000, partially covered by the cell tower lease reserve fund. The fire hall heating system cost of \$50,000 will be paid with federal coronavirus funds.

Replacing Maple Hall's heating and air conditioning is a \$162,000 cost, most of the \$176,350 increase in the facilities fund.

Funding the Town's water plan update is \$135,000, with \$65,000 more for an asset management program.

The \$300,000 increase in the compost program has \$250,000 for repaving and pads, and \$50,000 for replacing the mix auger.

The \$802,892 in storm drainage costs is covered primarily by \$767,941 in reserves, paying for several projects: Street projects at Whatcom and

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## First winter storm buries La Conner, western Skagit County

By Bill Reynolds

Today is the official start of winter. The seasons changed Monday, though, when La Conner and the Puget Sound region awakened to sub-freezing temperatures and light snow on the ground.

Much of the same is forecast through Friday.

The wintry conditions immediately impacted schedules. La Conner Schools Monday morning canceled Tuesday classes, the last day of school before winter break.

The La Conner High girls' basketball game at Meridian Monday and the Braves' Tuesday tipoff with Clallam Bay were postponed.

Those calls came in advance of the National Weather Service in Seattle issuing a Winter Storm Warning from Monday 7 p.m. until Tuesday 7 p.m. Heavy snow and record-breaking cold temperatures were predicted.

La Conner residents experienced overnight temperatures in the low 20s, a steady powdery snowfall of several inches, and slippery local roadways. The low Monday was 20.9 degrees at 8 a.m. and 20.7 degrees 7 a.m. Tuesday at the Washington State University Memorial Highway weather station.

Swinomish Tribal Police reported early Tuesday that "the entire length of Reservation Road is a mess" and that Pioneer Parkway and road surfaces in Shelter Bay were quite slick.

"If you have to drive," a tribal police spokesman said, "give yourself a lot of time to get there."

The Town's planning commission canceled its Tuesday meeting.

The Town of La Conner Public works crew began plowing streets and removing snow from sidewalks 5 a.m. Tuesday. Whitney Hill (East Washington Street) was blocked to traffic, as is customary during winter storms that hit town, said Public Works Director

Brian Lease. Kids turned it into their sledding hill.

Some of the work was made easier by the type of dry, powdery snow that fell. Seven inches was measured at a La Conner site Tuesday.

"The good thing," Lease said, "is with this stuff we can use the large leaf blowers. It actually moves the snow."

The Port of Skagit had a plow in service at La Conner Marina Tuesday morning as well.

Lease said his department was preparing for temperatures in the teens on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. The challenges won't end there, he said.

Lease anticipates water leaks and related issues to arise when temperatures are forecast to reach the high 40s and perhaps low 50s on Christmas weekend.

"When it thaws out on Saturday," he said, "it could be a mess."

## Shelter Bay lease forum held at Swinomish

By Bill Reynolds

Since 2015 talks had stalled regarding negotiation of a new master lease between Shelter Bay and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community.

Now folks are talking again.

Shelter Bay and Swinomish residents and leaders last week attended the first of planned traditional Native American open floor discussions hosted by lease consultants Dr. Wil James and Ava Goodman at the tribal social services building.

Most came away with a positive view of the three-hour session, which invited a frank but respectful dialogue stressing common ground approaches to solving complex issues.

"The 900-pound gorilla in the room is the lease," acknowledged Shelter Bay board member Monte Hicks. Because it expires in 2044, banks will not write 30-year mortgages. That is a difficulty for potential homebuyers.

Hicks added a Shelter Bay infrastructure upgrade need: the continuing closure of its more than half century-old swimming pools, an issue he suggested could be addressed by Shelter Bay, Swinomish and perhaps the Town of La Conner.

"I'd like to try to work with the tribe and La Conner for a joint pool," said Hicks, adding that "we need to get more people involved. This is a great place to live."

Swinomish Tribal Senate Chairman Steve Edwards struck a conciliatory tone

in brief remarks from the floor.

"We appreciate you gathering here," Edwards told the sizeable Shelter Bay contingent. "We respect you and we respect your community. As neighbors, we can get along. I wanted to stop in, just to listen. This is your time to speak and express your feelings. God bless you."

The goal, said James, a medical doctor, is to secure a new lease that both assures Shelter Bay sustainability and pays Swinomish and individual allottees true market value for the land.

It will be a difficult balancing act, James conceded.

"With a new master lease," he said, "home values will go up. But not everybody living in Shelter Bay currently will be able to pay the new rate."

"This is," he stressed, "the most beautiful place in the world."

Several Shelter Bay residents said they appreciate residing on tribal land and have enjoyed the cultural diversity and becoming acquainted with Swinomish traditions. A number said they had volunteered at Canoe Journey a decade ago and attended annual Blessing of the Fleet ceremonies.

One, saying he has lived at Shelter Bay since 2019, called it a "magical, unbelievable, special place."

"Any knot," he insisted, "can be untied if we work together. You can get quite a lot if you work together."

Swinomish Senate Vice-Chair J.J. Wilbur and tribal member Jay Bowen, a local artist, provided unique perspectives as Shelter Bay homeowners.

"When the Shelter Bay deal was signed," said Wilbur, who represents the Shelter Bay director district on La Conner's school board, "it provided a little more income for our people other than federal aid. We don't want to see Shelter Bay go away. We're going to keep working on this on our side."

"As a homeowner in Shelter Bay with family ties in the (Swinomish) village, I have a high stake in this community," said Bowen, who served as sergeant-at-arms for the Tuesday forum. "I have cousins who are (Shelter Bay) leaseholders, who live on that money."

Tony Cladoosby, older brother of former longtime Swinomish Tribal Senate Chair president Brian Cladoosby, struck a humorous chord speaking as one of four official open floor witnesses.

Cladoosby drew laughter, noting as he looked around the room that he saw "persons of a certain age" who likely won't be affected when the present lease expires in just over two decades.

"It's good that you have your sense of humor," he said, quickly switching to a more serious tone.

"We opened our front door to you," said Cladoosby, pointing out that the Shelter Bay entrance sign is one of the first things seen by visitors to Swinomish Reservation.

"We don't want you to leave," he said, expressing the hope residents can pass homes to their heirs.

James and Goodman, who reside in

(continued on page 3)

## Family moves into Channel Cove Habitat home

By Max Drews

Sunday afternoon Skagit Habitat for Humanity's 41st home was ready and dedicated for Katelyn and her two children. The Channel Cove duplex on Park Street was ready for move-in after three months of renovation by primarily volunteer workers, including Katelyn.

Skagit Habitat Executive Director Tina Tate, Board President Rob Ashby and Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen spoke at a 2 p.m. ceremony in the Channel Cove community center. They welcomed Katelyn into her new home and expressed appreciation for all who made the project possible. Jodi Dean, Home Trust of Skagit director, presented the family with a \$200 cash gift and Rev. Scott Rossiter quoted from Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans that I have for you, says the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."

When Kerry Ashby, a committee chair at Skagit Habitat, presented gifts to the family: a bouquet of flowers, a \$100 gift card donated by Grocery Outlet, a toolbox and an engraved wooden sign reading "MORGAN FAMILY," Katelyn dabbed tears from her eyes.

She thanked the crowd, Project Manager Andy Weightman proudly handed her the key to her home and everyone filed out for the ribbon cutting. After a few photos, Katelyn's daughter was given the scissors to cut the red ribbon. She did. It fell and everyone applauded. "It's an exciting new chapter in our lives," Katelyn said. "It's the best Christmas gift ever."

According to Congressman Rick Larsen's (D-Everett), whose text Tate read earlier, the affordable housing crisis should be a bigger priority in Congress. He noted Washington state is in the process of building 500,000 affordable homes within the next decade.

In Skagit County, those houses are built one at a time. The future owner of Skagit Habitat's 42nd home, Cynthia, was in the audience Sunday.

### Holiday Closures

**Christmas**

Sunday, December 25

**Everything:**

**Bank:** Closed

**Buses:** No service

**Library:** Dec 24-25

**Schools:** Dec 20-Jan 2

**Town Hall:** Dec 24-25

**County government:** Closed

**Post Office:** Closed

**Trash Pick Up:** None

**Weekly News:** Closed

*And God bless us, everyone*

A famous editorial —

# "Is There a Santa Claus?"

We take pleasure in answering thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of The Sun:

Dear Editor —

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, "If you see it in The Sun, it's so." Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?  
Virginia O'Hanlon  
115 West Ninety Fifth Street, New York

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence.

We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The external light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies. You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if you did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived could tear apart. Only faith, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! He lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

— Francis Pharcellus Church

Reprinted from the Sept. 21, 1897 number of The New York Sun. This is the most reprinted editorial ever to run in newspapers in the English language.

## Texas regulations failed electricity customers



By Greg Whiting

In February 2021, Texas had unusually cold weather, resulting in an electric energy supply crisis. Millions of customers were without power for up to four days, during the coldest days of the year. Retail prices went up dramatically, and some customers received monthly bills for more than ten thousand dollars. Initial news reports assigned the blame for both the reliability issues and the costs to Texas utilities increasing the amount of renewable energy on its grid.

What really happened in the Texas electric market? What was the affect of the increased use of intermittent renewable power sources? What should Washington do, and what is Washington doing, to avoid similar reliability issues and price spikes in the future?

Explaining this will take more than one column. Let's start with the huge retail electric bills.

For any commodity in a well-functioning free market, supply and demand balance at a market-

clearing price. When a system upset occurs that suddenly changes either supply or demand, a new market-clearing price has to be established that reflects that change. When supply and demand balance again, the price stabilizes.

Usually, a sudden rapid increase in price is caused by a short-term, unexpected shortage of supply. In such cases, the price of a commodity goes up until demand goes down and the market clears again at a new, higher price. That's what happened in Texas.

However, electricity is a unique commodity. It's generated as it is used. There are very few ways to store electricity and draw down an inventory during a short-term crisis. If supply falls suddenly, prices can rise 100-fold.

And, electric customers usually don't know about price changes immediately. A consumer who sees higher orange juice prices in a store after a Florida freeze can choose not to buy orange juice. Electric consumers don't know that the electricity for space heaters and refrigerators suddenly costs a hundred times as much as it did two hours ago. The electric bill won't arrive for days, or weeks.

Furthermore, most consumers don't understand how to react to an electric price signal even

if they could receive one. Even if they did understand it and were willing to act, there are few mechanisms through which utilities can offer delivery of electricity to some customers willing to pay a higher price while cutting off service, or reducing service, to others.

In most locations, utility regulations are set up to require utilities to have a maximum retail price. Utilities, in turn, set up backup power and load management programs to react immediately to supply crisis situations. If they guess wrong, the utility owners might absorb financial losses. Even when they don't, short-term costs are factored into years' worth of future bills. End consumers don't see giant bills immediately.

Texas has unusual regulations. Consumers can choose their electric utility even if they are in another utility's historic service territory. Some retail utilities had offered contracts that passed live pricing on to the consumer. Most consumers are not aware that other contract offers' higher prices included the costs associated with mitigating price spikes, and are not aware that electric price spikes can be so dramatic. Some consumers signed up for such contracts, and got lower prices for a few years — till they suddenly got ten thousand-dollar invoices.

## LETTERS

Giving thanks for community support —

### Volunteers brightened library's Tiny Trees success

By Susan Macek and Jean Markert

Once again our community responded generously and warmly to this year's Festival of Tiny Trees. More than \$8,000 was raised to support additional furnishings for the new La Conner Swinomish Library. It was wonderful to be able to host everyone in our new library and to recognize the amazing efforts that made it possible.

We applaud and appreciate all who made this year's event a success!

- Tam Mason from WaFd Bank who stepped up to coordinate the event. What a hero!
- Our creative tree donors & designers:
- Local businesses and museums: Linda Banaszak, Caravan Gallery; Kim Broadhead, Jackie Bailey, Kait Hailey, Stompin' Grounds Coffee; Christina & Robyn Burdick-Good-Rubenstein, Kim & Elizabeth Rubenstein, Tillinghast Postal & Business Center; Michelle Calvin, Beaver Tales Coffee; Amy Green, Jacque Chase, Chris Mohnkern, Pacific Northwest Quilt & Fiber Art Museum; Julia Johnson, Jo Wolfe and staff, Skagit County Historical Museum; Rich Murphy, Scott Dean, Jessi Creason, Matt May, Pac Nor Westy; Colleen O'Brien-Miller, Beezie & Company Family Flower Farm
- Individuals: Alice Collingwood and Sarah Broderick; Georgia Johnson; Alexa Robbins and Tina Everitt; Kay Stewart; Kathleen Wadland; Lee Ann Wing
- Sierra Pacific Industries for their donation of a Seiko woman's watch to our silent auction
- Frances Simmons, event graphics and operations volunteer
- Bernadette Bishop, website
- Event volunteers Katryna Barber, Serena Campbell, Robert Hancock, Emily Markert, Kim Rubenstein, Lee Ann Wing; Friends of La Conner Swinomish Library: B.J. Carol, Sandy Chomiak, Diane Fritzier, Midge Hanson, Joan Scarboro
- Skagit County Historical Museum
- Soroptimist International of La Conner

We wish everyone a safe, peaceful and joyous holiday season — and we hope to see you at the library!

Macek is director of the La Conner Library Foundation. Markert is director of the La Conner Swinomish Library.

#### 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

### Dec. 13 Town Council meeting

By Ken Stern

The La Conner Town Council was productive at its last meeting of the year Dec. 13. It approved the Town's 2023 budget and passed ordinances raising fees after hearing from residents and getting staff reports.

No residents spoke at the public hearing ahead of unanimous approval of the budget. The budget estimates \$5.6 million in revenues with expenses of \$6.97 million, projecting a \$1.4 million deficit. See story, page 1.

The business-side approvals included an amendment finalizing the 2022 budget, joining increases passed earlier. The six fund categories codified went from the arts through composting, \$152,602, streets, \$24,462, and the general fund, \$19,680, for a total of \$197,644.

An ordinance to raise funds by imposing a "proportionate share of the cost of fire protection and park facilities needed to serve ... new growth and development" was passed. A resolution approving a table of fees will be brought to Council next year.

Fees for low-income housing are set at 50% and Council may reduce fees more. Low-income is defined at 80% or less of Skagit County's median family income.

The ordinance amends Title 13 of the Town's Uniform Development Code.

Council passed an ordinance increasing sewer and water monthly rates and service charges, amending parts of chapter 12 of the municipal code.

A resolution was passed for annual updates covering five pages of land use and public works services fees.

Town planner Michael

Fish, and strategy, needed

Thanks for the free paper, Mr. Editor, even if I'd read it before. I think I've missed maybe one, since your arrival as publisher all those years ago. I like to think of myself as a La Connerite, but perhaps I'm not. The Beaver Marsh and Fir Island are formally Mount Vernon, but here is where I hang out. I fished the channel when there were some fish here and I fished the Skagit River when fish were there. Now I fish neither, nope, not enough fish anywhere! Now I grit my teeth and look a bit pitiful, with my steely glare and my mostly missing white hair.

I'm not sure what to think about DNR's decision to end all finfish rearing in their waters, does this include trout ponds and hatcheries? Now that we've lessened the fish counts, are we going to throw in the towel, give up and hope that they'll return to pre-industrial levels? We just saw the devastating effect of rubber tires breaking down, causing coho deaths in an expensively rehabilitated stream. As a student of soils, fish, flora and fauna, I've designed and strategized several systems to help these dwindling stocks. Remediating contaminated waters is in my wheelhouse, along with my colleagues, yeah, a few of us have been at it for fifty years! Some of us have become famous, while some of us have studied in obscurity, struggling to get our dissertations heard.

Milo Moore became famous here for his work with salmon and fish food, yet next to nowhere is his work revealed. As a ten year old boy he caught a 62 pound Chinook, at Mount Vernon, on the Skagit. He headed the state's department of fisheries during much of the '40's, spent his whole life establishing coho and chum runs, in Japan, Korea and even Wisconsin! Then he created the fish food to feed them, yeah, somehow his fame has gone the way of the salmon, from struggling to threatened, then endangered, extremely rare.

So, who now has a great new strategy? I keep my ear to the ground, but I hear nary a sound, even when the fish are seldom found and we all hope for a miracle recovery for the watershed of the Salish Sea, we see not the dire situation, or think it's important to listen to different ideas.

Glen S Johnson  
Skagit Valley

Davolio's contract was renewed at a rate of \$90 per hour for a maximum of \$75,000 annually for two years, or 16 hours weekly. Davolio told Council this would be his last term and that new assistant planner Ajah Eills "can step in" in 2025.

Council approved \$10,000 for the La Conner School District's after-school Braves Club, providing participation for 10 low-income children.

A contract for cleaning with Andrea's House Cleaning Services for bi-weekly cleaning of Town Hall and the La Conner Sheriff's Detachment office for \$350 monthly on an ongoing basis was approved.

Council canceled its Dec. 27 session and elected Councilmember Rick Dole mayor pro tem for the next six months.

Four residents spoke at the meeting's start. Mayor Ramon Hayes and Councilmember Marylee Chamberlain were absent.

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**OBITUARIES**



**Jim Zimmerman**

James Roger (Jim) Zimmerman was born June 26, 1933 in Noonan, ND to Edgar and Stella (Kjos) Zimmerman and passed away December 12, 2022. In 1936 the family, with siblings Eloise and Boyd, headed west, starting a new life in LaConner, WA. Jim graduated in 1951 from LaConner High School and went to work on the tugboats for Dunlap Towing Company. In 1963 Jim and 19 co-workers purchased the Company from Gene Dunlap and he spent the next 30 years in a management role until he retired in 1992.

In 1951 he married Mary Ann Peth and together they raised 3 children, Tommy, Annie & Nancy in LaConner until her death in 1972. In 1973 Jim married Margery Dunlap and gained two daughters, Laura and Alison. They spent nearly 50 years together, traveling mostly by car. Road trips to remote places in USA were their favorite destinations. Together they built their dream home at Bayview, watching endless sunsets and tending to their gardens. He loved sharing his garden's bounty with family, friends and neighbors -- even giving away his last homegrown cantaloupe in October.

Jim enjoyed his annual pack trips with the guys hunting mule deer in the Pasayten Wilderness and crabbing with his brother Boyd for many years. Jim could tell a story like nobody else and loved spending time with his friends and family. He was a people person and rarely met a person he didn't like. He will be so missed by all. His "Jim isms" will carry on!

Jim is survived by his wife Margie, son Tom Zimmerman (Judy), and daughters Annie Hernandez (Jerry), Nancy Alvord (Dave), Laura Powers (Cameron) and Alison Bailey and his sister Eloise Green. He is also survived by 11 grandchildren, 22 great grandchildren and several nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, Ed & Stella Zimmerman, his brother Boyd Zimmerman and his grandson Aaron Hernandez.

A private family memorial will take place at a later date. Donations can be sent to your favorite charity. Arrangements are under the care of Kern Funeral Home.



**Rev. Fr. Dale A. Johnson  
June 7, 1950-Dec. 8, 2022**

Author, Lecturer, Priest, Human Rights Advocate

The Rev. Fr. Johnson is the son of a dairy farmer from Mount Vernon, Washington. After graduating Mount Vernon High School in 1968, he continued a lifelong passion of study and teaching. Many who knew Fr. Johnson as a youth knew him as a talented wrestler, a sport that takes grit and determination for success. He put this same grit and determination into his study of semitic languages and service to orphans and refugees around the globe. Fr. Johnson eventually attended a graduate program for semitic languages at The University of Chicago in the early 1980s.

With a passion to study, follow and spread the teachings of Jesus Christ, he was ordained as a priest for the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch in 1991 by His Eminence Mor Athanasius Yeshue Samuel of Dead Sea Scroll fame. Father Johnson was a linguist and was one of the world's leading experts in Aramaic, the family of semitic languages considered by scholars to be that of the spoken language of Jesus Christ.

He has worked for the World Council of Churches of Geneva, Switzerland in Turkey and Iraq where for more than 15 years he investigated and reported on violations of human rights, served refugees and managed relief projects. He also did mission work in China and South Africa. Fr. Johnson was attuned to the call of the Holy Spirit and went to wherever he was called, no matter the physical deprivation or danger. In the early 1990's he lived and studied at Mor Gabriel Monastery, a Syrian Orthodox monastery in remote South Eastern Turkey near the Syrian and Iraqi border. Fr. Johnson expressed a deep love and commitment for the people of that area of the world and considered Mor Gabriel Monastery his spiritual home.

He recently was serving as a missionary priest and human rights activist in the Dominican Republic, and has been instrumental in developing and initiating strategic anti-poverty programs with the help of short term volunteers from North America serving orphans, homeless women and children. He was recognized in the Dominican Republic for his service of organizing feeding centers and census work on homeless children, milk and



pampers projects for women with HIV/AIDS, education programs and Micro-credit projects.

In 2015 Father Johnson spearheaded a project focused toward helping refugees in the Middle East escaping ISIS. He led a group of Christians from the Pacific Northwest to Turkey providing seeds to Christian refugees planting gardens in an effort to give "Seeds of Hope" and self-sufficiency in a region of increasing Christian persecution. Father Johnson took a vow of poverty later in life. He had a great heart while living at the level of the poor. In contrast it was said by mission volunteers that when they were with Father Johnson in Turkey it was like being with a "movie star;" children would run out into the street to greet Father Johnson in order to receive a blessing.

Fr. Johnson was especially thankful for the compassion and support he received from members of Christ Episcopal Church in Anacortes from 2017 through 2021, when he was in the United States between mission trips. A place to live was kindly provided by the church while stateside. Several Episcopal and Lutheran Parishes throughout the western United States graciously supported and supplemented Fr. Johnson's missions over the years. Many consider Fr. Johnson a family member. Fr. Johnson considered orphans and refugees his family. There are family members that number thousands, they live safe now around the globe, grateful to acknowledge their Father that helped save their lives, escaping poverty and persecution.

Father Johnson is also the author of more than one hundred publications of various genres. Many that knew him referred to him as Father Dale. One of Fr. Dale's teachings and lasting message was, "Let Go and Let God."

He was preceded in death by his parents, Albert and Martha Johnson, his brothers Allen Johnson, Dennis Johnson. Father Dale is survived by two children and extended family that live in the Pacific Northwest.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Philippians 1:21.

In lieu of flowers or other sentiment the family requests that donations be made to www.SyrianOrthodoxChurch.org, in honor of Rev. Fr. Dale A. Johnson.

Information prepared by family and dear friends of Rev. Fr. Dale A. Johnson.

**Town of La Conner 2022 tax revenues are golden**

By Ken Stern

The slight dip, to \$57,164, in the Town of La Conner's November sales tax revenue was the first sizeable year-to-year drop in collections since the first summer of the coronavirus pandemic, in 2020. That is \$3,7467, 6.2% below 2021. Still, the \$631,012 collected in 2022 is almost \$140,000 above the year's budget projections and exceeds 2021's year total.

Elsewhere, revenues are solid gold, moving to platinum by year's end. The \$21,228 in hotel/motel tax revenues is the highest November report ever, 5.2% over 2021. Revenue is almost \$50,000 above budget estimate. This is the ninth month collections exceeded 2021 totals.

The \$4,149 collected in REET (Real Estate Excise Tax)

revenue more than doubles the 2022 revenue estimate, totaling \$81,860 versus the \$40,000 projected for the year.

La Conner's total revenues are at 109% of projections, with a month to go. Almost every fund category is above 100%, including public works. Total expenses stand at 78%. Barring huge end of the year expenditures, the Town will finish over \$1 million in the black. It had projected a deficit budget for 2022.

No firetruck bond report was provided.

These totals are based on September collections from town businesses and online purchases delivered to La Conner addresses and reported to town council.

La Conner has a calendar fiscal year.

**Budget. . .**

(from page 1)

Laurel; Maple and Caledonia and East Washington total \$435,000. Updating the storm water plan is \$40,000

Water projects are \$172,500 for a plan update, \$135,000, operation and maintenance, hydrant and water replacement, \$30,000, and \$7,500 for an analysis of the Skagit Beach main.

Operating costs for public safety: the Skagit County Sheriff's office contract, the Town's code enforcement program and the fire department -- will make up 9.4% of the budget, at \$658,000. The contract with the sheriff's office increased 9%, to \$369,017. The code enforcement program is another \$60,000, half in salary and benefits. The \$226,092 fire department expenditures have increased 31%, as upgrading equipment and training has become a frequent concern the past year.

The department now has a half-time fire chief in Aaron Reinstra, a fulltime Town employee with code enforcement duties. Likewise, some equipment and maintenance costs are split between the two units.

The fire truck bond was paid off in 2022. The special fund safety tax is banked for future fire apparatuses.

Councilmembers are investing \$7,000 in a planning retreat.

Town revenues are projected

to increase 9%, to almost 5.6 million, a conservative increase from 2022's budget. Revenues for this year are above that total with December not yet tallied. In 2021 the actual revenue was \$6.1 million. Mayor Ramon Hayes again expressed caution in his budget message, writing, "we are still in a time of uncertainty with expected decreases in our tax revenues and increases in cost and materials ... Storm clouds appear on the horizon as many economists report the advance warning signs of a recession."

Tax revenues derived from tourists have been robust monthly for over two years. Revenues from sewer and compost operations have also exceeded projection in 2021 and 2022. The 2023 budget is again cautious in projecting growth from every revenue source.

Hayes has led the Town administration to be frugal in projecting revenue and expending actual dollars, yearly. This year, expenditures are \$1.7 million below the annual budget.

The end of 2023 projected fund balance, or reserves, is \$4.3 million, over 75% of 2023 revenue. Town policy is to maintain the fund balances equal to 20% of operating revenues. The mayor and council members have long discussed the need for major water main and wastewater treatment plant infrastructure projects. The Town's reserve fund continues to grow.

**Shelter. . .** (from page 1)

Shelter Bay and have deep Swinomish roots, were retained two years ago, at \$10,000 per month, to break what had become a lengthy impasse in negotiations.

They have conducted numerous personal outreaches and developed YouTube videos outlining the history of Shelter Bay's master lease development.

"Shelter Bay didn't cost the Swinomish Tribal Community anything other than deferred rent," James said. "At the time, Swinomish didn't have any money. Shelter Bay has upheld for the most part its end of the bargain.

James said that historical trauma related to Native Americans and land has some questioning whether the lease should have been entered into in the first place.

He is not in that camp.

"Their initial response is to take it back," he said. "But I have to trust that my ancestors who made this deal acted in the best interests of my people.

"I believe in the future," said James. "It's not 2044. Our ancestors made the deal and left the responsibility to us."

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**Spotlight on Missy**

Missy is approximately eight years old and full of love for that special someone. She is an indoor cat; spayed and litter-box trained.

This pretty lady was surrendered to the shelter after the death of her person. She's a wonderful, loving companion kitty that needs someone to help her feel secure and provide her with a loving, quiet, and calm home.

Missy loves tummy rubs, lap time, window perches, cat trees & toys, and hideouts.

Missy is shy and fearful of other animals and commotion. She would do best in a home as the only cat (no dogs) with a mature owner who is home a lot to spend time with her.

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# Kim Pedroza leaves as school district transportation director

By Bill Reynolds

La Conner Schools Transportation Supervisor Kim Pedroza is leaving the school district for a similar post with the Stanwood School District.

School Board President Susie Deyo formally recognized the many contributions Pedroza has made at the panel's monthly hybrid meeting Friday morning.

Pedroza will be hard to replace, a point underscored by transportation staff member Randy Swift, who juggles driving, maintenance and classroom instructional assignments.

"Our coach has gone to Stanwood," Swift lamented, "and we're in the process of finding someone else. We need to have

a varsity coach, not a JV coach. We need a great coach. My biggest concern is that we take our time and find somebody who's pretty stellar."

Complicating matters, said Swift, is that three district bus drivers are eligible to retire at the end of the school year.

"We're trying to get newer and younger folks to come in here," Swift said. "We have to get creative doing that."

Brian Gianello, as director of finances and operations, updated a tough short-term district fiscal forecast. A combination of declining student enrollment, loss of COVID-19 emergency funding and a significant drop in anticipated federal impact aid monies will likely push the

reserve funding balance below its goal of 10 per cent of budget expenses, he said.

Board member J.J. Wilbur, who serves on the Swinomish Tribal Senate and is a Fire District 13 commissioner, said the drying up of pandemic revenue is affecting governmental entities.

"This isn't the only budget I look at," he said. "Without COVID money, we're back to reality."

La Conner's K-12 student population has dropped from around 600 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to 530.

"The good news," Gianello allowed, "is we're holding around 530. That seems to have

(continued on page 8)

# La Conner Schools will remove diseased trees during break



**TREE REMOVAL** – The school district plans to remove diseased trees and trim back others on campus. The work, weather permitting, is scheduled to take place over winter break. – Photo by Madoc Hiller

By Bill Reynolds

'Tis the season to put-up Christmas trees.

At school, it's also the time of year to remove diseased trees and trim back others that are intruding on campus buildings.

La Conner School District staff will take out "five sickly trees" plus trim several more over the upcoming winter break.

"Three of these sick trees will be removed from the front of the high school," district staff stated in a release last week, "and four others will be limbed back in that area. One tree will be removed from behind the high school gym. One tree will be removed from

the front of the middle school. Two trees will be limbed back at the district office."

The work will be done reluctantly, they stress.

"We will be sad to see these trees go," the release noted, "but feel this is appropriate for both the longevity of our buildings and safety of our school community."

The district is putting out the word beforehand, so the public is not surprised when they realize the trees are no longer in place.

Those wishing additional information on the project may contact Director of Operations and Planning Bobby Vaughn at the district office, 360-466-3171.

# Braves suffer tough overtime loss against MVC

By Bill Reynolds

Mount Vernon Christian played well but needed an almost miracle to edge La Conner 65-61 in boys' hoops action at their home court Saturday.

The Braves (3-5) had seemingly won the game when Isa Gonzales-Rojas sank two of three free throw attempts for a 56-55 lead with two seconds remaining in regulation. He had been fouled on a desperation three-point heave from midcourt.

The winds of fortune then shifted in favor of the Hurricanes.

Referees nixed the second of Gonzales-Rojas' made free throws by whistling La Conner for a lane violation, sending the contest into overtime tied at 55-55.

Mount Vernon Christian took advantage of the call and pulled

away in the extra session.

La Conner played the final two minutes of overtime without Braden Thomas. The senior transfer fouled out after his tip-in knotted the score 57-57.

Thomas had scored 44 points in his La Conner debut, a 95-14 road romp past Chief Kitsap Friday.

La Conner closed to 62-61 on successive scores by Cole Medeiros and C.J Edwards. The team earlier appeared on the verge of a blowout win, bolting to a 15-2 first period lead.

Thomas, Edwards and Isaiah Price buried perimeter treys during that stretch. Ivory Damien drained a 15-foot jumper and Price worked inside for a put-back.

The tide turned after Thomas knocked down a turn-around jumper for a 19-6 lead at 6:30 before intermission.

MVC responded with a 13-4 run that narrowed the deficit to 23-19.

Price answered with a trey and bucket in the paint and Logan Burks meshed a short jumper for a 30-25 Braves halftime lead.

The Hurricanes' 6'6", 225-pound senior post Liam Millenaar spurred the second quarter MVC comeback with three hoops in the paint, including a deft reverse layup that cut La Conner's lead to 25-23 with less than a minute remaining.

In an omen of things to come, Damien had a driving shot in the lane to open the third quarter waved off for traveling. Still, he soon nailed a three-pointer to offset a DeJong spin move and keep the visitors in front, 33-29.

A layup, free throw and two close-range scores by MVC gave

(continued on page 5)

# La Conner girls swept away by second half Hurricane comeback

By Bill Reynolds

Big school programs on the La Conner High School girls' basketball schedule have posed few issues for the Lady Braves.

Not so with nearby small

school rival Mount Vernon Christian, however.

The Lady Hurricanes overcame a five-point halftime deficit to hand La Conner a 46-45 NW-2B/1B setback at DeKok Court Saturday afternoon.

La Conner was playing its third road game in three nights, having bested 4A Kamiak 68-45 Thursday and 2A North Kitsap 52-40 Friday.

Mount Vernon Christian, the defending state 1B champions, parlayed a patient half-court offense and crucial three-point shooting into its one-point comeback triumph.

La Conner rebounded from an 18-13 second period deficit in a back-and-forth affair.

An inside bucket and putback by Makayla Herrera narrowed the final margin to 46-45. Despite forcing a Lady Hurricane turnover, La Conner was unable to score in the last 49 seconds.

La Conner (7-2 overall) was scheduled at 1A Meridian Monday night.

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# Shelter Bay Marina a community asset

By Aven Wright-McIntosh

Shelter Bay community residents learned about their marina's history, structure and financials at the second "Know Your Community" class held Dec. 12 at the clubhouse.

The class began with interim community manager Pat McGarry saying he was "drafted" to the volunteer marina committee after moving here in 2010 based on his marina construction experience. The marina's story started with Axel Osberg negotiating a lease agreement with Dewey Mitchell of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community in the 1960s to dredge a harbor and create a development to provide income for the Tribe. The marina, built and controlled by the Osbergs, was built in 1970.

In 2004 a group of residents purchased the lease and marina from the Osbergs. As a community, Shelter Bay agreed, for the marina would pay 10% of the lease. The borrowed funds were then repaid by marina revenue. This entity - lease and marina - became Shelter Bay Company.

In 2007 an engineering assessment estimated the marina's lifespan to be 5-10 years. A finance team presented the 2013 Marina Business Plan with two options; 1) take no action and let the facility deteriorate to failure, or 2) rebuild the marina and dredge community waters. The decision to rebuild increased property values, allowed raise moorage fees, built an asset to borrow against to attain a commercial loan for future work and realigned boat slip lengths to market demand which increased marina occupancy and revenue.

Reconstruction shifted smaller slip lengths to larger; to 50 feet from below 40 feet. This brought much higher, year-round occupancy and additional revenue. "Larger slips are occupied year-round - you can't pick 'em up and put 'em in your backyard," McGarry said.

In 2016, the board transferred marina ownership from the for-profit Shelter Bay Company to the non-profit Shelter Bay

Community.

Between 2017-2020, docks A-E were replaced funded by borrowed community reserves, repaid by marina revenues and lease contributions made. This year, replacing docks F-I, along with the dredging work, "are the biggest thing we've done," McGarry said. "It's been 40 years since any major dredging."

Harbormaster Vanessa Finch outlined the physical plant, tenants, vessel slips and rates ending with budget and financials. "The marina exists because volunteers have committed to preserving it," she said.

The harbor committee is 11 volunteers plus a strategic marina business and implementation task force of 10. The marina employs one full time harbor-master (Finch) and a half-time person. Nearby La Conner Marina, slightly larger, has nine full time summer employees.

Finch is accountable for day-to-day marina functions, maintains the physical plant and supports the safety/security of tenants/vessels. She also ensures compliance and seeks maximum profitability.

Shelter Bay residents comprise 36% of the marina tenants. Most of the remaining 64% are from nearby counties.

Slip sizes are up from less than 32 feet in 2013 to over 36

feet in 2022 and over 42 feet projected for 2023 including 60 slips 48 feet and larger.

Obtaining a slip requires a signed lease, proof of \$500,000 liability insurance, current registration and, if not a resident, a paid security deposit equivalent to one month's rent. "It's also going to require going on a wait list," said Finch. Community members "go to the top of the list," said Finch giving a thumbs up.

Moorage rates for residents through June 2023 are discounted 10% and range from a per foot cost of \$8.27/month (\$9.18/month for non-residents) for slips less than 38 feet to \$10.79/month (\$11.98/month for non-residents) for slips 60 feet and up and end ties. There are no liveboards.

Marina revenue sources are 60% from non-residents, 34% residents' moorage fees and 6% other. The marina pays \$204,400/year towards the master lease and continues to be profitable with net income upwards of \$500,000 for fiscal year 2022. Marina profits are typically transferred to the community's capital reserve. Complete financial information is at shelterbay.net.

The next class, on community leases and taxes, is presented by Rod Proctor Jan. 10 at 6:30 p.m.

# Art auction supporting local wildlife sanctuary is success

La Conner locals and friends of Predators of the Heart gathered at Skagit Cellars in Gilkey Square to celebrate a 20-year legacy and raise funds for ongoing operations the night of the lighted boat parade, Dec. 10.

The winery was packed. Of a staggering 62 artworks for auction, 52 sold, bringing in over \$5,000 for wildlife rescue and conservation. Two participants drove all the way from Auburn to attend and others joined online from California to

New York.

Some donated above and beyond their winning bids. A generous winner of 11 items selected just a few to keep and donated back the remaining artworks, enabling POTH to hold another auction in the future.

Fundraising is ongoing! POTH is holding a Christmas Miracle campaign to match funds up to \$10,000 from a generous supporter. Learn more at: [poplme.co/poth](http://poplme.co/poth).

Source: *Predators of the Heart*

## Braves...

(from page 4)

them a 38-35 lead entering the fourth quarter.

The score then went back and forth. Price lifted the visitors to 45-43 with an 18-foot jump shot off a nice feed from Damien. MVC recaptured the lead at 47-45 on two straight baskets.

Thomas brought La Conner ahead at 54-51 with 1:20 to play on a pair of three-pointers and a foul shot. Again, setting the stage for the finish, a second Thomas free throw was denied due to a lane violation.

MVC re-took the lead at 55-54 with just three seconds on the clock after two consecutive baskets.

Gonzales-Rojas was then fouled attempting a game-winning three-point shot. He saw his first free throw rim out, but then sank the next two shots - the second apparently winning for La Conner.

La Conner was scheduled at home yesterday, Dec. 20, opposite Clallam Bay. The Braves have another non-league matchup at Landy James Gym today, 5 p.m., with Providence Classical Christian.

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# Schools...

(from page 4)

stabilized.”

Gianello said declining enrollment is not unique to La Conner, though the desirability to live here and resulting increased cost of living makes it less affordable for families with school age children.

“Most districts around the state are experiencing something similar,” Gianello said.

The problem, noted board

member and legislative liaison John Agen, is that there’s no easy fix to the student enrollment issue.

“It would be great to increase our student population,” he said, “but that’s not going to happen overnight.”

The alternative, though, isn’t attractive.

“Cost cutting would be painful,” Agen said.

Wilbur said it’s even more imperative that the district take measures to boost enrollment.

The district has considered

marketing to families of children graduating from parochial or non-aligned middle schools, such as Conway, and study reasons students residing in the district opt to enroll elsewhere.

“We need to get these kids back,” said Wilbur.

Still, Gianello expressed at least guarded optimism that the district will eventually receive about half of the \$500,000 federal impact aid shortfall through disbursement adjustments. The district might tap into a portion of the \$850,000 it received from

the state for Braves mascot logo removal.

The board approved \$3,000 for the Wahkiakum School District for its litigation to extend the McCleary Act mandate for equal education funding to include capital construction projects.

“This would be big for us in La Conner if they win,” Deyo said.

“It’s hard for taxpayers in small districts to raise capital funds,” board vice president Lynette Cram pointed out.

Wahkiakum has repeatedly seen bond measures designed to upgrade aging buildings and infrastructure fail at the polls. Deyo and Cram said that proportional school construction costs are much higher for Wahkiakum School District taxpayers than for those residing in more affluent areas such as Issaquah.

Also, Deyo, Cram and Agen were re-elected to their respective board leadership positions.

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