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Pioneer Association helps history museum • p 5

Your Independent Hometown Award-winning Newspaper

# LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

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## An unusual Skagit Valley sunrise



RED SKY AT MORNING, WE ALL NEED TO TAKE WARNING – This was sunrise Saturday off of Bradshaw Road. Farm staff were out in the field getting ready to start the day. “The sky was really orange and thick with smoke. Farmers were still out there working: We have to eat” are the photographer’s notes. – Photo by Sarah Walls

## Unhealthy air came in Friday for weekend

By Bill Reynolds

The La Conner High School football team lost its season home opener on Saturday – not to non-league opponent Forks but to poor air quality.

The Braves’ grid contest at Whittaker Field was nixed due to thick, stifling wildfire smoke that began hovering in the La Conner area Friday and lingered through the weekend.

The Northwest Clean Air Agency Board issued a Stage 1 air quality burn ban for the Island, Skagit and Whatcom tri-county region Friday morning. That ban, separate from existing fire safety burns, was in response to increased fire dangers.

Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen, who serves on the NWCAA board of directors, said Friday that smoky air here was pushed by winds from wildfires ignited by lightning strikes in the North Cascades and

elsewhere.

Winds carried in smoke from British Columbia and eastern Washington, compromising regional air quality on what was already forecast as a hot, dry weekend.

By Saturday afternoon, conditions had worsened with residents reporting seeing ash particles in the air. The haze-shrouded sun appeared as a brilliant reddish-orange ball overhead, an odd combination of beauty and repulsion, which some dubbed a “Sci-Fi” look.

A NWCAA statement Saturday stressed that people can inhale tiny smoke particles deeply into their lungs, causing damage to delicate tissue and capable of triggering asthma attacks, making breathing more difficult and aggravating heart and respiratory problems.

Wildfire smoke can be especially harmful for children, people aged 65 and older and those with pre-existing

health conditions.

La Conner Schools responded with a Saturday morning announcement posted on social media, posting. “Due to the fires and smoke in Skagit County, today’s La Conner home football game is canceled.”

The Slider Café on Morris Street made changes, too, reducing its weekend hours, closing on Saturday and making patio seating available Sunday upon request.

Air quality began improving Sunday afternoon. With winds sweeping out wildfire smoke and improved air quality, Monday morning NWCAA ended its Stage 1 air quality burn ban for Island, Skagit, and Whatcom counties. Skagit County’s fire safety burn ban remains in place.

As for La Conner football, the Braves are scheduled to play at Friday Harbor Sept. 16 at 6:30 p.m. barring another round of air quality issues.

## Maritime industry zoning Port of Skagit request

By Ken Stern

Adding a chapter creating a Port Industrial Zone in the Town of La Conner’s Uniform Development Code will “preserve” for the long term the Port of Skagit’s La Conner Marina property for maritime industries, Port Communications Director Linda Tyler wrote in response to Weekly News questions about the Sept. 20 town planning commission hearing. The Port made a 2022 recommendation for a change to the Town’s code in January.

The proposed chapter, 15.42, Port Industrial Zone, allows 60 foot tall buildings. Mavrik Marine’s expansion in 2020-2021 was approved under a variance. “Maritime manufacturing businesses in this area need more height,” Tyler wrote, and “the proposed La Conner Maritime project is also going to need additional height to meet their business needs.”

Tyler notes that 60-foot buildings at the marina’s location at the north end of La Conner will have “less impact on the Town’s visual profile.”

The Port seeks the new zoning chapter in response to the continued growth in maritime manufacturing at its facilities. Moorage demand at its marina has surged from people seeking the outdoors as a result of the pandemic. Yacht broker’s success indicates that recreational boating demand will increase, Tyler pointed out.

It is too early for projecting the number and types of businesses, jobs created, impact on infrastructure or the community, or the length of time even for the first phase of development or to estimate costs, Tyler wrote. The Port is “committed to (a) public process and want a well-conceived and carefully planned future for the property, including a good understanding of infrastructure needs and costs, as well as potential impacts such as traffic volume.

The proposed zoning code change is entirely maritime industry based. It is separate from the planning and visioning for a mixed use development shared with the La Conner community in May. No commercial zoning changes have been requested. Tyler writes, “The preliminary planning process will conclude with an open house in November where citizens will have another opportunity to come talk to the Port about what we have learned in our preliminary work and to continue to share ideas and comments with us.”

Port Executive Director Sara Young said, “Marine trades businesses are a priority for the area and we are looking at what else makes sense. Whatever redevelopment brings, the idea is to revitalize the Marina and be complementary to and cohesive with the town.

“We are in the very early stages of planning and (continued on page 6)

## Joyce Johnson helps protect more farmland in Skagit

At 104, greater La Conner resident Joyce Johnson has taken a stand for farmland.

Last week she finalized, with Skagit County’s Farmland Legacy Program, a conservation easement on her 57-acre property to permanently protect the land for agricultural use.

“My brothers and uncle were farmers, but they never owned their land,” said the longtime member of the La Conner Civic Garden Club in a county press release. “They would be so happy to know that I own this land. My father would be, too. And now it’s protected.”

The property near the corner of Bradshaw and Calhoun Roads has been leased to the Roozen family since 1979. Before that, Johnson’s late husband Stan Johnson and his family farmed the land.

“That land is the best of the best,” says John Roozen, co-owner of the Washington Bulb Company along with his siblings. “I’m really excited about seeing it protected.” The company will likely put in 20 acres of tulips behind Johnson’s house next spring.

Bulb crops rotate on a five-year-cycle to minimize soil disease. Rotation crops are grown between

bulb crop years. “We trade a lot of our ground, like the Johnsons’, with farming partners and a dairy farm partner,” says William Roozen.

The Johnson farm is in close proximity to a number of Skagit County Farmland Legacy conservation easements. Approximately 290 acres of protected farmland surround Mrs. Johnson’s farm in a one-mile radius.

“Protecting contiguous parcels of farmland ensures Skagit farmers can continue feeding the world,” says Commissioner Lisa Janicki. “The future of farming is more secure because of the Johnson family’s decision to protect this agricultural land.”

Johnson’s 57 acres bring the total to more than 14,000 acres of Skagit County farmland now protected from the threat of incompatible residential and industrial use. The county paid \$110,000 in industrial futures tax funds for the permanent protection of Johnson’s farmland.

Total protected acreage represents 16% of the roughly 89,000 acres designated Agriculture-Natural Resource Land in Skagit County, as of August 2022.

Source: Skagit County government



AMY MCADAM AND JOYCE JOHNSON

## Residents plan to be heard at public hearing

By Ken Stern

A group of residents intend to do their civic duty and be heard at the public hearing called by the Town of La Conner Planning Commission Tuesday. The Port of Skagit submitted its recommendation last January for a new chapter creating a port industrial zone in the Town’s code. In August town planner Michael Davolio prepared a 27 page document, “Suggested 2022 Code Changes,” for the planning commission.

Town residents have been preparing, also. Over 20 attended a meeting at Maggie Wilder’s Sept. 6, their second after a session at Renee and Jim Matthews in August. An attendee said the group was “kind of fired up about going to the meeting and letting their ideas be known.”

Their overall concern is with the leadership of town. Residents started paying attention and became galvanized with the purchase and sale of the Hedlin Maple Avenue ballfield property in 2021. This attendee, who asked to be anonymous, pointed to “the focus of the planner seems to be, in our opinion, misplaced to make development too easy at the expense of the neighborhoods.” The group wants planning redirected to serve the neighborhoods and the majority of the town’s residents. Intimated was that economic development take a smaller role in the community’s development.

Their three-page summary states they “covered important ground,” primarily – and necessarily – mirroring Davolio’s list, but the 306 Center Street condominium project was their first concern.

(continued on page 6)

From the editor —

## Planning the community's future

It is mid-September. The decision train – trains, actually – are boarding. It is time to get on if you do not want to be left behind as Town of La Conner governmental entities prepare trips into 2023 – and beyond.

First on the schedule is a Sept. 19 town conversation for residents to come together and talk. It is organized by La Conner Town Council's communication committee. They want to hear from citizens and listen for celebrations, concerns, trends, hopes and ideas. It starts at 6:30 p.m. in Maple Hall.

Come early the next night for the public hearing in front of the town's planning commission. On the agenda are potential municipal code changes. The Port of Skagit has asked that a Port Industrial Zone chapter be added. It will specify marine manufacturing and maritime services for the goal of supporting a strong maritime economy. This is not a follow up to the mixed use proposal presentation last May. The new chapter does sanction 60 foot building heights.

The 2023 Town of La Conner budget train is already rolling. Last evening town council started discussion, hearing from the directors of public works and the wastewater treatment plant. On Sept. 27 presentations for the fire department and other general fund departments budgets are planned. By Nov. 2 council will get Mayor Ramon Hayes' draft budget. There will be public hearings at the November council meetings and perhaps December's. In recent years almost no one has spoken at budget hearings.

And, last night the Town bought a piece of property on which they may site – or champion having – a tiny house village. Residents might want to weigh in on that.

Talk about drinking out of a fire hose. The last three weeks the Weekly News has reported on the Sept. 20 planning commission public hearing and the Port's request for a new zoning chapter. Only resident Linda Talman expressed concern for public participation. She was quoted in August questioning if a large citizen turn out will crowd the second story meeting room next week.

Good for her. Council, mayor and staff are not organizing, preparing or advocating for community involvement ahead of critical decisions on municipal code changes that may open the door for increased development at the north end of town.

South end economic development is also being planned, assisted by a \$30,000 planning grant by the state. La Conner's potential to grow is vast. Folks who champion new business and jobs in the community are doing exactly that, advocating for the future they want.

The annual budget is a planning document as well as a list of expenditures and revenue sources. Here is a small example: a line item for the new La Conner Swinomish Library, the first funding commitment from our local government.

La Conner – the town government, the school district, the business community, residents, have, from the 30,000 foot level – and perhaps at ground level – come through the two worst years of the coronavirus pandemic in amazingly good shape. By a strict accounting of tax dollars, town coffers are overflowing as tourists continue to love La Conner and month after month sales tax revenue records are set. Through all that, the community – as a governed entity – has not drawn closer together, has not been rallied to common purpose.

There have been common discontents – property development projects on Maple Avenue and Center Street that have stirred loud criticisms. Those have not turned into opportunities to invite discussion and participation for visioning and planning a future that minimizes ad hoc private development and offers a road map for a sustainable future.

The communications committee has heard and captured resident sentiment that our ongoing prosperous and developing La Conner maintain the small town values that everyone holds dear. That sentiment is loved. A vision for prosperity that protects the present day La Conner? Where is the train that will bring us to that destination? Who is holding hearings on getting us there?

– Ken Stern

## Musings – on the editor's mind

Something felt odd being outdoors Friday. The hazy heat was tempered mid-afternoon by a sky turned gray with smoke from distant wildfires. That tilted the day away from a typical end of summer northern Puget sound experience. And consider, we would have faced a hotter day if the smoke had not blocked the sun's rays.

How quickly human induced climate change changes the weather. Thursday the forecast was for highs in the 80s and maybe reaching 90 degrees. At 11:15 a.m. Saturday I was switching to jeans and a long sleeve shirt as smoke created overcast cooked temperatures down to the 50s. The famous Skagit Valley mystic light had an odd brownish tinge to it.

The heat forecast collided with smoke warnings and smoke triumphed, smothering the sun and lowering temperatures.

That was the morning. By 1 p.m. an orange red beach ball sun shined through the haze and the air tried to feel warm. The sunlight bleached to a light late day orangish hue and tree and building shadows were pale and weak.

Sunday the morning started cool, caused by the smoke again blocking the sun. By 9 a.m. the sun broke through, again shining weakly, the light that odd orange red on surfaces. The smoke also reached the ground, hanging visibly at just the right height for inhaling.

My thoughts turned, melodramatically, to newscasts from the Dust Bowl era and air turned brown over New York from Great Plains soil. Dust was in the air for years in the 1930s and made it to the east coast more than once. Look it up.

Forecasts on the radio warned of dust clouds rolling east, but when they arrived to darken and chill New York City, many had to be taken by surprise and surely everyone was awed by the event.

Is anyone surprised today when smoke from east of the Cascades gets in their eyes?

## LETTER

### Town council decisions

The Sept. 13 town council meeting will be over before you read this. I hope that the council will determine “who's on first” so you know what to expect at the Sept. 20 planning commission public hearing. (This situation is described in the letter I posted on the town website. The issue is that we really don't know what recommendations will be made for updating the town's municipal code on the 20th and what year it will be accepted.)

If you attended the council meeting or read the Sept. 21 Weekly News you will know that the town is behind on permit applications. By state law, these will be automatically granted if they are not acted upon in a certain number of days.

You will also learn that a generous gift of property has become the property of the town – with the condition that it become a public park, or go to parks and recreation or other needs of the town as determined by the buyer – the town. (That didn't work out so well last time.)

A little park there could make up for the hurt caused to the town by the Maple Street disaster. I can imagine kids going there through an easement path – since there is no road into it. I can also imagine some truly affordable houses as defined by the state. Just have the town give it to the Community Action or the Skagit Home Trust or Habitat for humanity. I can also imagine giving it the Skagit Land Trust to be put into a conservancy area.

Any of those would be suitable. And only those. It should not be sold to a developer.

Let your voice be heard.

Cheers,  
Linda Talman  
La Conner

A view from the Port of Skagit —

## The Future of the La Conner Marina

By Sara Young

It's an exciting time at the La Conner Marina. The Port of Skagit, which built and owns the Marina, has been considering the needs of this important property and future opportunities for more than 15 years. We've had a lot of great conversations with members of the community since our visioning presentation in May 2022 during the joint meeting with La Conner's town council and planning commission.

As the Port develops a vision and plan for the site, there will be more opportunities for public input. We also want to take some time to provide information to the community along the way. This column will serve as the first in a series to connect with you – the community – to provide updates and engagement through the process. We want to start by sharing more about the Port of Skagit, our role and where we are today.

Ports are special purpose districts authorized under RCW 53 to provide economic development functions and public infrastructure. Ports have a broad scope of activities, but a common theme is maintaining certain critical facilities in public ownership to serve the greater good. Within the Town of La Conner, we are subject to the same land use rules and regulations as any private citizen.

The Port is currently requesting changes to the industrial zone at the north end of our property to better support the marine manufacturing businesses there and focus allowable uses on the marine trades, a use the Port believes should be prioritized in perpetuity as a foundational component of a maritime economy.

Separate from the industrial zone code changes, the Port is undergoing a feasibility study for redeveloping 13 acres of the Marina property, home to the Marina office, RV Park, storage units and several aging buildings. This study will inform the Port of viable options to meet our mission of economic development and job creation, while supporting and enhancing the local maritime industry and creating synergy with downtown and the greater La Conner community.

Our goal for the property is to create a vibrant community waterfront space with a home for marine trades, better pedestrian access with downtown, improved waterfront access and green space. We are evaluating whether mixed use and residential elements have a place at the Marina. Housing is not traditional Port work, but we understand the lack of housing is having an impact on employers currently.

As we develop future plans, we have great sensitivity to and appreciation for the unique history and character of La Conner. The La Conner Marina has brought commerce, recreation, tourism, jobs and quality of life to our community for the past five decades. The time has come to rebuild aging infrastructure. With this initiative, we hope to revitalize this marina and bring positive impact to La Conner for generations to come.

We are early in this process and committed to transparency and open communication. The Port will host a community workshop in November to share what we've heard and learned so far through our visioning work. We're listening.

*Young became the Port's executive director in 2021 after being director of planning and facilities.*

## LETTERS

### Padilla Bay Foundation thanks

Padilla Bay Foundation recently held Brunch at the Bay 2022 at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve on a beautiful PNW summer day in August. The over 100 attendees enjoyed fresh grilled oysters and other locally sourced foods, while overlooking the Bay, connecting with friends old and new, listening to great jazz and touring the aquarium and gift shop in the Breazeale Interpretive Center.

The event raised funds toward a backup/emergency power supply system to protect the aquarium creatures. We celebrated the completion of the touch pool and recognized the contributions of Paul Dinnel, serving on the PBF Board for over 30 years. PBF wishes to thank our generous sponsors: The Port of Skagit, Skagit Soils Inc., Terramar Brewing and The Drain Doctor. We also thank Fidalgo Coffee, Schuh Farms, Indulge Bakery and Whidbey Island Bagels Mount Vernon; they provided in-kind support. We would not have been able to pull off this fabulous event without the efforts of the PBF Board, the Padilla Bay Reserve staff and all of our wonderful volunteers including those from Naval Station Whidbey Island and Banner Bank.

On behalf of the Padilla Bay Foundation Board, we thank our generous volunteers, sponsors and donors and look forward to celebrating at Brunch at the Bay 2023.

Mary Mae Hardt  
Padilla Bay Foundation

### Meet a trans person

An opinion piece in the New York Times last week was titled “America is Being Consumed by a Moral Panic over Trans People.” If the ramifications of this weren't so cruel, I would be tempted to laugh.

What is so scary about people who identify as transgender?

All that means is that their sex chosen for them at birth does not match their gender now that they are old enough to be able to say/demonstrate what their gender is. Sexual anatomy and gender may not agree. One comes from fetal development of body parts, and the other comes from the formation of the frontal lobe of the brain. Kind of like personality. Everybody's personalities differ. Each personality is their own. No one tries to tell them what their personality is. And no one can tell anyone else what their gender is.

It is pretty simple. So why the panic? As population percentage goes, trans folks are about 0.6% of the population. We are a pretty benign group. We don't storm the Capitol, we aren't big on gun ownership, we don't really care which bathroom you use. And last time I checked, we weren't hogging all the Olympic medals.

We aren't the major offenders in terms of sexual assault, although trans women of color are way too often the victims of sexual assault/homicide. Trans children and their parents seem to be particularly frightening to some state politicians. The misinformation that is being spread is pretty horrifying. I am not aware of any trans toddlers that are receiving hysterectomies

or being castrated.

Are we really so naive as to believe these ludicrous stories? Maybe you haven't met a trans person. I would be happy to make your acquaintance. I promise I am not worth the panic.  
Linden Jordan  
Marblemount

### Shavers has character

I am glad to see law enforcement action taken in the recent case of 115 puppies being held on Cape Horn Road (“Puppies Seized outside Concrete,” Skagit Valley Herald, Sept 7, 2022). It is shameful that we treat vulnerable animals as commodities without regard to their welfare.

I am grateful we have a law in Washington state that regulates such puppy mills and enables law enforcement to act. However, I am dismayed that the law was passed with only one vote from our Legislative District 10 representatives. Dave Paul voted in favor and Greg Gilday and Ron Muzzall opposed it.

The law is very mild, enabling breeders to keep up to 50 dogs for breeding purposes and requires breeders to provide only enough space for dogs to turn around and lie down. That is not a high bar for anyone who cares about the health of their breeding animals.

As I research candidates to make an informed decision in November, I look for clues to their character and their values in how they vote. I hope you do too. We have a great alternative for LD 10 in Clyde Shavers. Brenda Cunningham  
Mount Vernon

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# Fire District 13 will not join Anacortes study

By Bill Reynolds

Fire District 13 and the Anacortes Fire Department enjoy a strong working relationship. But theirs is, in the truest sense, a limited partnership.

On Thursday, Sept. 8, commissioners opted not to join Anacortes in a comprehensive operations and services study, which was designed to address the feasibility of the two departments jointly developing a fire station in the March Point area.

The commission had entertained for the past month a proposal that FD 13 participate financially in the study, a plan Anacortes Fire Chief Bill Harris and former chief Richard Curtis presented in August.

"They invited us to join in and participate in an overview of the service area," said Commission Chairman Bruce Shellhamer. "We're grateful that they were here."

"But we're coming off our own five-year plan, well led by Capt. (Ted) Taylor, and feel we're in a very good position moving forward," Shellhamer added. "My concern is the cost of the study, which would not be insignificant to us, and joining in the cost of building a fire hall."

"To me," he said, "it just feels a little premature."

Shellhamer said he feared the district would incur debt by taking part in the Anacortes plan. Commissioner J.J. Wilbur

concurred.

"I value our relationships with other services, but I share your concern," Wilbur told Shellhamer. "I look forward to working with Anacortes in other ways."

With Commissioner John Doyle absent, Shellhamer and Wilbur agreed to draft a letter "gracefully declining" the offer.

District Fire Chief Wood Weiss supported the commission action. "I'm in line with that, too," he said.

The commission later agreed with the chief's plea to implement signing and retention stipends to help curb the loss of district personnel to career departments.

While language must still be crafted by legal counsel, stipends will add compensation for those who commit to remaining with the district for a pre-determined period.

"A lot of people are being hired right now," Weiss said, "and it won't be slowing down. We have to react to it. It's beating us down."

The commissioners endorsed the concept of loyalty stipends to retain district personnel who otherwise might be tempted to hire on with larger departments.

As an example, Shellhamer said he has been told that the Bellingham Fire Department is on the verge of a major hiring campaign.

"They're looking to hire 30 people this year," he said.

"It's the world we live in today, post-COVID," Wilbur said. "Wages are rising. Demand (for labor) is there, not just in this industry, but in all industries, for employment. We have to invest in our people and keep them here."

Career departments are now hiring personnel with as few as six months experience when before a new firefighter-first responder would typically log two years before being recruited.

Shellhamer suggested that the commission could call a special meeting prior to the panel's Oct. 13 session if more specific language and stipend amounts are formulated between now and then.

In other business, Weiss said FD 13 and the Town of La Conner and McLean Road fire departments are planning a tri-department structure fire training drill in October.

Taylor, in his district emergency management report, said there is "development of a communitarian spirit" under way to help residents embrace the teamwork and communication skills necessary to effectively respond to major earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Additionally, former commissioner Bobbie Scopa has released her book, "Both Sides of the Fire Line," Weiss said, with Scopa having signed books in Anacortes.

# Town sales tax revenue tops \$70,000 first time

By Ken Stern

Off the charts: the \$70,383 the Town of La Conner lists in its August sales tax revenue report is the highest total ever. The August data, from the state's Department of Revenue, captures June sales, always the highest revenue month. This year's collection is 12% above 2021's and the first time over \$70,000.

The year-to-date total is \$446,300. The town's 2022 budget income projection will be met next month.

As in 2021, collections have set records monthly, except January's.

The \$19,137 in hotel/motel revenue is the highest August collection also. The year's budget projection may be met next month.

August's firetruck sales tax receipt of \$7,020 is the first time

over \$7,000 and raises the year's collection to nearly reach the annual total budgeted.

Town revenues in almost every fund are exceeding projections, led by the two Real Estate Excise Taxes (REET) totaling \$66,967, each 166% of annual projected income. The three wastewater treatment plant funds together average 75% of their year's revenues, ahead of the 67% estimate for eight months, assuming equitable monthly collections. Town income from all revenue sources is about \$3.9 million, also 76% of the projected annual total.

These totals are based on June collection from town stores and online purchases delivered to La Conner addresses and reported to town council from the state's Department of Revenue.

La Conner has a calendar fiscal year.

# August La Conner area median home sold price: \$633,750

By Ken Stern

La Conner was again the second highest priced Skagit County market for homes sold in August. The median price of \$633,750 for the 10 La Conner area homes that closed was above the \$627,500 July median selling price, the Northwest Multiple Listing Services reported.

Countywide, 180 homes and condominiums sold and closed, down from 190 last month. The median price was \$515,000, 7.4% below July's median price. The Anacortes market's median price of \$711,500 for the 34 homes closed was down 11% from July's \$800,000 median price.

The countywide median selling price was the lowest for any month this year. That might mean price pressures are cooling, or it may be that million dollar homes, as the one that sold on Guemes Island in July, are not in the mix, lowering the price spread.

Five of the seven market

regions sold homes at or above a \$500,000 median price. Only Burlington, at \$490,000, and the Concrete/Upriver area, at \$420,000, were lower. The 42 homes in Sedro Woolley sold at a median price of \$500,000. Mount Vernon's 54 sold homes combined for a median price of \$515,000.

The 249 homes and condos listed in August is almost the same number as July. In La Conner, 16 homes were listed, down three from last month's 19. The La Conner inventory estimate is about 80 days, up from 60 days in July. Countywide, the inventory estimate is about 60 days to sell all homes if no new structures came on the market.

The La Conner area is roughly the La Conner School District's boundaries.

The median sales price is the point where half of the home sales are above it and half are below it.

# Farm to Market Road now open

Farm To Market Road and Josh Wilson roads are open at the intersection. The roundabout construction project is finished, Skagit County Public Works announced Sept. 9.

While the project is largely complete, the contractor will be performing some minor finish work over the next few weeks. Drivers will see only limited impacts to travel as this work is accomplished.

The project included installation of an illumination system, various drainage improvements and utility work.

The two-phase project was started in summer, 2021. Combined cost is over \$5.8 million.

The Bayview Ridge Urban Growth Area is the fastest growing area in Skagit County.

Source: Skagit County Public Works

# A La Conner COVID-19 case

The coronavirus is still among us. A La Conner Weekly News staff member called late Wednesday afternoon to report a positive test and not feeling well. That was still the situation Monday.

Staff started wearing masks in the office Thursday. Policy is to test before working. Those with the same test results – negative or positive – can come to work. Staff will follow federal Centers for Disease Controls protocols for coming to work.

All staff members are vaccinated and have booster shots.

The pandemic is not over and it is not past.

# State parks free Sept. 24

OLYMPIA – State parks and lands have free entrance Sept. 24, in recognition of National and Washington Public Lands Day. A Discover Pass will not be needed to park. Discover Pass free days apply to all visitor parking on Department of Natural Resources and Department of Fish and Wildlife lands and in day-use areas at Washington state parks.

Source: Washington State Parks

**ONLINE GO TO:**  
[www.laconnerweeklynews.com](http://www.laconnerweeklynews.com)



September 10-12 Film: **Where the Crawdads Sing**  
SAT & MON 7:30 PM / SUN 5:30 PM

September 16, 18, 19 Film: **Three Thousand Years of Longing**  
FRI & MON 7:30 PM / SUN 5:30 PM



**UPCOMING EVENTS:**  
Dudestock - September 17  
Iona Fyfe - September 23  
Nat'l Silent Film Day - Sept 29  
The Skagit Drag Show - Oct 1

712 S. 1st St • Mount Vernon  
360.336.8955  
[lincoltheatre.org](http://lincoltheatre.org)

**Home Loans Made Simple**

Jessica Nguyen  
Skagit County Home Loan Specialist  
Specializing in Shelter Bay lending  
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# La Conner volleyball defeats Anacortes in season debut

By Bill Reynolds

The roster is different, but the result was the same. The defending state 2B champion La Conner High School volleyball team opened its 2022 season with an impressive triumph over 2A Anacortes at Landy James Gym Thursday, Sept. 8.

The most imposing part clearly was a 13-2 run to close out the second set and erase what had been a 20-12 Seahawk lead. “It was a little setback for us,” senior middle blocker Makayla Herrera said of the brief deficit midway through the match, “but we were able to come back.”

Following a timeout, senior outside hitter Ellie Marble blasted a monster kill that fueled the decisive rally. Josie Harper delivered four consecutive service points and freshman Maeve McCormick later put La Conner in front 22-21 with a well-timed block. Herrera and Marble combined on three kills to finish off the set. “After I got that kill on the right side and then when we scored the next point, we knew we could do it,” Marble, a Central Washington University commit, said afterward.

Anacortes never recovered. La Conner scored the first eight points in the third set and never looked back. La Conner, which cruised 25-13 in the opening frame, finished with a 25-11 victory in the third and final set.

La Conner head coach Suzanne Marble liked how her club



GAME, SET, MATCH – Junior setter Abby Udlock fueled the attack with 29 assists as the defending 2B state net champions swept 2A Anacortes in their season debut match at Landy James Gym Sept. 8.

– Photo by Madoc Hiller

responded to adversity in its first outing of the season. “We’ve been working on the little things,” she told the Weekly News. “Especially communication. We did very well with that for our first match with a new crew. Everybody is finding their voice.”

The team’s stat sheet spoke volumes. Ellie Marble was flawless on 13 service attempts, including a pair of aces. She also recorded a team-high 24 kills and added a dozen digs.

Junior setter Abby Udlock had 29 assists while junior outside hitter Morgan Huizenga was

16-of-16 from the service stripe, matching Marble with two aces, and notching seven kills. Herrera was strong on the front row with six kills and three blocks. Natalee Koch, the team’s junior defensive specialist, extended points with 12 digs.

As a team, La Conner controlled the match’s tempo by serving at a 93% clip. “It wasn’t a bad start,” said coach Marble. “I’m really pleased with how we played and how we held it together when we got down in the second set.”

La Conner returns to Landy James Gym Sept. 19 at 7:15 p.m. against Sehome.

# Janet Laurel’s art at Skagit Cellars

By Russell Chandler

Local artist and poet Janet Laurel showcases unreleased work at Skagit Cellars tasting room in Gilkey Square through September. “Red Goddesses” is a curated collection, representing decades of her prolific and unseen work. Galleries in Seattle were originally hesitant to hang the work and subsequently Laurel started her own gallery when she bought a church from the steel workers union in West Seattle. Always moving on to another series, this artwork was archived for a later time.

A lifetime of expressiveness was digested, dissected and assembled by textile artist Angelee Lloyd Richmond in a two week period. In the end, it was the unshown work that resonated. Richmond grew up on the floors of the union hall. Years later it would be Laurel’s gallery. Her mother was the first woman steel workers union steward and through serendipity Richmond unrolled years of artwork.

“I was drawn to Janet’s work because it represents the work of an untamed spirit. Janet is a pure, raw and disciplined soul who is able to pour her true self into her work,” Richmond recalled. “Janet stands tall in a long line of women who dared to be angry, sexual, talented and challenge a world that does it’s best to diminish feminist energy.”

Laurel, a Pacific Northwest native, was an influential force for decades in the Seattle art scene. Her work is in many Seattle area collections as well

as nationally and internationally. Trained in traditional Japanese Sumi painting and calligraphy, her innovative style fuses Eastern and Western culture, the natural world, passion, sensuality and vivid imagery. Her collection is expressive with poetry, calligraphy and images all integrated into the work.

A professional artist her entire life, she supported herself and family. “I never was princess and sometimes you need to kiss a few frogs,” she says after discussing a painting with a young woman.

Entering the winery is an overwhelming sensory experience. Across the windows are strung clothesline and art hangs by clothes pins. There is a sense of the forbidden and, curiosity and mystery. “I wanted to give the show and the unframed pieces a woman’s touch” explains Laurel as she flips through the pages of the guestbook. Many of the pieces are unframed nudes done in minimalist traditional ink on rice paper. Raw, honest and brilliant best describe this.

Russell Chandler, Skagit Cellars winery marketing manager, organized the exhibit. His summary: “This show is out of a deep respect for Janet. Though some of the pieces might be shocking to some, it’s a testament to her ability to shake up the art world. I come from music and photography. The 1980s with Punk and New Wave broke down barriers bigger than the Berlin Wall. While the winery is not a traditional gallery, we are a strong supporter (continued on page 5)

# School coffee meeting Thursday

Bring your questions and concerns to a meeting with La Conner Schools leaders tomorrow at 7 a.m. at Stompin’ Grounds Coffee, on Morris Street. Join Superintendent Will Nelson, Director of Special Programs Andy Wheeler, Business Manager Brian Gianello, Teaching and Learning Director Beth Clothier and Director of Operations and Planning Bobby Vaughn, the district’s five-member cabinet. Monthly community coffee meetings will continue through May.

# Skagit County Public Health texts parents timely tips

Skagit County Public Health, in partnership with Help Me Grow Skagit, announces a new text service to support parents and other caregivers of young children by providing them with early childhood education, development tools and community resources by text

messages. The service, Bright by Text, sends expert-approved resources to promote the learning, development and health of children prenatal through eight years old. Topics include brain development; games and activities; health and wellness;

science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); safety and important local information and announcements. The service includes two to four weekly text messages specifically targeted to the age of the subscriber’s child and local zip codes. Text also often link to more online learning materials, including videos accessed by smartphone. Bright by Text is free. Subscribers can choose to receive texts in English or Spanish. Parents and caregivers can sign up by texting SKAGIT to 274448. Subscribers can stop the service at any time. Information: 360-416-1500. Source: Skagit County Public Health

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# Poets in schools part of Skagit poetry year round

By Anna Ferdinand

When Rena Priest stood before a crowd at the Lincoln theater Sept. 3, she asked attendees to answer this question: “Where do poems come from?”

A theater took pen to paper, writing to the prompt for five minutes, each person free to travel the pathways down which their brains chose to meander, tracking thoughts on the page.

The Skagit River Poetry Foundation, a co-sponsor of the poetry reading with Priest, Washington state’s poet laureate, helps us answer the question: For students in and around the Skagit Valley who benefit from the Poetry in the Schools program, poetry comes in part from working poets visiting in classrooms where students get to track their thoughts, play with words and surprise themselves with where those thoughts might go. Voila – poetry.

“Having a poet in the classroom is the difference between being exposed to poetry and falling in love with it,” said Linsey Kitchens, English teacher at Sedro-Woolley High School and this year’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction regional teacher of the year. “The Skagit River Poetry Foundation curates poets who resonate with and draw out young people – people who desperately need poetry.”

The SRPF, run by a board of volunteers, hosts poets in seven school districts in Skagit, Whatcom and Island counties. “Before COVID we placed poets in classrooms for 175 days,” Executive Director Molly McNulty said.

During COVID-19, the foundation brought in teachers virtually. The donor-based organization began in 1998.

In the beginning, the roster included Irish poet Tony Curtis with his guitar and stories of hummingbirds and mental institutions in Ireland; former state poet laureate Sam Green with his soft and magical ways; Tim McNulty with his writing of the natural world in the Olympic Peninsula; and Lorraine Ferrera, nun turned poet.

In my own classroom Daemond Arrindell from Queens, now a slam poet in Seattle and a teaching artist, as he phrased it, brought a new, younger voice into the classrooms. At the end of his week teaching writing, Arrindell magically wove together a line from each student in the classroom. They loved it. Students always did. It was like freedom blowing through the door.

“Sometimes we can’t see the

barriers in our own classrooms. The poet sees and can free us and the kids, who have just been waiting for this kind of thing,” said Georgia Johnson, a local poet and former culinary arts teacher at La Conner High School. “The poets bring in new ways to tell universal experiences. Many of our SRPF poets have very diverse backgrounds, come from very different communities and know how to connect with our own diverse students. Trust can build very quickly with shared stories.”

The foundation has hosted, among others, Jourdan Keith and Anastacia Renee, the most recent civic poets in Seattle, along with Bellingham-based, Jeffery Morgan, Seattle-based Samar Abulhassan and Seattle slam poet Matt Gano.

In early October the foundation will host the poetry festival in La Conner, bringing in poets from around the world for a three-day festival, the first since the pandemic, allowing students who have studied and worked with the poets, to see that poetry is a living and vibrant art.

McNulty says high school and college students with valid ID get into the festival for free.

“Imagine 33 poets all in one town, bunched together, from Maple Hall to the Methodist Church to Santo Coyote restaurant. Kids running off busses to get to them for six incredible sessions,” Johnson said.

Priest is one of the poets who will read at the festival.

“Rena Priest weaves Lummi history, a mother’s cautionary tales, literary juice, into provocative and profound poetry for everyone,” Johnson said. “Sometimes I am overwhelmed by the beauty, the joy of her words, then gently struck down by the truths in them, that I might be more open, kinder.”

A good definition of poetry if I ever heard one.

# Pioneer Association checks in with \$3,000 contribution to museum



ONE MOORE CHECK - Having just announced his intent to step down as treasurer of the Skagit County Pioneer Association, Bud Moore joined Liza Peth Bott (center) in presenting a \$3,000 check to Skagit County Historical Museum Director Jo Wolfe.

-Photo courtesy of Kim Good Rubenstein

By Bill Reynolds

August’s annual Pioneer Picnic has provided a boost to the Skagit County Historical Museum for the year ahead.

The Skagit County Pioneer Association, which for over a century has coordinated the picnic on the first Thursday in August, has contributed \$3,000 to the historical museum from proceeds from the picnic.

That represents the association’s largest contribution to the museum in a decade and is

\$2,000 more than the amount donated a year ago.

Former La Conner mayor Bud Moore, the pioneer group’s treasurer, presented a \$3,000 check to museum director Jo Wolfe during the association’s fall meeting at Skagit City School on Fir Island Sept. 9.

A large turnout at the picnic to honor descendants of Emil and Anna Dalan Nelson, the Pioneer Family of the Year, made possible the association’s increased financial support of the museum.

“The town is proud to have this picnic,” Moore said. “It means a lot to a lot of people that we still recognize that La Conner is the oldest town in Skagit County.”

The Nelsons drew in excess of 300 people to the picnic and the pioneer association’s business meeting that followed.

“From our point of view,” said La Conner Civic Garden Club member Kim Good Rubenstein, “it was a very successful event. We planned for 250 people and served 300.”

“It was heartwarming to see the community come together the way it did to celebrate the history of our pioneers,” she added. “It was great to have an honored family that truly embraced the event and shared their stories.”

Liza Peth Bott, the 2021-22 president, agreed. She praised La Conner High School alum Reggie Nelson for having facilitated his family’s participation.

“I think we could all take a lesson from Reg in compiling family histories,” she noted.

Prior to presentation of the check to Wolfe, Moore announced he would be stepping down as treasurer after serving for the past decade.

“I better leave while I can still find my way home,” Moore, 90, said with his trademark humor. “As you get older, numbers get more difficult. I’ll still help out, but we need a new treasurer.”

The association has already welcomed a new president. Peggy Stowe will preside between now and the 2023 Pioneer Picnic. She handled the gavel for the meeting.

**Laurel. . .** (from page 4) of the arts. We organize the summer concert series for La Conner Live! and have weekly live solo musicians. There’s a French term, Salon. That’s where we are evolving as a winery.

There is a mix of art, wine and community that totally reflects the essence of the town of La Conner.”

View the show Thursday-Monday 12-6 p.m.. Check it out. Sometimes we need to add a little gasoline to the fire.

## Stuart Welch art open

La Conner resident Stuart Welch has a Friday 6 p.m. opening reception of his exhibit, “The Art of Furniture” at Cassera Galleries. The exhibit runs through Oct. 20 at 26915 102nd Drive NW, Stanwood 98292.

Source: Cassera Galleries

**La Conner Street Fair**  
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# Skagit Valley Giant Pumpkin Festival Saturday

The Skagit Valley Giant Pumpkin Festival is Sept. 17, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Christianson’s Nursery on Best Road. Competitors will bring giant pumpkins from across the state and region. A giant pumpkin weigh-off competition is the day’s highlight for pumpkin-growing hobbyists and vegetable growers. This free, family-fun event gives entrants the chance to win cash prizes for giant pumpkins.

Enjoy family-friendly carnival games, face painting, toad observatory, bluegrass music and more. Visit christiansonnursery.com to download an entry to submit pumpkins and vegetables.

Source: Christianson’s Nursery

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# POLICE BLOTTER

SKAGIT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

**Monday, September 5**

**2:45 a.m.: Theft at boat launch** – A catalytic converter was stolen off a truck at the boat launch. The owner of the truck was out fishing on the water. A possible suspect vehicle was described as a Jeep Cherokee. A license plate number was not obtained. Boat Launch Rd., Greater La Conner.

**6:00 p.m.: Another theft at boat launch** – A vehicle owner reported he parked his Lexus at the boat launch on Friday and when he returned on Monday, he noticed the catalytic converter was stolen. A suspect has not yet been identified. Boat Launch Rd., Greater La Conner.

**Tuesday, September 6**

**10:12 a.m.: Abandoned Mustang** – A black Ford Mustang was observed parked abandoned at the west end of the street. The vehicle owner was contacted, and he removed the vehicle from the side of the road. Caledonia St., La Conner.

**Wednesday, September 7**

**1:03 p.m.: Vehicle prowl** – A parked car was broken into in

the alley behind Pioneer Market. The vehicle owner found his front passenger window broken but did not believe anything was stolen from inside. A suspect has not yet been identified. Morris St., La Conner.

**Thursday, September 8**

**8:41 a.m.: Abandoned vehicle** – A teal SUV was left abandoned for several days in the parking lot of Snow Goose Produce. The owner was contacted and informed the vehicle will be towed if it is not removed. Fir Island Rd., Greater La Conner.

**Friday, September 9**

**6:21 p.m.: Yelling male** – A transient male located near the bathrooms was yelling threatening remarks at a citizen and then yelling at himself. 1st St., La Conner.

**7:18 p.m.: Yelling male arrested** – The transient male who had been reported previously as causing a disturbance continued to be loud and yelled obscenities at people who walked by. The male was arrested by deputies and booked into the Skagit County Jail. 4th St., La Conner.

## Vigil remembers Laynee Westbrook's disappearance at two year anniversary



-Photo by Madoc Hiller

By Bill Reynolds

Laynee Westbrook has not been seen in two years, but she remains a constant presence in the hearts and minds of family, friends and law enforcement officers who gather monthly for vigils to keep alive hopes she will be found.

Westbrook, who worked at the Anacortes Safeway, disappeared the night of Sept. 10, 2020 after leaving the Chevron station near Swinomish Casino & Lodge.

Westbrook was with a man who is believed to have driven her to his campsite at the Thousand Trails Lone Tree Point RV Resort near La Conner. According to published accounts, he told investigators that he dropped Westbrook off at Causland Memorial Park in Anacortes later that night.

"There are lots of unanswered questions," Westbrook's sister-in-law, Emily Pepper, told about 35 people attending a candlelight vigil at the park Sept. 10 in observance of the second anniversary of her disappearance.

The one-hour event included a slide show tribute to Westbrook. "Not a day goes by," Pepper stressed, "that Laynee is not missed."

Pepper praised the efforts of the Anacortes Police Department in its ongoing investigation.

"The APD is still working hard," she said. "The APD has done an amazing job trying to find Laynee."

Anacortes Police Detective Sgt. Jackie Nations assured the

group, "This case is open and active. I want you all to know that this case is close to my heart."

"We can't make promises," said Nations, "but we'll never stop. This case is very active."

"Anacortes Police Department detectives continue to investigate and search for answers regarding what happened to Laynee and who might be involved in the case," APD Community Service Officer Brent Lindquist said in a statement issued Sept. 9.

Lindquist said that the probe has included an excavation of a rural Skagit County site in July and relevant reports entered into the case file last week.

"Current investigatory pieces," said Lindquist, "include analyzing digital data, obtaining search warrants for both digital and physical evidence and a recent collective case review that

included the APD, Skagit County Prosecutor's Office, the FBI and other agencies with a vested interest in this case."

Recent major developments in the case have come from people providing information, said Police Chief Dave Floyd.

More information is needed.

"There are not a lot of factors that are in our favor with this case," Floyd said. "The ones that we have could be extremely key pieces when we get to the point that those factors come into play. For now, releasing those pieces could jeopardize the case as it stands. We understand and share in the frustration regarding this case felt by Laynee's loved ones and her community."

Those loved ones, meanwhile, cling to hope that there will be justice for Westbrook. Until then, they will remain vigilant.

## MARINA MOORINGS

Port of Skagit

A bustling summer makes me think of safety and best practices. I watched a 40' sailboat come in this week. Wind and current were both out of the north and he was docking near the head of G. He came in, way over by the marina slips, then waited to turn until he was very deep into the flat of G. He made his turn so deep I thought he was going to hit the flat, but he knew exactly where he was. He completed his turn sharply which took off all his way and he stopped exactly in his spot on the dock. His wife stepped off and dropped a line on the cleat and I had nothing to do as I stood by ready to assist. A real pro.

I watched another boater come in with a 50' cruiser. She was a new skipper but she had a mentor with her who coached her through docking. She had a brisk wind on the nose and yet parallel parked her 50' boat in a 60' space, with boats at either end. It was a remarkably good job from someone who described herself as an amateur.

I also watched a new boater leave the dock. Wind and current were again out of the north, and he was tied on the flat of G. The boat was 25' with a single outboard. He started the engine, signaled and we pushed his nose out, then his stern. He got fixated on using his bow thruster and the hydraulics were not turned on, so he focused on that instead of driving his boat. He got out with no incident on his second try, and didn't need his bow thruster at all.

There's no substitute for practice – knowing what skills need to be honed, and finding the right opportunity or mentor to help you improve. Much like the experienced pilot I saw recently doing touch-and-gos at the Skagit Regional Airport, just practicing their basic skill maneuvers of takeoff and landing, over and over again. An important aspect of formal pilot training and the safety culture that goes along with it that simply is not part of other pursuits. While some people practice docking and departing, it's not part of the common practice of the boating community. It would be great if it was. Safe docking, everyone!

– Chris Omdal, harbormaster

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