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LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

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THOSE WERE THE DAYS – At the height of the Smelt Derby, Pull and Be Damned residents organized and others enjoyed a non-sanctioned Smelt Derby party. Beauties included 1994 Smelt Queen John Kaguras (right), Beth Hailey (on John's right) and "Miss Directed" Cathy Schoenberg. Some wish those days had never ended. Editorial, page 2. *–Photo courtesy of Cathy Schoenberg*

Smelt Derby extinct after 54-year run

By Anne Basye

In spite of tremendous support by members, the Rotary Club of La Conner is retiring the annual Smelt Derby.

For the handful of smelt in the Channel, the Derby's demise is good news. Not so for the humans who gathered each February to fish and frolic during the beloved late-winter community event.

Longtime Derby committee member and judge Patsy Good has been doling out prizes for the largest smelt, the smallest smelt and the strangest catch since 1996. For the last several years, Smelt Derby fans "have sat on the docks and not caught anything, and that's discouraging," she said. "Last year I ended up with six or seven trophies that I couldn't give away."

Six fish were caught in 2018, two in 2011. By noon in 2013, the only catch was a pinecone.

"We got to a point where we had two dozen people fishing for five fish," said John Milnor, who has been Rotary president and Derby chair many times. "The Smelt Derby is a year older than the Super Bowl, but once we hit 50 years we were fighting each year to keep it relevant."

Where's the beef . . . er, smelt?

Old timers say that in days of yore you could practically rake in the smelt in the Swinomish Channel.

That was when smelt could dine on seafood processing waste discharged by the Moore Clark plant. When the plant closed in 1992, the smelt migrated to other feeding grounds.

While smelt can still be found at Coronet Bay, they are declining throughout intertidal areas in the Puget Sound. Some marine biologists see a link between their decline and the dwindling marine bird and orca populations.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is surveying smelt spawning grounds as a first step in trying to build healthy forage fish

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Roundabout will be built at Josh Wilson and Farm to Market Roads

By Anne Basye

A full-size roundabout will be constructed this summer at the hazardous intersection of Josh Wilson Road and Farm to Market Road.

Skagit County Public Works director Dan Berentson and his team revealed the plans during a Jan. 29 meeting at the County Administration building in Mount Vernon.

About 60 residents of Bayview and Bow were present to watch an animation of the roundabout in use as county engineers explained the particulars. Commissioners Lisa

Janicki, Ron Wesen and Ken Dahlstedt listened from the sidelines.

Safety concerns increased after a right-hand turn lane was added to northbound Farm to Market Road five years ago. While the lane reduced congestion, it also affected visibility. The lane was blamed for the death of Kathy Wolf in January 2018. Driving west on Josh Wilson, she tried to cross Farm to Market as a semi-truck was turning east, blocking her view of the northbound car that struck and killed her.

After the accident, neighbors gathered 1,478 signatures on

a petition asking the county to improve safety at the intersection. In response, the County considered four alternatives: a flashing signal, a four-way stop, speed bumps and small- and large-radius roundabouts.

The large-radius roundabout emerged as the best option for increasing traffic safety, reducing collisions and maintaining traffic flow on the road, which is often traversed by trucks being designed and developed by the PACCAR Technical Center just south on Farm to Market Road.

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Swinomish and national native leader

Brian Cladoosby seeks tribal Senate re-election

By Bill Reynolds

Brian Cladoosby is a recognized leader both here and in the other Washington.

The longtime Swinomish Tribal Community Senate chairman, under whose tenure the local reservation has realized unparalleled economic growth along with major advances in social services and health care facilities, has during that time often shared a speaking dais with governors, state and federal lawmakers, cabinet officers, and even a U.S. President.

Yet more remains on his to-do list, he told the Weekly News last week.

"Swinomish has a great future," Cladoosby said, "and I would be blessed to continue to be part of it in a leadership position for my people."

Cladoosby, past President of the National Congress of American Indians, is seeking re-election to the Swinomish governing panel, this time facing a challenge from 27-year-old Alana Quintasket, who held key campus roles while attending the University of Washington and Arizona State University.

Quintasket was featured in the Jan. 29 issue of the Weekly News.

Cladoosby, a 1977 La Con-

ner High graduate, was first elected to the Swinomish Senate in 1985. He became Senate chairman a dozen years later.

Throughout that time Cladoosby has harkened back to the foundation laid by previous Swinomish leaders while also steering an ambitious and modern course going forward.

"I have had the opportunity to be shaped and molded by some of our best leaders over the years," said Cladoosby. "The late Laura Wilbur, Robert Joe, Sr., Chet Cayou, Sr. and Susan Wilbur just to name a few and, of course, Landy James, who played a very important role in my life during high school. These were very strong leaders who helped mold me into the leader I am today."

It is their legacy, Cladoosby said, that has helped propel an ongoing Tribal focus on cultural, educational and health care advancements.

"Swinomish," said Cladoosby, "has been very progressive over the years in its approach to providing essential governmental services for its people and is one thing one of my mentors told me – that we as leaders are to be the best at providing services for our people."

Cladoosby said that is a priority shared by his Senate colleagues, with whom he has traveled the country visiting



BRIAN CLADOOSBY

other tribes and tackling a wide range of issues and causes of interest to Native Americans and non-Indians alike.

Cladoosby, for instance, was among those called upon to speak when Washington Gov. Jay Inslee launched his run for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, a campaign that brought climate change to the forefront.

The Swinomish Chairman hasn't shied away from addressing thorny subjects – from natural resources management to the historical trauma experienced by Native Americans as a result of past government policies – leading some in the national media to label him an activist.

As a young Tribal Senator, Cladoosby returned to La Conner Schools as an instructional aide, a position that would help

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January: plenty wet and snow

By Ken Stern

It rained and rained and rained last month and in between it snowed. Rain fell 27 days, including snow. There was no school Jan. 14-15. Last month's 5.9" of rain was 1.8" more than the century's average of 4.1", or 44% above. It was the third wettest January since 2000 and one of five years of over 5". Six of the 11 years of 4" or more of rain have been since 2011. The highest rainfall was 6.5" in 2006. This century there have been 15 years of at least 3" of rain.

There was 1.4" of rain Jan. 5-7 and again the 27-31. Another 1.1" fell Jan. 10-12, for 2.5" Jan. 5-12. The month ended with 1.9" or rain Jan. 26-Feb. 1.

With 0.01" of sprinkles in the 11 p.m. hour Feb. 2 and rain Monday the first five hours starting at 12 a.m., rain has fallen 16 days in a row.

The 1.8" of precipitation in 2019 was the second driest in two decades, with 1.6" in 2017 the driest. Oddly, five of the driest years have been since 2010. Still, rainfall for the month has averaged 4.1" the last 10 years, the century average.

There were eight frost days, all between Jan. 8-17. Jan. 13-14 did not rise above freezing. The low Jan. 14 was 19.6 degrees. The month's average daily temperature was 43.7 degrees, with an average low of 38.4 and average high of 48.6. These were roughly three degrees above the century averages, though the daily maximum temperature was only 2.7 degrees above that average.

It warmed to 51.5 degrees Jan 18 and was above 50 degrees daily the last two weeks, except for Jan 28, when it was 49.6. The month's high was 60.7 degrees Jan 3. Highs were in the 40s and 50s the first 12 days.

The Skagit River went above the 28 foot flood level at 5 p.m. Feb. 1. The river crested at 29.45' 6 a.m. Sunday and went below 28' 4 p.m. Sunday. The river's height was 22.79' 2 p.m. Monday.

Measurements and data are at Washington State University's Mount Vernon weather station on Memorial Highway.

Rain Report: January

Rain last week, Jan 26-Feb. 1: 1.9"
 Rainfall in Jan: 5.9"
 Number of rain days: 27
 Least rain, one day: 0.01", Jan. 26
 Most rain, one day: 0.86", Jan. 8
 Least rain: 1.6", 2017
 Most rain: 6.54", 2006
 Average rainfall, 2000-2020: 4.1" *
 Rainfall last month, Dec.: 3.5"
 * 18 years: no data 2003, 2005.
 Data from WSU Mount Vernon.



IT'S RECEDED SINCE SUNDAY BUT DON'T MOVE THE SIGN – The week started with the Skagit River cresting at 29.47 feet. It quickly came down, but the river will rise again: rain and flood conditions are forecast into Saturday. This is at the Conway boat launch on the eastside of the Skagit River's south fork. *–Photo by Ken Stern*

Smelt Derby . . .

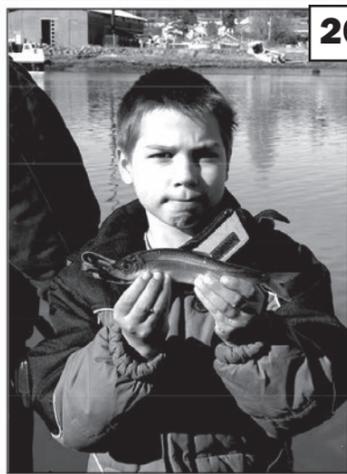
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Channel Town Press

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populations for orcas and other predators. But it's too late for the La Conner Smelt Derby. While hundreds of Skagit Valley residents have fond memories of the Derby, "unfortunately, it's time to let a really traditional thing go," said Good.

Politicians, queens and riots
The Smelt Derby has been held almost every year since 1955, when it was founded by Red Reynolds and other locals.



PRIZE CATCH - Charlie Paul of Anacortes took home a prize Webkin Reindeer donated by Bears 'n Friends for his catch of the day. - Photo by Kane Miltenberger



FISHING'S FUN - Conner Mackey, 4, with his brother Ryan at the derby. - Photo by Kane Miltenberger

Families came. Politicians stopped by to have their pictures taken holding fishing poles. Good attended with her mother and sisters almost from the beginning. "Back in the day they used to shut down the street," she remembered. "The 1890s had live music, and it was a big party that got kind of out of hand."

In 1978, a warm Saturday attracted crowds to the Tavern, the 1890s and the Lighthouse. "The party spilled out onto First Street, overwhelming the policing abilities of the Town's first responders," wrote the late Weekly News columnist Jim Smith in 2010. "It wasn't really a riot: it was simply the Smelt Derby run amok."

The first Smelt Queen was chosen in 1994. "I don't remember who came up with the idea, but we decided we needed something more exciting than smelt,"

said Guemes Island artist Cathy Schoenberg, then a resident of Pull and Be Damned Road.

Architect John Kaguras, in a slinky dress with a ribbon in his hair, was crowned Queen at a party at the yacht club. Other contestants were "Miss Placed", "Miss Directed" and "Miss Advised". The competition was repeated in 1995. Linda Reynolds Gravley declared herself Smelt Queen in 2011.

"It wasn't part of the Rotary but nobody minded because it was La Conner, and we're an eclectic group," said Good. She still owns a Smelt Queen T-shirt made by Schoenberg that says "it takes a jerk to catch a smelt."

Support for scholarships, literacy continues

"The spirit of our club is to try to make the Smelt Derby work,

but that's life," said Milnor. "Things change."

What won't change is the Rotary Club's commitment to La Conner Schools.

Besides scholarships, the club supports the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which supplies any child living in the La Conner School District with a book a month for five years. The club also supports schools in Guatemala, occasionally traveling to help build restrooms, desks and chairs.

"The La Conner community has been a great supporter of Rotary literacy programs by its support of the Smelt Derby," said Milnor. "We know that this great community will continue its support by buying from our tulip stands and contributing to our annual Harvesting Hope auction."

2012



ART IN PROGRESS - For fish-printing, the art of preserving the likeness of a recently deceased fish, the tools required are paint, a dead fish and cloth. Here Alexis Sanchez, 3, of Sedro-Woolley, creates a fish print during the Smelt Derby on Saturday. - Photo by Don Coyote

2011



HER MAJESTY - The 2011 Smelt Queen is Linda Reynolds Gravley of La Conner. Queen Linda will make her first official public appearance on Saturday during the Smelt Derby. - Photo by Bill Stokes

'Homeless Crisis in our Community' at Lincoln

Theatre Artists for Social Action presents "No Place Like Home: Myths, Truths and Solutions about the Homeless Crisis in our Community" 7 p.m. Feb. 15 at the Lincoln Theatre and Feb 19 at Skagit Valley College.

The play is compiled from stories and interviews with local people who are currently homeless or have had an experience of homelessness. The genre is Reader's Theatre and Verbatim Theatre to stick as closely as possible to the words of each person telling their story.

Following the Reader's Theatre presentation there will be a panel discussion by community leaders

seeking solutions

There will be a silent auction of artwork in the lobby. Doors will open at 6 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the Skagit Valley College Foundation Second Chance Garth H. Arneson Memorial Scholarship, allowing a homeless person to attend college.

TASA is a group of socially minded theatre artists whose intention is to focus on the needs of marginalized people who live in Skagit County. Its purpose is to educate and advance the understanding of social justice issues in our community with a purpose in mind of motivating people to take immediate action. Their theatre projects are research based and focus on targeting solutions.

Source: TASA

Friday concert will be 'Over the Hills'

Get away from it all by coming to Maple hall Friday at 7:30 p.m. for the Skagit Community Band concert "Over The Hills And Far Away." Enjoy "a whimsical concert for the child in all of us." The musicians promise a concert that will thrill and delight everyone. Selections include "William Tell Overture," "Peter and the Wolf" and Percy Grainger's "Over the Hills and Far Away."

Admission is free, with donations gladly accepted.

The band will perform again Sunday in Anacortes, 3 p.m. at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

For more information: Skagit-communityband.org

Source: Skagit Community Band

Council . . .

(Continued from Page 2)

ment that O'Donnell's disputes were primarily because actual expenditures varied from budgeted amounts and "actual costs are reconciled against the budget every year," as Thomas summarized the City's response.

O'Donnell found flaws in Thomas' memo.

At 6:30 p.m. Hayes called for an executive session to discuss the Town's labor contract with its staff and "real estate." He declined to identify the property's address but said later Council approved a labor agreement with staff.

All votes were unanimous. Bill Stokes and Mary Wohleb's absences were excused.

TASA Theatre Artists for Social Action presents...

Myths, Truths & Solutions about the Homeless Crisis in our Community

Feb. 18, 2020 | Lincoln Theatre
6:30pm Silent Art Auction | 7:00pm Performance

Free community event
For more info: lincolntheatre.org | 360 336 8955

Have 401(k) questions? Let's talk.

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