

See the Strawberry Festival guide inside. **Pages 13-24**

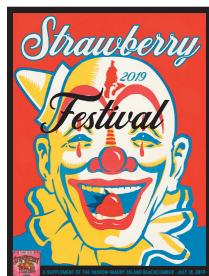
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SUSAN RIEMER/STAFF PHOTO

Police had the road at Will Van Spronsen's residence blocked off on Saturday evening.

Festival maestro keeps an island tradition in tune

By ELIZABETH SHEPHERD
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For Jim Marsh, Vashon's annual Strawberry Festival is about so much more than a parade and elephant ears.

Marsh is the affable executive director of the Vashon-Maury Island Chamber of Commerce, which presents the festival each year as a fundraiser for its organization. Since his hire in 2012, Marsh has been tasked with working with island businesses, volunteers, vendors, contractors and permitting agencies to make sure Vashon's biggest event of the year runs like a top.

This weekend, from Friday, July 19 to Sunday, July 21, Marsh will be easy to spot — he'll be the middle-aged, blond and bespectacled man wearing a yellow safety vest, purposefully pedaling on his bicycle from one festival location to the next.

Helming the event is no easy task, he said, in a recent interview, given as final preparations for the 2019 festival took place. Behind his desk at the Chamber, Marsh spoke about the weight of responsibility he feels to uphold a beloved island tradition.

"When I got this job, I freaked out because when I was at Thriftway in July,

heard people greeting each other with 'happy festival' in the same way that people say 'Merry Christmas,'" Marsh said. "In no other job has what I've done been elevated to holiday status — and that's a lot of pressure."

Each year, Marsh said, the Strawberry Festival brings more than 30,000 people to the island. It's an influx that requires coordination with 12 government agencies — including the King County Sheriff's Office, the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board, the King County Department of Local Services and the King County Department of Health — that help regulate safety and logistics for the event.

According to Marsh, last year's festival boasted 138 booths filled by on- and off-island vendors that included commercial businesses, island nonprofits, food service operators and local artists. A similar number will take part this year, he said, with local vendors outnumbering outsiders.

Music by dozens of local music acts — always a draw for the festival — will be heard on five stages this year, and as usual, a grand parade will be held on Saturday morning, followed by a car parade on Sunday.



Jim Marsh, executive director of Vashon Island Chamber of Commerce, can often be spotted during the festival wearing a bright safety vest as he bicycles between events.

The festival's beverage garden, Marsh said, will also have a distinctly local flavor, with offerings all coming from Vashon breweries, wineries and cider mills.

Throughout the course of the festival, islanders will also have the opportunity to open their wallets to support island causes.

Northwest Detention Center while armed with a rifle, according to the Tacoma Police Department.

On Vashon, Van Spronsen, 69, was known to many as an activist, handyman and musician. But in the days following the incident, news accounts have also

termed him an anarchist and anti-fascist who was involved in far-left militias, such as the John Brown Gun Club.

Some people on social media, including well-known activist Shaun King, have

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Tacoma police kill Vashon man in confrontation at detention center

By ELIZABETH SHEPHERD
AND SUSAN RIEMER

Tacoma police shot and killed Vashon resident Willem Van Spronsen in Tacoma early Saturday morning after he had thrown incendiary devices at the

Park district will try for new levy rate in November

By PAUL ROWLEY
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The Vashon Park District board agreed unanimously to propose a 45 cent, four-year levy for the November ballot to provide for the district's operating funds and maintenance needs.

"Even at 45 [cents], we're just staying open and acting responsibly. We're not building piers or pools or anything else."

Commissioner Hans Van Dusen

with economic forecasts for unincorporated areas, last week the board voted in favor of a 45 cent levy, which they say will be enough to account for the district's financial goals and for tackling urgent repairs at park facilities.

The district will be unable to function without passing a levy later this year.

Commissioner Hans Van Dusen was one of the earliest proponents of a 45 cent levy rate, while several commissioners, including

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Confrontation

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called him a martyr and hero. Others have said that he intended for years to provoke police into shooting him as a means to die by suicide.

News of the incident traveled quickly from coast to coast — and beyond — over the weekend and drew remarks from Gov. Jay Inslee, who said he objects to the current inhumane treatment of immigrants but condemned Van Spronsen's actions.

"If today's attack was motivated by opposition to the federal government's actions, it was totally unacceptable. Violence is not acceptable," Inslee said. "Our democracy is strong and we are a resilient people. But it is, again, unacceptable to turn to violence."

The Tacoma Police Department statement says that at about 4 a.m. on July 13, Van Spronsen first threw lit devices at the detention center, a privately run prison that holds nearly 1,600 people on charges of immigration violations. Van Spronsen then changed course and threw the devices at vehicles in the parking lot, where one vehicle became fully engulfed in flames.

Some independent reports have indicated that vehicle was his own, given to him by his adult daughter. In a conversation on Monday, Tacoma Police Department spokesperson Loretta Cool said that she could not say who owned the vehicle, but that Van Spronsen continued throwing the devices at other vehicles as the vehicle burned. The four officers involved in the shooting have been placed on paid administrative leave.

In addition to carrying a rifle, Van Spronsen was

wearing a satchel, had flares and had tried to ignite a nearby propane tank, she said.

A large law enforcement presence arrived on the island Saturday afternoon to help Tacoma police with a search warrant following Van Spronsen's death and headed to the Westside Highway, where he lived in a bus on the Dolstad family property.

King County Sheriff's Office spokesman Sgt. Ryan Abbott said SWAT teams from King County and Tacoma police came, along with members of the King County bomb squad and hostage negotiating teams. Guardian One, the King County Sheriff's Office helicopter, also arrived on the scene. Law enforcement activity at the property continued until early evening, Cool said. She declined to say what they found at Van Spronsen's residence.

"Due to the weapons that we found on the subject, we were concerned what might be at his home," she said. "For our safety, that is a normal response for a location where we do not know what might be contained within the home. Also, we do not know what person might be present."

Saturday's incidents took place against a nationwide backdrop of extremely heightened tensions about immigration. On Friday night, just hours before Van Spronsen's actions, hundreds of cities participated in Lights for Liberty demonstrations. On Vashon, more than 100 people gathered in town at the four corners, first in song, and then in silence. On Sunday, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was expected to begin rounding

up thousands of undocumented people. Indeed, the large number of law enforcement vehicles that came onto the island, including unmarked cars and armored SWAT vehicles, fueled the fear that many people have about ICE actions. Rumors began to spread, via telephone calls and social media, that ICE was on its way.

On Monday, Cool said the investigation into Saturday's incident is ongoing and includes the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security along with the Tacoma Police Department. The Seattle Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives participated in the early investigative efforts on Saturday, but is not continuing going forward, she added.

Cool declined to say how long the investigation might take. She also said that whatever is in Van Spronsen's background will be part of the investigation.

"These investigations are pretty in-depth," she said. "It won't be complete until we gather all the details."

Born in the Netherlands to Dutch parents, Van Spronsen moved to the United States with his family when he was 8 years old. In 1974, he moved to Seattle and in 2002 moved to Vashon.

He played music occasionally around town, in events that included Vashon's Strawberry Festival and a men's singer-songwriter showcase organized by Vashon Events in 2013.

A longtime island friend, who requested anonymity due to concerns about her privacy and safety in the overheated climate of widespread social media commentary about the case, told The Beachcomber that Van Spronsen had long been involved with anti-authority groups, including Antifa and Redneck Revolt.

The friend attributed his

motives in attacking the detention center to his political beliefs but disagreed with the actions he took.

"It was a terrible, violent, unacceptable thing to do, but in a twisted way he was trying to save people he felt were vulnerable and in danger," his friend said.

However, another Seattle friend of Van Spronsen's told the Seattle Times that she believed Van Spronsen's actions were motivated by his desire to be killed by police.

"He was ready to end it," Deb Bartley told the Times. "I think this was a suicide. But then he was able to kind of do it in a way that spoke to his political beliefs. I know he went down there knowing he was going to die."

It has also been widely reported that Van Spronsen, shortly before his death, had mailed letters and a copy of a manifesto to his friends that spelled out his intentions to die.

According to Van Spronsen's ex-wife, it had been Van Spronsen's plan to die in a confrontation with the police for at least 10 years.

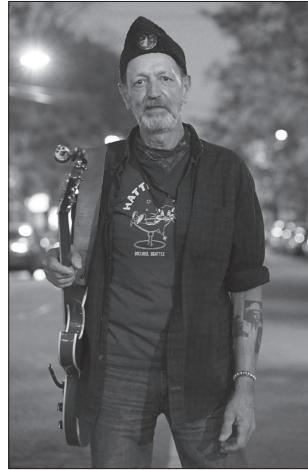
His ex-wife told The Beachcomber that Van Spronsen had repeatedly told both her and their son that he intended to commit "suicide by cop."

(Upon her request, The Beachcomber is not naming Van Spronsen's ex-wife to help protect her identity and that of her son.)

Court documents filed earlier this year in his ex-wife's successful effort to obtain an order of protection for her son against Van Spronsen contain references and testimony to Van Spronsen's repeated statements that he intended to die at the hands of police.

"It was a self-aggrandizing gesture," his ex-wife said. "He had this plan for a really long time for when he was done with his life. Suicide-by-cop was his life goal."

Over the course of the past six years, Van



Will Van Spronsen

PETE WELCH PHOTO

Spronsen's ex-wife received domestic violence protection orders against him four times. The orders, issued after hearings, came in 2013, 2014, 2016 and 2019.

Attached to the most recent protection order was an Order of Surrender, signed by Van Spronsen in March 2019, that said he understood that he was prohibited from owning firearms or other dangerous weapons as part of the court order and that he did not own them.

In Van Spronsen's manifesto, he urged his friends to "Ignore the law in arming yourself if you have the luxury, I did."

Other documents attached to the protection order described Van Spronsen's substandard living conditions, his alleged involvement with left-wing militia groups, photographs of bullets he texted to his son, and abusive behavior toward him.

Van Spronsen's bitter dispute with his ex-wife over their 2014 divorce and custody of their son was a protracted battle that many islanders were aware of.

On social media and in public, Van Spronsen often

claimed that his ex-wife's claims of domestic violence were unfounded.

Some islanders recall him leading a solitary protest on the corner of Vashon Highway and Bank Road, holding a sign that accused his ex-wife of manufacturing her claims against him. According to police reports, he also posted these claims on social media and on leaflets tucked under the windshields of cars parked on Vashon Highway.

Public records also show that Van Spronsen was arrested last year at the same detention center where he died Saturday. In that instance, he tried to free a protester by jumping on an officer's back and wrapping his arms around the officer's throat to free another protester. He was found to have a collapsible baton and knife in his pocket. He received a deferred sentence.

Cool said that the Tacoma Police Department's next release of information regarding Van Spronsen's death will be after the officers involved in the incident have been interviewed. She did not indicate when that would be.

DALE KORENEK, BROKER

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