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# Tribune

PRSRT STD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
Mount Vernon, WA  
Permit # 34

ECRWSS  
POSTAL CUSTOMER

Volume 129, Number 36

Wednesday, September 4, 2019

360-568-4121

## Former Seattle-Snohomish Mill burns No firefighters injured, building likely a total loss



Doug Ramsay photo

A firefighter keeps an eye for any spreading fire as flames race through the former Seattle-Snohomish lumber mill in Snohomish. Fire crews worked to fight the fire early Wednesday, Aug. 28. In the top right, a Fire District 7 ladder truck sprays water down onto the roof.

By MICHAEL WHITNEY

SNOHOMISH — A two-alarm fire tore through the former Seattle-Snohomish Mill across the river from First Street on Wednesday, Aug. 28.

The site is at 9525 Airport Way. Crews were called to the scene at 12:45 a.m. and found the mill building being used as storage for mattresses fully involved in fire, a public information officer said. It was under control by 1:30 a.m.

It is not known why the fire started. The county fire marshal's office is investigating, and will need time to render a determi-

nation.

It was also not known at press time if anyone remains inside.

Fire crews could be tamping down smoldering spots for days, Fire District 4 Battalion Chief Jason Hodkinson said.

No firefighters were injured, Getchell Fire Assistant Chief Jeremy Stocker said, acting as on-site public information officer.

Stocker described the building as a likely total loss.

No pollution or fire wash entered the river, from what surveyors for the state Department of Ecology saw. A flood berm that separates the mill site from the river held up, and "we checked

the outfall of the site's stormwater drainage system, and saw no signs of pollution entering the river," Ecology regional spokesman Larry Altose said.

Air quality post-fire was safe for all populations including sensitive groups such as children and those with breathing difficulties, according to an average of monitors located in surrounding areas of Monroe, Mill Creek and Marysville, said Joel Creswell, an air resource specialist at the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency. The agency has no monitors placed in the city of Snohomish.

Onlookers hurried to the scene; many thought First Street was

on fire. The fire was visible from near Snohomish High School, witness Andrew Thompson said.

"It was insane," Thompson said, standing with his friends.

Tony Emery watched from the railing at Kla Ha Ya Park and called the scene "sad."

Emery worked at this mill for five years, but got out before it shut down. His sons called him down to see.

He thinks the lumber was cleared out before it shut down, but with the sawdust and remnants, "it's like a giant Presto log," Emery said.

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## Today's safest game helmet unattainable for some

By ADAM WORCESTER  
contributing writer

EVERETT — When 125 Everett Junior Wildcats players kicked off the youth football season recently, most wore the safest helmets money can buy.

Literally.

The Junior Wildcats are one of five youth football organizations in 2019 offering Vici helmets — the top performer in national safety tests — for every player.

Vici (pronounced like the plural of vice) is a Seattle company renowned for its revolutionary technology.

Its Zero1 Youth helmet has an outer shell designed to absorb impact like a car bumper. An array of interior pads can be configured to custom-fit any head.

The Zero1 Youth earned a five-star rating in 2019 and had the best safety score in the history of annual testing at the Virginia Tech University Helmet Lab. Only drawback: it retails for \$495.

That price tag didn't faze Rex Lewandowski.

"Player health is our highest priority," said the Junior Wildcats founder and president. "We want to provide the best safety equipment we can."

In the wake of growing concussion concerns, other area leagues are also stepping up efforts to protect players' brains.

The Snohomish Junior Panthers use Guardian Caps, a padded, soft-shell cover worn over the helmet during practices to cushion the force of blows.

So does the Glacier Peak Youth Football Association, as well as the Glacier Peak High School football team.

But cost is one steep deterrent for officials of most leagues and schools. They view Vici helmets like organic vegetables: undeniably healthier, yet too expensive for the average

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## Learn safety and emergency prep at Town Hall Sept. 10

By JANA  
ALEXANDER HILL

SNOHOMISH — Stay safe out there on Sept. 10, and a group of local safety officials will show you how.

A town hall Tuesday will present information on how to get involved in neighborhood watch, community emergency response team (CERT), and Map Your Neighborhood. The three national programs are active on a local level and provide tools and information that are imperative during a disaster.

The Public Safety Commission is hosting the town hall from 6 to 8:30 p.m. in the Harvey Auditorium room at the Fire District 4 annex building, 1525 Ave. D. The event is free and open to the public.

"The overarching plan here is to give the community as many tools as we can so they can help stay safe and survive" a disaster, said commission chair Donna Ray.

Attendees will view three 15-minute program presentations, with the remaining 45 minutes open to questions and signups for additional training.

Forming a citywide Neighborhood Watch is Ray's interest. It's a program that connects neighbors and law enforcement for the purpose of crime prevention.

The CERT training presentation will be from Fire District 4 Chaplain Dana Uplinger. Fire Chief Ron Simmons said the multi-week program teaches people survival, if they are without assistance during medical emergencies.

"This is a great initial learning program for the general public and also is intended to provide relief and assistance to emergency

services, because we can't be everywhere and help everyone at the same time," Simmons said.

The Map Your Neighborhood program's purpose is to coordinate resources and gain information about who'll need to be checked on in the event of a disaster.

A facilitator from the county's Department of Emergency Management will present Map Your Neighborhood.

Data gathered by a program ambassador includes information on which neighbor has a chainsaw or a generator, or which neighbors

need someone to show up and help them, due to illness, advanced age, and other challenges. The ambassadors coordinate information for their area.

Disasters such as earthquakes, floods, major power outages and other misfortunes are inevitable, Ray said, which is why preparedness is so important.

"People freak out when they hear the word 'disaster,'" she said, and she can relate. Even with her background in safety and preparedness,

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## Safety

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she found herself during the most recent earthquake “standing in the middle of the room looking for my cat.”

Steps printed on a piece of paper and stored with a disaster kit can offer a memory jog when the mood turns frantic. Ray said she plans to coordinate additional opportunities for safety pre-

paredness in future events, such as disaster-related drills.

The drills “get it into your brain” what steps to take when an emergency begins to panic or freeze up. Nine steps to take once a disaster strikes will be offered at the event.

Ray explained a kit should include the needed items to ride out a post-disaster stage, when first responders are unable to address every call immediately.

“You have it under your

bed,” Ray said.

Experts recommend preparing for five days with no help and no access to food and water. Necessary provisions include food and hydration, as well as any other items required for health and survival, such as EpiPens or insulin.

Sign-ups for Map Your Neighborhood can happen onsite at the town hall, or by contacting Boll: Michelle. Boll@snoco.org or 425-388-5064.

The public safety commission has six members and one vacancy, and liaises with councilmembers Linda Redmon and Tom Merrill.

In the past year, the commission has hosted town halls related to fraudulent scam protection and city crime statistics. Monthly meetings are at 5 p.m., the second Tuesday of every month, at the Fire District Annex, 1525 Ave. D. Agendas are available at the city’s website, www.snohomishwa.gov

## Swifts

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the chimney on their south-bound migration. The swifts visit in spring, too.

They use chimneys and trees because they do not perch. They use their toes to cling to brick walls.

“These are little critters that fly all day long,” Easterson said.

The Vaux’s (pronounced “voxes”) swifts resemble swallows but are more closely related to hummingbirds, and have embedded themselves in city culture. It became the official bird of the city in 2016; the statue at Main and

Lewis streets depicts their chimney swirl.

“I’m just so thrilled and tickled with the city of Monroe” and its interest in swifts, Easterson said.

Tracking swifts is a relatively recent trend, and it began from wonder: Birders noticed the swifts about 15 years ago. The first Swifts Night Out happened around 2007.

The Audubon Society supports keeping old chimneys for the birds.

Frank Wagner Elementary’s chimney is one saved through the Pilchuck Audubon Society’s lobbyist efforts. The Monroe School District evaluated dismantling the bricks because of safety concerns, Easterson said.

Instead, the lobbying work helped get a state grant to seismically retrofit the chimney in summer 2010.

Earlier this decade, birders prevented the chimney demolition at Chapman Elementary School in Portland. It’s one of the swifts’ most popular chimneys.

The most popular resting spot is the McNear Brickyard in San Rafael, California, north of San Francisco which has oodles of prepared chimneys. More than half a million Vaux’s swifts have been spotted there during a migration.

A byproduct is aerial predators are becoming attracted to Frank Wagner’s chimney. Crows and merlins pick off

swifts for a quick meal.

A swift supporter climbed to the chimney and put up anti-crow netting to abate the problem. The merlins are more recent, Easterson said.

Swifts sometimes see the predators and disperse. It means swifts might be taking individual roost in home chimneys or trees, Easterson said. A homeowner would be none the wiser.

Swifts Night Out on Saturday, Sept. 7 will include children’s games and crafts. Parking is available at the Wagner Center and at Monroe City Hall (806 W. Main St.). ADA-accessible parking is available kitty corner nearby in Windermere Real Estate’s parking lot.

## Fire

Continued from page 1

The fire was largely contained to the main lumber processing building.

Emery explained that the bark stripping machines were in the eastern part of this building, the splitting work was in the middle and gang saws were toward the west. Emery said the western edge of the building held completed lumber to be taken away by forklift, which was where an open air area is.

Lately, a used mattress recycler is leasing the site on a month-to-month basis as a holding spot. The recycler “sorts, separates and prepares for the transport of mattress materials to various recycling facilities to process them to their end life,” a spokesman for the mill owners, Josh Estes, wrote in a statement given to media. Before the mattresses began coming, an RV seller was leasing the site to store recent-model recreational vehicles.

Witnesses who said they got there near the beginning said the fire spread from east to west, which if true suggests the fire started toward the rail bridge. Bright green flashes were seen from the center of the building during the fire, which a *Tribune* reporter verified in an eyewitness photo.



Michael Whitney photo

The mattresses stacked at the main building of the former Seattle-Snohomish Mill in July.

Plumes of black smoke were prominent in the early stages of the fire, witness Keaton Sidell said.

Sidell came down out of curiosity when he saw the smoke. His friend Bryson Schurman rushed over from Lynnwood to see. The flames were also visible from the Old Snohomish-Monroe Road coming into town.

The mattresses created “a heavy fire load” which firefighters couldn’t get close to, Stocker, the fire site PIO, said. Heat radiated from the fire, Hodkinson mentioned. He was not the battalion chief on duty when the call went out, but took over the shift in the morning.

Estes, the spokesman for the mill owners, wrote that no authorized personnel were on the site at the time of the blaze.

The statement opened: “We are thankful that no one was injured during this incident and we are grateful to the Snohomish County Fire-

fighters who brought the fire under control and prevented it from spreading to any of the other structures on the site.”

The former Seattle-Snohomish Mill operated for 75 years before oversupply in the market led to its closure in the summer of 2015, leaving 68 people jobless.

In its heyday, it employed more than 200 people.

The riverside seems like prime real estate, but selling the huge site to a buyer faces a significant environmental hurdle. The 33.7 acres of riverfront property is in a designated floodplain, limiting what can be built there. It’s county land across the river from downtown Snohomish that is part of the city’s southern urban growth area.

Because it’s in a FEMA-designated floodplain, changing the development regulations would invoke requiring state and federal government approvals, the head of the

county planning department wrote in a January 2017 letter.

The Waltz family’s story is interwoven into the mill’s history, as owner Megan McMurray’s grandfather Robert Waltz Sr. joined with his father-in-law who owned the mill to become a business partner. Robert Waltz Sr.’s son, Bob Waltz, was the mill’s established president for more than 20 years. McMurray took over the reins from the younger Waltz in late 2011.

Fourteen firefighting vehicles responded to last week’s fire. Agencies that came were Fire District 4, South County Fire, Everett Fire, Getchell Fire, Lake Stevens Fire and Snohomish County Fire District 7.

A previous fire in September 2017 burned through a building at the mill site.

*Jana Alexander Hill contributed reporting.*

*Tribune archive materials were included in this story.*



## Police Blotter

• Snohomish • Monroe  
• Everett

### Everett

#### Vehicle theft

Eight vehicle thefts were reported in north Everett between Aug. 23 and 27:

On Aug. 23, a vehicle theft was reported from the **2400 block of Cedar Street.**

On Aug. 24, a vehicle was reported stolen from a residence in the **3300 block of Rucker Avenue.**

On Aug. 24, a vehicle was reported stolen from the parking lot or garage in the **3200 block of Smith Avenue.**

On Aug. 25, a vehicle theft was reported from the **1700 block of W. Marine Drive** and another from the **2100 block of Grand Avenue.**

On Aug. 26, vehicle theft was reported from a parking lot or garage in the **3100 block of Pine Street.**

On Aug. 27, theft of a motor vehicle was reported from a parking lot or garage in the **1800 block of Hewitt Avenue.**

On Aug. 27, vehicle theft was reported from the **intersection of California Street and Rainier Avenue.**

#### Robbery

On Aug. 25, a strong-arm robbery was reported from the **3000 block of Hoyt Avenue.**

#### Theft

On Aug. 24, theft of \$750 or less was reported from the homeless shelter in the **3700 block of Smith Avenue.**

### Monroe

#### Community outreach

On Aug. 29, the Community Outreach Team interacted with six people in three separate incidents to discuss resources: a male in the **19100 block of N Kelsey Street**, two males and one female in the **3000 block of Oakes Avenue**, and two females in the **19900 block of U.S. 2.**

#### Theft

On Aug. 29, speakers and a laptop were stolen during a vehicle prowl that occurred in the **100 block of Charles Street.**

On Aug. 29, jewelry was stolen from a residence in the **300 block of Ferry Street.** An investigation is ongoing.

#### Drugs

On Aug. 29, a van was impounded from the **200 block of East Main Street.** during a narcotics investigation.

### Obstruction

On Aug. 27, three subjects were contacted by police at the intersection of **Railroad Avenue and Mill Street.** One male fled and was caught shortly after. obstruction charges were forwarded to the prosecutor.

#### Arrest pending for stealing food

On Aug. 27, a male subject in a store in the **19600 block of U.S. 2** who had previously trespassed attempted to steal food and left. An officer identified the male via video and an arrest is pending.

### Snohomish

#### Juveniles breach water tower, dip in. Drinking water safe.

On Aug. 29, the Snohomish Police Department was made aware of a YouTube video circulating showing several juveniles accessing a water tower. Detectives had identified all of the involved individuals the same day, and the case is currently under investigation. There is no danger to the public.

#### Theft

On Aug. 29, a suspect in a theft case was taken into custody after a surveillance video from Aug. 25 and a photo of the man was posted on the Snohomish Police Facebook page. The man was allegedly stealing cameras from a bar on **First Street.** The 20-year-old is known to police. He was named by police with a photo of him posted alongside the video. He was charged with theft 3, a misdemeanor.

#### Arrest

On Aug. 28, deputies observed a vehicle involved in a prior theft at the **parking lot of Home Depot.** Occupants were contacted and a 35-year-old female was arrested on six outstanding theft warrants and an organized retail theft. Freshly stolen merchandise was located in her purse. She was booked into the Snohomish County Jail.

#### Minor crash on First Street

On Aug. 26, First Street was temporarily blocked at **Avenue B** after a car rear-ended a motorcycle which had stopped for a pedestrian in the crosswalk. Minor injuries were reported and the roadway was reopened by 3:45 p.m.