

# The Leader

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## 2019: Three homeless deaths in PT

### Nine months after his fiancée dies of hypothermia, homeless man dies

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On the day before his 54th birthday, Edwin Wisbey died of liver failure, another casualty of homeless life in Port Townsend, where untreated chronic illness, addiction and exposure are implicated in three deaths this year.

Like so many other Port Townsend residents, his death is mourned and felt throughout the communities he touched in the four years he lived here. Because he was homeless and single, there was little public notice of his Oct. 25 passing and all that is left of him now is a death certificate, his ashes and the stories on the lips of those who knew him.

Wisbey's death is a sequel to the first homeless community death of this year: Cassandra Aldrich, 56, who was his fiancée. Wisbey told others he was with her in the tent where she died of hypothermia on Feb. 4 during a blizzard.

"He really changed after Cassandra died," said Chaplain Richard Nordberg, who knew Wisbey from hosting a weekly free lunch at Kah Tai Park. "He became very quiet."

"I think he died of a broken heart," said Trevor Green, who helps serve lunch at Kah Tai Park.

Local attorney with Jefferson Associated Counsel Nat Jacob said he knew Wisbey from representing him and he was a kind and gracious soul. Aldrich and Wisbey were very deeply in love, he said, and Wisbey would often speak of her after her death saying he had lost a part of his life in her passing.

Wisbey and Aldrich met when she first moved to town, fleeing an abusive relationship, said Wisbey's friend Johnny, who does not use a last name.

"They fell in love right away; they just clicked. He wanted to be with Cassandra," Johnny said. "He used to pray to her every morning."

Wisbey was a U.S. Army veteran, who had worked with his brother, Dallas, as a pipe-fitter and roofer, before the two lost their housing due to a fire in Shelton.

Dallas Wisbey said when his brother died at Jefferson

see **HOMELESS**, page A18

## Farmers markets start dollar-for-dollar SNAP matching

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Jefferson County Farmers Markets' food stamp matching program is in flux due to a lack of grant funding this year.

In past years, the three farmers markets in Jefferson County, two in Port Townsend and one in Chimacum, received federal grant funding for a matching program that would allow shoppers who use the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/EBT) to receive an additional \$2 for fresh fruit and vegetables for each \$5 they spent on their SNAP/EBT card.

But in 2020, the state's Department of Health (DOH) was not awarded the same federal grant money, which would have continued SNAP matching at farmers markets around the state for the next five years.

Because of this, there is limited state funding available to support farmers market SNAP match programs.

Despite the lack of federal funding, DOH and the Washington State Farmers Market Association will be working with farmers markets across the state to roll out a common one-to-one SNAP match program in 2020.

Farmers markets that accept this state funding will offer a one-to-one match for SNAP with a cap set by each market based on their budget.

This means that for every dollar spent on fresh fruits and vegetables, shoppers who use SNAP/EBT will receive a matching dollar good for fresh fruit and vegetables.

But the amount that farmers markets can offer as matching money will be dependent on their budgets.

"The funding is a fraction of what we've received in past years," said Amanda Milholland, director of the Jefferson County Farmers Markets. "We'll have to set cap depending on how much money we can raise."

If they manage to raise \$11,000, the cap for matching could be up to \$20 per shopper. The match money will come in the form of a voucher that shoppers can use at the market to purchase produce.

But if the market doesn't raise that much, the cap could be lower.

"The amount is dependent on how much we raise between now and the start of the season," Milholland said.

Based on sales from the previous year, the average SNAP user spends about \$20 at the market. Having match money allows them to get more locally grown fruits and vegetables.

see **MARKET**, page A14



Rebecca Argo at the wheelhouse of the 76-foot scow Sunnyvale, a salmon tender, which she captained last summer. Argo's salmon tender operates out of Port Townsend's Boat Haven, serving southeast Alaska. Her experiences as skipper brought her to Rome in November, where she spoke at the United Nations sustainable fisheries conference. *Leader Photo by Dean Miller*

## Local skipper speaks at United Nations fisheries conference

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At a United Nations sustainable fisheries conference in a posh conference center in Rome three weeks ago, it was "Your Excellency" this and "Minister that" until the master of ceremonies stilled the room to introduce a fishing boat captain.

That captain was 34-year-old Rebecca Argo, co-owner of a pair of salmon tenders that operate out of Port Townsend's Boat Haven, serving southeast Alaska.

She took to the stage to encourage governments worldwide to model their policies on Alaska rules she works under that favor small-scale fishing companies and protect indigenous peoples' place in the industry.

"Salmon fishing permits may only be owned by an individual or the state of Alaska," she told the crowd. "The permit holder must be present when the vessel is fishing. This prohibits corporations from owning all the permits, and discourages consolidation of the salmon fishery. It also enables a fisher to use the permit as collateral if they need to secure a business loan. Thus, people like me have an opportunity to finance their fishing business."

She reflected on the remote places where her company

picks up the catch, hustling it to market so fishing boats are free to keep working. "The fishermen in the villages I serve are mainly Aleute natives. I feel lucky to meet indigenous people living and thriving off the ocean, just as they always have. I hope that their way of life can continue. I am excited to be here today, surrounded by people from all over the world who share the same sentiment and are working towards sustainability."

Argo's trip to Rome started when Vera Agostini, the Deputy Director of the Fisheries and Aquaculture Organization of the U.N. told a friend the conference needed a young female angler to balance the opening day of a global gathering of policy makers and industry leaders.

Word got to Caroline Gibson at the Northwest Straits Foundation, who immediately thought of Argo, a troller, gill-netter and now co-owner and captain of a salmon tender.

"I had just walked past Becca and Ozzie's boats at the dock when I heard that Vera was looking for a young female fisherman," Gibson said. "Becca immediately came to mind. She's a natural face for the industry; hardworking, fun, articulate, independent and adventurous."

see **U.N.**, page A14

## Copper Canyon poetry title wins National Book Award

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Port Townsend's Copper Canyon Press has done the improbable — again — winning a National Book Award, the literary prize that recognizes the best American fiction, non-fiction, poetry and youth literature of the year.

This year's winner, "Sight Lines," by poet Arthur Sze, is the fourth Copper Canyon title to win the coveted prize, which ranks with the Pulitzer Prize among marks of literary merit. This places Sze, and Copper Canyon, in the company of household names such as poets Wallace Stevens, Adrienne Rich and Allen Ginsberg and novelists William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor.

Copper Canyon Editor-in-Chief Michael Wiegiers said it still feels new every time the bronze statue and \$10,000 check are awarded to one of their celebrated authors.

"This wasn't our first National Book Award ceremony, but it always feels joyously new when it happens," Wiegiers said. "Arthur Sze now joins Copper Canyon Press poets W.S. Merwin, Ruth Stone and Hayden Carruth as winners of the award,"



Arthur Sze, author of "Sight Lines" wins the National Book Award. *Courtesy photo*

Wiegiers said.

"Through the work that Copper Canyon has been quietly publishing from our little nest in Port Townsend, our poets have gained international recognition, and have greatly influenced our national literary landscape. Through the support of the community and our donors, I can say with all humility that the Press has really done extraordinary work."

Odds of another Port Townsend honor were good this year. "There are five finalists each year, and we had two of those finalists this year, including Jericho Brown's 'The Tradition,' alongside Arthur Sze."

Indeed, Wiegiers noted this was the sixth time in the past 25 years that Copper Canyon Press had a finalist for the award, and the third time it's had two finalists competing head to head.

Copper Canyon Press' annual open house and holiday book sale at 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 11, will celebrate Sze's award.

### BEAUTY AND THREAT IN TENSION

Sze said he was moved by poet Mark Wunderlich's introductory speech at the Nov. 20 awards ceremony, about how writing poetry is an essential human activity.

"Then I was stunned, amazed and grateful to hear my name as the winner of this year's National Book Award," Sze said. "After writing for so many years, it felt wonderful to see my latest book receive this recognition."

Sze admitted that superstition prevented him from going too far in preparing an acceptance speech.

"I thought, if I wrote out the acceptance speech word by word, I would never have the opportunity to give it," Sze said.

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# Homeless: Advocates call for community action

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Healthcare, he was there with him. The process of taking care of his remains was difficult since he is homeless and lives on Veteran's Affairs benefits.

Wisbey's ashes are now spread in the same place as Aldrich's, his brother said.

In official terms, Wisbey was "experiencing homelessness." In the nationwide "Point In Time" count coming up on Jan. 23, he would have been counted as one of Jefferson County's homeless.

Johnny and Wisbey were "tent mates." They slept side by side underneath the stars for two years, separated only by the thin nylon walls of their tents.

In rain and shine, the tent mates would cook dinner together outside and play music over the radio at their tent camp on a friend's yard in Port Townsend.

But Johnny said Edwin didn't mind it. "He liked living outside," he said. "We were comfy, we'd cook every night."

Dallas agreed, saying that Wisbey did not want to be under anyone else's control and liked the outdoors and not having to answer to anyone.

This feeling isn't uncommon for those in the homeless community, said Brian Richardson, manager of Port Townsend's up-and-coming Recovery Cafe, which will provide services for people recovering from addiction and homelessness.

"Once you are homeless, there are a ton of barriers to get into housing," he said. "And even if you do find housing, there are even more barriers: maintaining your hygiene, having transportation, paying insurance, car

"We need to look in the mirror as a community and say what are our values."

**Nat Jacob**  
ATTORNEY

tabs, and more.... Some people will say, 'You know what, it's a whole lot easier to take care of just me.'"

Addiction and mental health issues add a whole new set of barriers for those searching for housing, Richardson said.

"We'd argue about what music we wanted to listen to, like best friends do," Johnny said.

Today, Johnny said he will still sometimes call out from his tent to Wisbey out of habit.

"For a couple of weeks, I'd be in my tent and I'd yell out over at his tent, forgetting that he wasn't there," Johnny said. "I miss him really bad. It's weird that you can go for so long being next to someone and then they're just gone ... I haven't really even cried about it at all yet."

Wisbey's official cause of death is listed as acute alcoholic liver failure.

"He was all yellow, his eyes were yellow," Johnny said. "He struggled for eight days, and finally went to the hospital. I could see that he was reaching the end."

Cirrhosis of the liver is a condition that causes jaundice, like Johnny described. It's often caused by long term alcohol abuse, but can also be the result of hepatitis B or C, or a condition called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

Michael McCutcheon, an acquaintance



The Leader could not track down a photograph of Edwin Wisbey, who died Oct. 25. He was experiencing homelessness and dealing with addiction related health issues. His death certificate records that his place of residence was "homeless." *Image courtesy Jefferson County Public Health*

of Wisbey who has been in recovery from addiction for 10 years, said addiction and homelessness are closely connected because people stop valuing themselves.

"When you're broken, you settle with less than what you deserve," McCutcheon said. "Even though Edwin died on the street in his disease, his life is worth just as much as the guy who sits in a nice house overlooking the bay."

Beyond the possibility that Edwin struggled from alcohol addiction, being homeless itself can affect one's health. Mike Johnson, manager of the shelter at the American Legion spoke about this issue in May when another local homeless man, Paul Gomes, died from heart failure in Port Townsend.

"It's like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," Johnson said, referring to Abraham Maslow's psychological theory that until people's basic needs for things like food, water, safety and warmth are met, they are not motivated to seek more complex satisfactions.

"The more base the need, the less likely you're going to address the upper needs," he said, such as getting to a doctor's appointment, or buying a cell phone to be able to call and schedule an appointment.

Jacob said he hopes that Port Townsend as a community can foster a deeper appreciation for the humanity in everyone and contribute to solutions.

"We have so much wealth in our community, there's no excuse that people like Cassie and Edwin are dropping dead in our streets," he said.

One way to do this, Richardson said, is to change our mindset.

"We need to shift the way we even think about addiction and homelessness, from 'What's wrong with you,' to 'What has happened to you,'" he said. "There's always a story there. Have some compassion. If we blame them, that's an easy way out for all of us."



## JEFFERSON COUNTY STUDENTS OF THE WEEK

### CHIMACUM



**Logan Hicks**

Mr. Racine, World History teacher, nominated Chimacum High School junior Logan Hicks for Student of the Week.

The son of Amie and Jamison Constable of Port Hadlock, Logan's teachers agree that he works hard, he is enthusiastic, and he is known to help others.

"Logan is earning all As and Bs. In class, he is engaged and if he is confused, he will consult with his teachers. Logan is very personable; he brings positivity to each and every class. In addition to being a dedicated member of the football team, Logan helps his peers in class. He also participates in track. It is a common sight to see Logan helping other students in class. In conversation, he is curious to know his peers' perspective and interpretation of class materials, in doing so he helps them reinforce their learning. It is a pleasure to work with Logan Hicks."

Outside of school, Logan enjoys archery, gaming and hiking.

After high school, Logan plans to attend college to learn metalwork.

### QUILCENE



**Isaac Boling**

Emma Eliason, K12 music teacher, nominated Quilcene High School senior Isaac Boling as Student of the Week.

The son of Michele Ennis, Brant Boling, and Nicole Boling, Isaac was selected for his work ethic and dedication to his classes, activities and friends.

"We think Isaac's super power is the speed of light—everywhere you turn he is there, ready to help! So speedy you don't even hear him appear. However, Isaac would like his super power to be the power to doing anything that's humanly possible, so he could learn to do absolutely anything, immediately, and have super intelligence. His theme song would be 'Let It Be' by the Beatles, as he is very calm and content in all situations and speaks with profound wisdom and wit."

Outside school, Isaac enjoys cooking, gardening, and collecting rocks. After high school, Isaac plans to go to Job Corps and learn how to become a computer technician, then possibly go into video game design.

### PORT TOWNSEND



**Nathan Cantrell**

Dean of Students Patrick Gaffney has nominated Port Townsend High School senior Nathan Cantrell for Student of the Week.

The son of Carey Cantrell of Port Townsend was selected for athletics and academics.

"Nathan is an honor roll student who takes a challenging load including AP classes. He is always kind and thoughtful. All of Nathan's teachers speak highly of him and enjoy having him in class. He is a standout member of the PTHS Orchestra and Knowledge Bowl team. Recently, Nathan placed seventh at the state cross country meet after winning the district and regional meets. Nathan also has competed in the state meet for track and field in the spring. We think Nathan's superpower is his ability to run forever and keep smiling, and in the movie of his life, the theme music should be 'Unstoppable.'"

Outside school, Nathan enjoys running and music. After high school, he plans to study physical therapy.

### JEFFERSON COMMUNITY



**Noa Montoya**

Head of School Craig Frick has nominated Jefferson Community School senior Noa Montoya for Student of the Week.

The son of Heather Apker and Noa Montoya, Sr. of Port Townsend was selected for being a standout student.

"Noa shares his positive attitude and compassion for others constantly. He is very polite, has a gentle sense of humor and is consistently easy going. He serves as a positive role model for all the students at JCS."

"At Jefferson Community School, Noa's athletic prowess outside of school is admired by all. He participates in football, basketball, baseball and golf. Inside the JCS walls, students joke that he is known for his insatiable appetite."

"We think Noa's superpower is to make people happy and in the movie of his life, his theme music should be 'Thunder' by Imagine Dragons."

In addition to sports, Noa is participating in a Police Cadet program, and hopes to receive a criminal justice degree after graduation.

*(Jefferson Community School will run a student for a month at a time due to the number of students at the school.)*



## JEFFERSON COUNTY STUDENT OF THE WEEK SPONSORS

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