

**Avista project replaces poles**

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**Rosalia graduates class of 2020**

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2020 Palouse Empire Fair canceled

BY JANA MATHIA  
Gazette Editor

Whitman County Commissioners yesterday voted to follow Fair Board recommendation to cancel the Palouse Empire Fair this year.

"This is no one's choice," said Commission Chair Michael Largent during discussion. "I don't like this; I don't like this vote, I don't like the position the state has put us in."

The fair board presented the recommendation based on a 8-3 vote. The fair board was tasked with presenting the commissioners a plan to host a fair given Phase III restrictions after a decision was delayed last month.

"This was a hard, hard task," said Largent.

A fair board sub-committee worked "tirelessly" to put together a plan that fair board member Nathan Moore hoped

would "knock the commissioners' socks off." However, the committee struggled due to a lack of clear guidance and direction from the state.

Issues the committee ran up against with a Phase III fair—which restricts gatherings to 50 people or less—were public health concerns and the budget. It was unclear whether the 50-person limit meant on the entire fairground or per building.

During discussion, Moore presented

a "big ask" for the commissioners to hold off on a decision for two more weeks, citing a task force which had recently been set up by Alex McGregor. The task force's purpose is to develop guidelines for fairs to be open during reopening restrictions. It is set to meet June 18.

Largent pointed out the ultimate guidance comes from the governor's office, despite what the task force may do and doubted the governor's office would have

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Demolition begins



AJ Mathia, left, and Leonard Mathia of LM Services, Garfield, begin work removing brick from the top of the Fonk's building Tuesday afternoon. Phase one of demolition will take the building down to the bottom 15 feet and then reassess in the hopes of saving the mural and front facade of the building.

BY JANA MATHIA  
Gazette Reporter

COLFAX – Demolish of the Fonk's building began today after a permit was granted this morning. Chain-link fence barriers were erected around the building and into Main Street in anticipation of the work.

According to owner Joel Warwick, the plan is to take down the building as far as the bottom 15

feet which would leave the mural and front first-floor facade in place. At that point an engineer would reassess the structure to determine if the rest would have to come down or not.

"It'd be nice to make that useful," Warwick said of the bottom portion of the building.

In case the mural is damaged or must be removed, Warwick said they have pictures of it and could re-do the mural if it is not salvage-

able. The hope is to get the building down as quickly as possible. The company doing the work stated the first phase, which would take it down to the bottom 15 feet, is slated for one month.

Warwick said they are keeping their options for re-opening and the community has shown its support and desire for a return of Fonk's.

Thin Blue Line flag matter arises in Palouse

BY GARTH MEYER  
Gazette Reporter

PALOUSE – The Palouse City Council's policy and administration committee was set to meet Tuesday night after flags flown over the weekend capped days of discussion about whether one particular flag should have been.

The Palouse Lions Club has put up American flags and those of the five military branches and more, in recent years on Memorial Day, Flag Day and Veterans Day. In the past five years, they added the Thin Blue Line flag – which was created to honor fallen police – and has since been used in the Blue Lives Matter movement, as a counter to Black Lives Matter.

The city council discussed the issue June 9 after receiving four letters from residents asking that the Thin Blue Line flag not be flown on taxpayer property.

The Lions Club gave a statement to the city that they "see no reason to remove a flag that honors our local and national law enforcement officials."

The council on the ninth talked about ways to uphold the First Amendment while being sensitive to and looking out for people of color, as stated by Mayor Chris Cook.

No agreement was reached on possible alternatives.

"While I find it extremely important that we honor those who serve our communities, I find it equally important that we are sensitive and welcoming to all," Cook told the Gazette later. "That said,

all city actions and policies moving forward should seek to find flags/symbols that bring us together as a community rather than pull us apart."

The city has no set flag policy.

After discussion, city councilman Steve Alred moved to suspend flags flown before the city institutes a flag policy. The motion failed, followed by a motion from Councilman Bill Slinkard that the council request the Lions Club only fly the U.S. flag, the Washington State flag and the POW/MIA flag until a policy is adopted.

Alred seconded the motion and it passed.

"It's a perception issue, as well," said Kyle Dixon, city administrator, to the Gazette. "Obviously with everything going on nationwide, there is a heightened awareness to what municipalities do."

The Lions Club looks now to continue its tradition, with possible alteration to come.

"For our part, if the city decides which flags can and can't be flown, we'll abide by the rules," said Damon Estes, Palouse Lions president. "But we had four people complain and a bunch of people that didn't. So we're not gonna change over four e-mails."

LIONS RESPONSE

Previous club president Ken Alsterlund (until June 11) was notified June 4 about the flag complaints. He went down to city hall and talked with Dixon, who offered to replace the Thin Blue Line

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Two passengers ejected in hit and run collision

DAILY BULLETIN

THORNTON – Five people were transported to area hospitals, including one by LifeFlight, after a hit and run collision north of Ralph Henning Road near Thornton.

Washington State Patrol responded at 2:45 p.m. Sunday, June 14, to the collision, along with fire departments from Colfax, Steptoe and Rosalia, and Whitman County Sheriff's Office. According to Trooper Rob Aucutt, two vehicles were headed southbound on Highway

195 when the first pulled onto the shoulder. The second vehicle, a grey Ford Focus, while staying in the southbound lane, began to pass. The first vehicle pulled back onto the road and brushed the Focus. The driver made an evasive maneuver and lost control of the vehicle. The Focus crossed the centerline, both northbound lanes and rolled into a field.

There were five occupants in the vehicle; only the driver and front passenger were wearing seat belts. Two of the back seat

passengers were ejected from the vehicle. Both were transported to Spokane for non-life-threatening injuries, one by LifeFlight, the other by ground ambulance, according to Trooper Aucutt. The other three occupants were taken to Whitman Medical Center.

At right: One helicopter takes off with a patient bound for Sacred Heart Medical in Spokane while a second stands by. Bill Carroll photo.



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# SPORTS

## New SE 1B league to begin

BY GARTH MEYER  
Gazette Reporter

The Southeast 1B League is in place for 2020-24 as a 12-team league divides into East and West.

The East division will be largely what the league has been the past four years, with the addition of Tekoa/Rosalia dropping back to 1B from 2B. The East will include Oakesdale, Garfield/Palouse, Colton, Pomeroy, Tekoa/Rosalia, Touchet and St.

John/Endicott/LaCrosse. The Southeast 1B West will be DeSales – coming down to play sports at the 1B level after historically going up to play in 2B – Liberty Christian, Prescott, Sunnyside Christian, Touchet and Yakama Tribal.

“As someone said, it’s the wheat division and the grape division,” said Ken Lindgren, WIAA executive and longtime Oakesdale athletic director. “I’m excited. Adding in new teams – and some good teams. I think it’s gonna be fun.

Gonna be a lot of travel. Tekoa/Rosalia is about as far away from Yakama Tribal as you can get.”

In sports such as football and volleyball, teams will play mainly within their division until the district playoffs.

In basketball, East and West teams will play three crossover games in the regular season, to be counted as non-league. Eight teams would advance in basketball to the playoffs, opening with two rounds of games at home sites, then the top four

teams playing at a neutral site such as the Dietrich Dome in Walla Walla.

From there it is likely two teams will go on to regionals, as has been the case in recent years.

“Since we’ve had two, I’m thinking we should get two,” said Lindgren.

The playoff plan is not yet official. A District Nine meeting of athletic directors will need to be held to make it final.

Changes in classifications and leagues were decided by the WIAA in January.

## Colton football to play with Genesee

BY GARTH MEYER  
Gazette Reporter

The Colton School District has announced a co-op agreement with Genesee for football, to allow Colton students to play for the Idaho Class 1A-1 Bulldogs, similar to how 1B (Washington) Oakesdale kids have the opportunity to play football for 2B Colfax.

Because Colton’s enrollment is small enough, it does not affect Genesee’s classification.

Colton expects to send about 10 kids out for the team.

“If there is football,” said Paul Clark, Colton superintendent, referring to possible COVID-19 restrictions. “We want our kids wearing our colors, playing on our field, but if we can’t, we want them still to play.”

Under new Washington state rules, Colton may have had a chance to play six-man football, to play teams farther west, or within Eastern Washington if enough schools wanted to drop to six-man.

“It would mean our kids traveling long distances. We discussed it,” said Clark, noting talks with Athletic Director and last year’s interim coach, Jim Moehrle.

Schools on the Olympic Peninsula, such as in Coast League District Four, have played six-man football for the past two years. This year, the Coastal League will be completely six-man, after the WIAA representative assembly passed an amendment on the matter in May.

The WIAA also sought out schools in Eastern Washington to gauge interest.

“Interest was expressed but the number of schools were so few it wasn’t realistic because of the travel aspect,” said Justin Kesterson, WIAA assistant executive.

The Colton co-op with Genesee is set only for the 2020-21 school year.

“Six-man can help a lot of these schools out,” said Ken Lindgren, WIAA executive and Oakesdale athletic director. “The saying is, ‘let’s keep football alive.’ Football’s got a bad rap going, we’re trying to keep football alive.”

The six-man game includes changes which include scoring, field length and width.

“There’s some nuances to it that are completely different from the 8-man game,” Kesterson said.

## WIAA suggests fall sports direction

BY GARTH MEYER  
Gazette Reporter

Plans for fall high school sports took a step forward last week as the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) Executive Board set what is known as philosophical guidelines for the 2020-21 school year.

Meeting June 7 by teleconference, the board has laid out a plan to resume fall sports, if the state Department of Health and Governor’s office allow – depending on phases of re-opening after COVID-19 shutdowns.

The WIAA intends to conduct a regular season and championships, for each fall sport. This would carry

even if all schools in Washington are not allowed to participate.

“Where schools and programs can compete, we’re gonna let them compete,” said Ken Lindgren, executive board member and longtime Oakesdale teacher, athletic director and coach. “We can’t hold back all kids because of some.”

A scenario may arrive in which teams – or a whole league – in one county may play, while teams in the next county would not.

Each sport will be subject to individual restrictions. It is possible, for example, that volleyball would be allowed to be played but not football – with its close contact, breathing and otherwise.

The parameters for the games

are another fluid question.

“Are we gonna even let spectators in? We don’t know this yet,” Lindgren said. “What about officials? Are we gonna have officials?”

Lindgren noted that many officials come from high-risk populations regarding the virus.

The executive board will meet again June 23 for a bi-weekly check-in, which is not an official meeting.

A target date of Sept. 7 has been set for the start of fall sports, Sept. 5 for football.

“From the DOH and the governor, we need direction from them,” Lindgren said. “We’re putting this in real slow motion to make sure we get all the information to make the right decisions.”

## continued from front

### Flag controversy

flag with another flag in a similar vein, such as the National Law Enforcement Memorial flag.

Alsterlund called a Lions Club board meeting that night.

About 20 of the club’s 30 members met in the American Legion Hall above city hall.

They talked about the matter and voted to issue a statement to go before the city council.

After the city council meeting, the Lions met two days later at Hayton Greene Park, an evening in which they invited five graduating seniors from Garfield/Palouse High School to give presenta-

tions vying for annual Lions Club scholarships.

“We did all the social-distancing crap and all that,” Alsterlund said.

Meeting afterward, the club voted to go ahead with plans for Flag Day.

“Friday night, the flags went up,” said Alsterlund.

Hanging from light poles and utility poles, they stretched from the park to the city welding shop at the other end of Main Street.

In total, 31 American flags, five military flags, one for firefighters, one for Thin Blue Line, one for EMS, one for POW/MIA and another for “I Support

the Troops” were put up. The Thin Blue Line flag flew from a light pole in front of the grocery store.

The flags were taken down Monday, as is usual after a weekend of display.

Did the Lions hear anything further from the city?

“I have not,” Alsterlund said, an Army veteran. “We are not in a fight with the city. They have been very nice to us, nobody’s fighting.”

#### THE FLAG

The Thin Blue Line design, a black and white American flag with one blue line, is seen as a symbol of support for law en-

forcement by many, and one of dismissiveness by others, in light of calls nationwide for police reform after charges of excessive force.

“My whole thing is we’ve put up the flag for five years and no one had a problem before this,” said Estes. “There were no politics involved, to my knowledge. We can’t control who adopts what flag. We were flying it for law enforcement, not for Blue Lives Matter or against Black Lives Matter.”

Will there be a new city flag policy before the Fourth of July?

“I don’t know,” said Mayor Cook. “That’s a good question. I would hope so, but I’d rather get it right than rush it.”

### Fair cancellation

any direction on fairs in two weeks.

WSU Extension Director Janet Schmidt added 4H has been directed by its state officials not to meet until in Phase IV. It was expressed during the meeting that it is “unlikely” the county will be in Phase IV by fair time. Fair Board Chairman Sid Mays said that under Phase III guidelines, most people on the board did not see how it would work to have a fair.

Mays added the stock sale was discussed and they had buyers for turn animals, admitting the kids would not make as much money, but the youth may be able to receive booster support.

In reply to public comments shared through the Zoom meeting’s chat feature, Largent said it was unfair to suggest board members did not support kids because they had to face reality.

“All of us wouldn’t do this if we didn’t care about the kids,” he said.

Public comments expressed disappointment after the vote to cancel passed unanimously. The public also expressed appreciation for everyone’s hard work in getting to that point.

After the vote Largent stated this does not preclude family and community support for youth projects. He expected next year’s fair to be bigger and better, adding “this is not the end of our fair by any means.”

### Hit and run

The first vehicle did not stop. It was described as a white Toyota Camry-style vehicle. It is wanted for hit and run. Any witness to the collision is encouraged to contact WSP at 509-397-3600.



At right: A crumpled Ford Focus rests in a wheat field. Bill Carroll photo.

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