

# SOUTH WHIDBEY RECORD

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2021

COVERING SOUTH WHIDBEY ISLAND, WASHINGTON • \$1.00



## Leaders confront gov's office over reopening plan

By KIRA ERICKSON  
kerickson@whidbeynewsgroup.com

Island County commissioners, city leaders and port commissioners will send the governor a letter criticizing a new pandemic-related reopening plan that places the county in a region that hasn't moved forward to the second, less-restrictive phase.

Under Gov. Jay Inslee's cur-

rent Roadmap to Recovery plan, Island County is part of the North Region, which includes Skagit, Whatcom and San Juan counties. The region is in Phase 1, which means no indoor dining at restaurants and other restrictions.

To advance to Phase 2, regions must meet three of four metrics, which are updated every other Friday. The next

update will occur Feb. 12.

Members of the Council of Governments held a special meeting this past week to discuss sending a letter to the governor's office that outlines concerns regarding the state's policy and impacts to Island County.

The council is made up of Island County commissioners, mayors of the three municipali-

ties and representatives from the port districts. Also in attendance at the meeting was Joe Timmons, the Northwest regional representative for the governor's office.

Leaders of the county were outspoken in their disagreement with the reopening plan. Many advocated for the return of Island County to Phase 3, where it was in a previous re-

opening plan.

"Our restaurants, they were ready and set up to safely serve customers and then it was taken away from them," Coupeville Mayor Molly Hughes said.

Indoor dining in the county's restaurants has not been permitted since before mid-November.

"It's very disheartening for

SEE REOPENING PLAN, A2

## County should have received more vaccine

By JESSIE STENSLAND  
jstensland@whidbeynewsgroup.com

Island County hasn't been receiving as many COVID-19 vaccines as it should be despite vigorous advocacy, according to statistics from the state.

On Tuesday, Island County commissioners discussed the confusion and chaos that has been part of the state's distribution of vaccines. They described a situation in which different counties are competing against each other to procure as many vaccines as possible.

The commissioners bemoaned the lack of clarity in how the state is distributing the vaccine and the fact that people from other counties are getting vaccinations in Island County.

The commissioners also congratulated the county's COVID response team for aggressively advocating at the state level for vaccine allotments. Last week, the county was only going to receive 100 vaccines, but it was raised to 800 after the staff had strong and convincing words with the state.

Commissioner Melanie Bacon said the county's success in controlling the spread of the virus led to state officials

SEE VACCINES, A2



Photo by Kira Erickson/South Whidbey Record

Paulette and Greg Beck look at photos of their daughter, Piper Travis, who died in 2017.

## Trust named after daughter will support island charities

By KIRA ERICKSON  
kerickson@whidbeynewsgroup.com

A South Whidbey couple is keeping the memory of their daughter alive by creating a charitable trust to reflect her kindness and generous spirit.

Piper Travis, the daughter of Clinton residents Paulette and Greg Beck, was an active member of the South Whidbey community who offered a lifeline for many by opening her home to those who were down on their luck.

Their daughter, the Becks acknowledged, was not without her own flaws but was in-

credibly kind towards others, something they are hoping to continue with a trust fund that bears her name.

Just three years ago, Travis became seriously ill during a two-week stay in Snohomish County Jail, where she had been booked because of minor offenses discovered during a traffic stop, according to a previous story that ran in the *South Whidbey Record*.

Travis was diagnosed with meningitis, sepsis and acute respiratory distress. She passed away in the hospital on Dec. 16, 2017.

Her family filed a federal civil rights lawsuit alleging that staff at the jail neglected her as her health declined, leading to her death.

The family and Snohomish County reached a \$3.1 million settlement.

The Becks have chosen to put the money from the lawsuit toward nonprofit organizations that Travis either would have used herself — such as Good Cheer Food Bank — or her friends would have used.

"A lot of her friends didn't have a house, didn't have a car, didn't have food," Greg

SEE TRUST, A2



Photo provided

Three new staffers recently joined South Whidbey Fire/EMS.

## Three new staff members join South Whidbey Fire/EMS team

South Whidbey Fire/EMS hired three new staff members in January by configuring its team to be more cost effective and efficient.

The department filled one vacancy and created two new positions, bringing in-house critical services it historically contracted to outside vendors, the department explained in a press release.

Filling the new positions are Michael Hastings, an IT support technician, and Alex Carlson, a fire

mechanic.

The vacant position of maintenance technician is filled by Jake Grevé. All three are South Whidbey residents.

"We're ecstatic to find such talented local residents to put in these positions," Deputy Chief of Resources Jon Beck said.

"Bringing these critical services in-house is already saving us down time and money," he said. "We literally put them to work on New Year's

Day. Nothing has slowed down since then."

Quality technology systems have never been as essential, nor demanding, as they are today for first responders.

From emergency response to communications and training, technology touches every aspect of the department and impacts its ability to serve the community.

Even before the pandemic, the

SEE NEW STAFF, A3

# VACCINES

CONTINUED FROM A1

thinking they could disregard the county.

"No, you can't just ignore the county," she said. "We need to be rewarded for the fact that we've been doing a good job."

She pointed out that 30 percent of the county's population is 65 years old and older, making it one of the "grayest" counties in the state.

The state Department of Health announced Thursday that 773,000 people have been vaccinated so far in the state, which is more than 10 percent of the population.

The state reported that 8,200 people in Island County have received vaccinations, which is 9.6 percent of the population. While it's not far below the state average, it doesn't even put the county in the top 20 in terms of vaccinations per capita.

Neighboring Skagit County has 10.5 percent of its population vaccinated. Island County Commissioner Jill Johnson protested last month when the state forced providers in the county to send a portion of their vaccines to Skagit County after officials there complained about having fewer vaccines.

Since vaccine distribution began in the United

States on Dec. 14, more than 33 million doses have been administered, reaching 8 percent of the total U.S. population, according to federal data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The state Department of Health sent out a statement Thursday that clarifies that vaccines are distributed based on several factors, including the proportional population of those eligible in the county. Under that condition, Island County should be getting more vaccines than most other counties because of the number of people over 65.

Currently, individuals in the 1B group — those who are age 65 and over and those over 50 who live in multigenerational households — are able to receive the vaccines.

There is good news. WhidbeyHealth announced this week that it is reopening the scheduler for vaccination appointments after having to cancel 12,000 vaccine appointments last week due to a shortfall in vaccines.

Officials caution people not to be disappointed if they are unable to get appointments as demand is high.

The hospital directs people to go to [FindYourPhaseWA.org](http://FindYourPhaseWA.org)

# TRUST

CONTINUED FROM A1

Beck said. "She had all of those things."

"Her door was literally open," he added.

She quietly helped an untold number of people during her 34 years.

During her memorial service, a man nobody knew stood up and told a story about how Travis provided a place for him to stay while he was recovering from drug addiction.

Because of her generosity, he was able to stay clean.

Paulette Beck said Travis would always stop and buy diapers and baby food for her friends who had young children. Travis lived on Whidbey most of her life and had friends in all corners of the island.

"She was always the kind of person that they turned to and they could always sleep on the couch for a few nights, and she always had food," Paulette Beck said.

Travis was a patron of the food bank, where a bench carved in her memory by sculptor Pat McVay now sits. The bench is adorned with painted flowers and is a popular spot for other patrons of the food bank to sit while they wait in line.

It's where the Becks sit on a cold but sunny January afternoon, as they reflect on old pictures of their daughter.

"She liked flowers, she liked color, she was a real girly-girl. This is what we designed and I thought it was just the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen," Paulette Beck said of the bench, which was carved in 2018.

The Becks chose Good Cheer, Whidbey Island Nourishes, Mother Mentors of Whidbey Island and the House of Hope as beneficiaries of



Photo by Kira Erickson/South Whidbey Record

A bench dedicated to Piper Travis, built by Pat McVay, sits in front of Good Cheer Food Bank, where Travis was a patron. Below, Piper Travis.

Travis' trust.

"Being how she was always helping the homeless and helping the hungry, that's where we focused," her mother said.

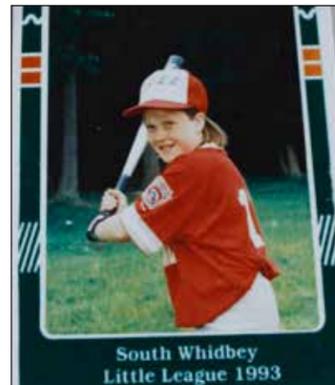
The trust will continue to be maintained, even after the Becks' passing, by their other daughter and granddaughter. Every year it will contribute donations to South Whidbey nonprofits.

Jonathan Kline, executive director for the Whidbey Homeless Coalition, said the funds will help House of Hope staff to connect with individuals to ensure their needs are being met.

"Rather than take that money for themselves, they decided to put that money into a trust to honor the type of person Piper was," Kline said of the Becks.

Pam LeLoup, the board president for Whidbey Island Nourishes, said friends of Travis benefitted from the food available in WIN's free vending machines.

"Such a tragic story, but beautiful that they've created a trust with the funds received from the



South Whidbey Little League 1993

lawsuit and are giving back to help others that might be in a situation like Piper's," LeLoup wrote in an email.

"A beautiful legacy for a person who died so young."

Paulette Beck summed up the giving spirit of her daughter with these words: "Whidbey Island is a great place to give," she said. "People give here. People do things for other people. Piper saw it, and that's what she did."

# REOPENING PLAN

CONTINUED FROM A1

our citizens who have embraced the governor's guidance and done the hard work in order to reduce our numbers of cases, to be treated this way," Langley Mayor Tim Callison said. "It's like we're a footnote."

Callison said he understood the regional approach, but that it doesn't work because Island County is not like the other counties it has been associated with in the re-

opening plan.

Others pointed out what they deemed as inconsistencies in the new plan.

"It's very difficult to explain to our citizens why having dinner in downtown Seattle is safer than having dinner in downtown Coupeville," County Commissioner Jill Johnson said.

She added that citizens were more motivated to keep COVID-19 case

numbers low when the county wasn't lumped in with Whatcom County, where cases have been steadily rising.

"There's local government for a reason," she said. "But this sort of one-size-fits-all dictatorship isn't working."

Hughes said the Puget Sound Region, which houses Everett and Seattle, was able to move into Phase 2 last week because the more populous counties where virus cases were higher had a lot more room to improve.

"Their decreased num-

bers are still not getting any closer to what ours were," she said, adding that Island County has been "rock steady."

Don Mason, the county's COVID response manager, told the commissioners this week that Island County would be in Phase 2 if it was on its own, based on current metrics.

Timmons, the governor's representative, said the regional approach to reopening was based around the state's emergency medical systems and was designed to prevent an overflow of medical needs in any particular region.

He added that the application process in the previous "Safe Start" plan was "cumbersome" for counties.

With the most recent adjustment to "Roadmap to Recovery," only three of the four metrics need to be met for regions to move to the next phase, making it easier to do so.

Johnson said that Whidbey residents utilize hospital beds at Providence Regional Medical Center in Snohomish County — which is in Phase 2 — yet they cannot ac-

cess PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center in Whatcom County.

She also argued that she prefers being held to a high standard of having to meet all four metrics, rather than the alternative.

County Commissioner Melanie Bacon agreed that the amount of paperwork that had to be done previously to advance to the next phase was "onerous" but necessary.

"We made filling out the paperwork a priority for our organization because we recognized how important it was that we stay open and safe," she said.

The leaders also discussed a more equitable vaccine plan. County Commissioner Janet St. Clair pointed out that the average age of Island County residents is older compared to the state as a whole.

"Our county is disproportionately older than the state population," she said.

Johnson shared concerns about adults with developmental disabilities not yet being able to receive their vaccines.

Last month, the commissioners sent the governor and state Department of Health a letter complaining about the placement of disabled people living in group homes in the vaccination

distribution phases.

Callison said he has also heard concerns about the vaccination distribution phases.

He has been approached by constituents who are immunocompromised and part of the workforce but have not been able to receive their vaccines yet.

Timmons said no county is receiving all of the vaccines it has requested, but that a 16 percent increase in the state's supply will be forthcoming in the next three weeks.

In the end, members of the Council of Governments agreed to write a letter, part of which asks for Island County to be released from the Roadmap to Recovery opening plan.

Oak Harbor Mayor Bob Severns also wrote a separate letter to the governor's office, which also calls for a separation of Island County from its associated counties in the North Region.

"Island County feels as if we do not have as much influence on your decision-making because we are comprised of mostly rural communities," Severns wrote.

"We are impacted differently and now being penalized for the hard work our communities have done by this regional judgment."

Windermere REAL ESTATE  
WINDERMERE REAL ESTATE/SOUTH WHIDBEY

LM

All in, for Whidbey Island

Louis Muniz  
360.969.1028

Windermere REAL ESTATE

Louis Muniz of  
Windermere Real Estate/South Whidbey presents

## 2021 Housing & Economic Forecast

### A Night With Matthew Gardner

Windermere's Acclaimed Chief Economist will share his forecast and its impact on both the local and national real estate market.

FREE WEBINAR

Thursday, February 11th @ 6PM

EMAIL: [jennyhooper@windermere.com](mailto:jennyhooper@windermere.com) FOR LINK

Jennifer Pearson  
Broker, Realtor®  
Whidbey Island - Freeland

Let me help you with your next chapter!

Windermere REAL ESTATE

office: 360.331.6006 | mobile: 360.320.4080  
[jpearson@windermere.com](mailto:jpearson@windermere.com)  
5531 Freeland Ave, Freeland Windermere Real Estate/South Whidbey

Celebrating 32 years on South Whidbey

Dr. Maria Best, DC Welcomes Dr. Kevin Smith, DC and Greg Nelson, LMT to the Family Chiropractic Center in Freeland

Family Chiropractic Center since 1985

Maria Best, D.C.

1832 Scott Road, Suite B1, Freeland  
360-331-3646 • [www.mjbestchiropractic.com](http://www.mjbestchiropractic.com)