

The Northern Light

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Community Newspaper of Blaine and Birch Bay

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11 Stafholt residents, two health care workers test positive for virus

BY OLIVER LAZENBY

Good Samaritan Society – Stafholt in Blaine has 13 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus, including 11 residents and two health care workers, a spokesperson for the Good Samaritan Society said in an email on April 1.

Two medical professionals and two Stafholt residents initially tested positive for COVID-19, the Good Samaritan Society confirmed to *The Northern Light* on March 30. Additional testing at the facility revealed nine more cases. Shawn Neistadt, a spokesperson for the South Dakota-based non-profit provider of senior care and assisted living services, couldn't say anything about the condition of the infected individuals or when the initial tests came back positive.

The facility has notified all residents and their families and is working with the Washington State Department of Health to implement its guidance on isolating residents, Neistadt said. Stafholt is masking all employees and "following droplet precautions for symptomatic residents, and caring for ill residents in designated areas within our facility," he said.

"Our team is taking extra precautions to monitor the health of staff and residents who may have been exposed. The health and safety of our residents, employees and the community remain our highest priority as we serve during this unprecedented pandemic," Neistadt said.

On March 30, Neistadt said all employees and residents were offered tests for the virus and were tested one at a time in a tent in the parking lot. When questioned about testing the following day, the Sioux Falls, South Dakota-based spokesperson said he heard testing was still in process.

The Washington State Department of Health, in its guidelines for long-term care facilities, recommends prioritizing ill health care workers for COVID-19 testing and for facilities to "have a low threshold for COVID-19 testing" for residents.

Throughout the county, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases more than doubled over the past week, going from 64 on March 24 to 139 on March 31.

(See Stafholt, page 15)

D Street Shell station giving away milk and bread



▲ In order to help the Blaine community, the owners of the Shell gas station at 360 D Street have decided to give away free milk and bread to local families until at least April 7. See our story on page 16.

Photo by Oliver Lazenby

Inslee prohibits in-person city council meetings Audience participation also removed from agenda

BY JAMI MAKAN

Blaine residents who wish to personally attend the next city council meeting on April 13 will not be able to do so, after governor Jay Inslee suspended key provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act and prohibited in-person attendance at city council meetings and meetings of other public bodies.

The Open Public Meetings Act generally requires the deliberations and actions of public bodies to be conducted openly, so that citizens can oversee the conduct of the people's business. "The people of this state do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them," the Act begins. "The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created."

In a March 24 proclamation, Inslee used his emergency powers to suspend a key provision of the Act which states, in

part, that "all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the governing body of a public agency," which includes city councils. Inslee's Proclamation 20-28 "waived and suspended" this provision until midnight on Thursday, April 23. "Violators of this of this [sic] order may be subject to criminal penalties," Inslee's proclamation stated.

The proclamation allowed city council meetings to go on if they provide options for the public to attend remotely by telephone or otherwise, and if they also provide "the ability for all persons attending the meeting to hear each other at the same time."

Blaine residents' voices won't be heard at the April 13 council meeting. In a separate decision made by Blaine city manager Michael Jones, audience participation has now been removed from city council agendas until "we get back to normal," Jones said. His decision was announced on March 20, prior to Inslee's March 23 stay-at-home order and March 24 proclamation.

Specifically, Jones modified Rule 15 of the Council Rules of Procedure by removing the audience participation portion

from council's regular agenda. His decision was conveyed to Blaine councilmembers in a memo, and the decision was made pursuant to Resolution 1800-20, which councilmembers had passed at a special meeting on March 16. Their resolution affirmed Jones' March 13 proclamation of a local emergency related to the COVID-19

(See City council, page 3)

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(see details on page 16)

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D Street Shell station owners giving away milk and bread to help local families

BY OLIVER LAZENBY

Since about March 21, Sukhwant Singh Gill and his son Gury Gill have been giving away milk at their Shell gas station at 360 D Street in Blaine, and more recently they started giving out free bread as well.

“My son and myself, we thought we need to do something for the community during this hardship,” Sukhwant Singh Gill said. “We were feeling like we shouldn’t always make money. This is a time to support the local community.”

As the new coronavirus and the effects of social distancing snowballed in March, Sukhwant Singh Gill, who is also president of a Lynden Sikh temple, looked for a way to help the community. After talking with a friend, he got the idea to start giving away milk and bread to those who need it, he said.

The Gills are currently giving away two cartons of milk and one loaf of bread per family. They are making exceptions for those taking home extra for neighbors.

Milk is a popular item at local stores and gas stations. Canadians who come south to buy cheaper gas also take advantage of U.S. government-subsidized dairy. With border restrictions in place as of March 21, Canadian demand vanished. But the Gills are not just giving away surplus milk from a drop in business – they’ve ordered more to keep up with the local need for free milk

and they’re trying to source more bread, Sukhwant Singh Gill said.

“I am asking other businesses ... we all should do it. We all should help the local community, because the local community helps us,” he said. “They give us business and we should give them something back in a hard time.”

Business at the Shell station has surely dropped off with border restrictions and the state’s stay-at-home order, but Mr. Gill wasn’t in-

terested in talking about that.

“I’m not thinking about the business right now,” he said. “It’s not time to think about business, it’s time to think about how we can fight the coronavirus, how we can help the community, how we can help the needy.”

The D Street Shell’s current temporary hours are 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Its owners plan to give away milk and bread until April 7, but that could be extended, they said.



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▲ Cherry blossom trees in bloom on Drayton Harbor Road in Semiahmoo on March 30.

Photo by Jami Makan

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