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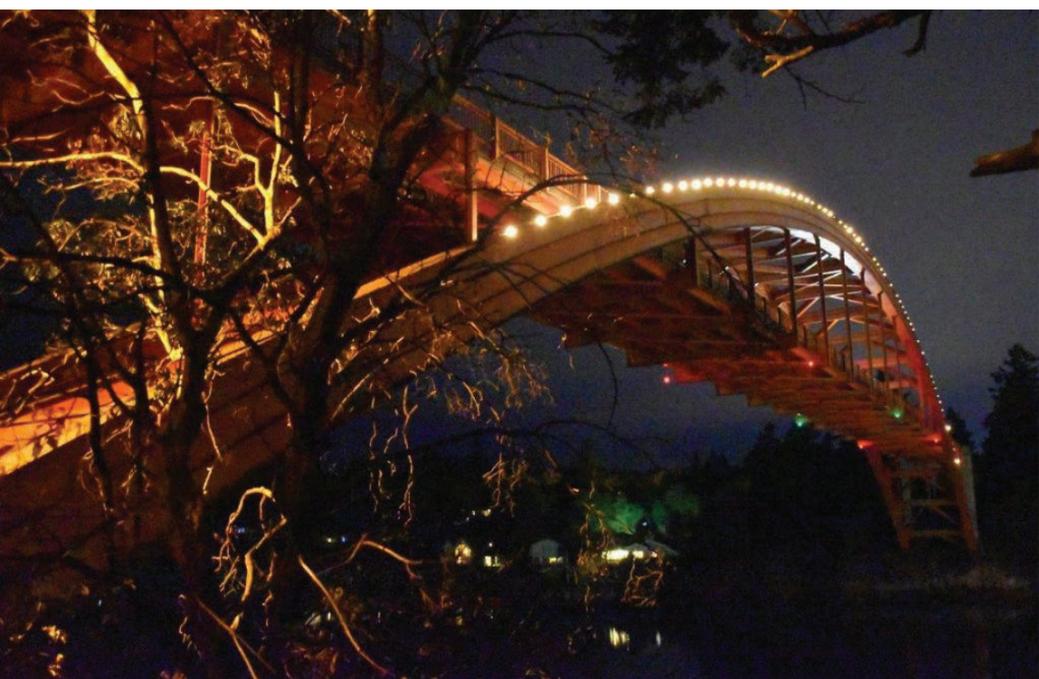
LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

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A VIEW OF OUR BRIDGE – A lighted Rainbow Bridge is an iconic sight. The bridge has been lit in the past by caring prankster residents. Soon it will be officially lit, thanks to an agreement between the Town of La Conner and the Skagit County government. Director of Public Works Brian Lease has done yeoman work to find magnet-held lights at a fraction of the cost of other options. – La Conner Weekly News file photo

Rainbow Bridge will soon shine bright with lights every night

By Bill Reynolds

Despite an ongoing global pandemic, La Conner area residents can still look on the bright side.

The bright side of the Rainbow Bridge, that is.

This after the Town Council last week inked an interlocal pact with Skagit County officials allowing the north side of the visually striking and popular arched span above Swinomish Channel to once again be lit.

The long-sought town-county agreement is being hailed as a literal bright spot here during the virus crisis.

“This is (an example of) economic development,” said Mayor Ramon Hayes. “This is one of the things people come to the community for.”

The bridge, which opened in 1977 and is owned by Skagit County, has been lit previously but without official sanction, making significant liability concerns.

“For years,” Hayes explained, “the bridge was lit independently by individuals who will remain nameless. The county sent us a cease and desist order because of

the liability issues.”

New technology, pressing economic conditions and town and county collaboration aligned to make possible a new round of bridge lighting – this time on an official basis.

Town Public Works Director Brian Lease said the bridge will be strung with 60 commercial grade LED bulbs secured by powerful magnets able to adhere to a surface that has borne numerous coats of paints over the past six decades.

“It was quite a trick to find the right magnet that would hold,” Lease told Town Councilmembers at their Oct. 13 video-conferenced meeting.

The magnets chosen for the project passed a test administered by Skagit County engineers, he said, and are designed to stand up to Pacific Northwest weather.

“It’s pretty amazing technology,” said Council member Bill Stokes. “It will be a great way to light the bridge. It will be something we’ll be looking at all winter as the days get shorter.”

Lease crunched numbers to bring the project price tag to about

\$0,000, one-third of which will be covered by the county. An initial bid for lighting the bridge was more than 10 times that amount.

Lease said the estimated cost is based on 40 hours of contracted work. Because of that, the Town could realize further savings.

“I don’t anticipate it (the work) taking that long,” said Lease.

Hayes said hours of behind the scenes research and planning will generate long-term visible dividends for the town.

“As public officials,” he told the Weekly News, “we want to make sure that we are utilizing our assets as best as possible. This does that in a very economical way and beautifies one of the state’s most iconic structures.”

He and Lease expressed appreciation for the county’s support.

“They were great to work with,” Lease said.

“I want to give a huge amount of credit to Commissioner (Ron) Wesen, who really pushed this forward at the county level,” said Hayes.

“We’re talking about quite a few lights,” he added, “that will light up the bridge beautifully.”

Weekly News wins 14 awards in all-state contest

By Ken Stern

The La Conner Weekly News keeps getting better in its efforts to bring news to the community.

The staff earned 14 awards at the annual Better Newspaper Contest for Washington’s community newspapers, led by Bill Reynolds’ six. Reynolds almost swept the “personality profile, long category,” getting second place for his story on Mike Carrigan retiring after 25 years at La Conner High School. His Fisher Family tribute ahead of the 2019 Pioneer Picnic took third.

Reynolds gained firsts for his coverage of the Swinomish dental clinic opening and his sports feature on the 18th undefeated La Conner football team. He also picked up a second for his story on the second place basketball finish by the La Conner High School girls and a second for profiling Middle and High School Principal Kathy Herrera donating a kidney. He took a third for his election story of Alana Quintasket defeating Swinomish Tribal Senate Chairman Brian Cladoosby.

Anne Basye took the other first place award for capturing the extinction of the Smelt Derby.

Pat Paul gained a second for a set of her recipe columns, A’qimuk’s Kitchen. The judge

wrote “I felt like I got to know the author and became invested in her life.”

Ken Stern came in second and third in general news photography for his 2019 high school graduation photo and capturing the ritual march for the Swinomish Blessing of the Fleet.

Stern’s chasing the momentary run on hand sanitizer won a second place news award. His editorial on “Taking flattening the curve seriously” at the start of the pandemic in March was awarded third place and a set of his musings columns took second in the general interest column category. He took a second for his review of “The Addams Family” at the Whidbey Playhouse.

The behind the scenes staff of Eileen Engelstad, Michelle Havist and Cindy Vest ensure each week’s publication.

The contest time period was for newspapers published from April 2019 through March 2020. Awards are presented in four groups based on circulation. The Weekly News is in group 1, circulation under 2,500. Judging was by members of the New York Press Association.

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Bill Bruch’s two judgments for \$1.7M fraud against Whatcom County elders

By Ken Stern

Republican Bill Bruch, a candidate for the state Legislature representing District 10 who is seeking to unseat incumbent Democrat Dave Paul, was the subject of two lawsuits in 19 that found him liable for judgments totaling nearly \$1.7 million.

The judgments were made public by Skagit County Democrats on Oct. 14 and posted on their website under the headline “Bill Bruch sued for swindling seniors in 19”

Bruch posted a statement on his own campaign website in response.

“When I was starting my career 28 years ago, I trusted the wrong people and unwittingly became an instrument in [. . .] a purported real-estate investment, which turned out to be a Ponzi scheme,” Bruch wrote. “Young and naïve; I was exploited, used, and defrauded of tens of thousands of dollars of my own money by someone who I believed to be a trusted friend. Most unfortunately two of my good friends also fell victim to the same investment. I lost my money, my home, my job, my car and my credit by trusting someone who turned out to be the purveyor of a Ponzi scheme.”

Bruch claimed he was completely unaware of any court proceedings or judgments until years after the fact, writing “I don’t believe that I was ever served a summons; and I never had a chance to defend myself in court,” and stated “this issue was resolved over a decade ago, it was a civil matter and I most certainly did not break any laws.”

Bruch declined to be interviewed by the Weekly News, which emailed him electronic copies of the two court cases, Partners In Care vs. William U. Bruch III, case # 2-0107 and Geraldine Dixon vs. William Bruch, case # 2-0116. In a short email response Bruch wrote “Over the years my friends and employers have known about the circumstances. It is a non-issue.” He provided a link to the statement on his campaign website, above.

According to the court documents, on Aug. 5, 19 William Urban Bruch III had a default judgment in a lawsuit entered against

(Continued on Page 5)

Amaryllis robbed at gunpoint Tuesday

By Bill Reynolds

Location. Location. Location.

That is the familiar mantra deemed a key to valuable real estate.

But prime location can be the scene of unintended consequences.

Such was the case late last Tuesday afternoon when an armed robber stole an undisclosed amount of money and fled on foot from the Amaryllis women’s clothing boutique in the historic Hotel Planter Building on First Street.

“He probably picked me,” store owner and local artist Charlotte Decker told the Weekly News afterward, “because I’m at the end of the street.”

The incident led to an immediate police lockdown of La Conner, said Mayor Ramon Hayes, himself a First Street business owner.

Skagit County Sheriff’s deputies and Swinomish Tribal Police officers sought a male suspect wearing black sweatpants, black sweatshirt, black knit cap and red bandana. Their search came up empty despite deploying a K-9 unit and positioning patrol vehicles at all town entrances.

“The suspect was not known to the store owner and he has not been located at this time,” Skagit County Undersheriff Chad Clark said on Thursday.

Decker, in fact, did not initially recognize whether the suspect who demanded money from her was male or female.

After she twice refused to give him money, Decker said the suspect then brandished a handgun.

Decker somehow managed to remain calm as she handed over the contents of her cash box.

“I never really felt threatened,” she said, “even when he pulled the gun because I couldn’t be sure at first if it was a toy gun or a real gun.”

Once the suspect fled, Decker called police.

“The police were here almost before I got off the phone to 9-1-1,” she said.

“Between Swinomish Police and the Sheriff’s Office,” added Hayes, “the town was locked down immediately. The response was excellent.”

Hayes, though, said the downtown robbery lends further credence to establishing a citizens’ patrol here for times officers are on duty elsewhere.

“We need it,” he said. “It would be controlled and administered by the Skagit County Sheriff’s Office and provide more eyes and ears on the ground.”

As for Decker, she is grateful for the overwhelming support received in the days following the robbery.

“I just want to say that the community has been so supportive,” she said.

One fellow La Conner merchant, for instance, delivered flowers to Amaryllis soon after learning of the incident.

The store has remained open as usual, though Decker concedes the robbery has had an impact.

“I’m a little more discerning,” she said, “when people come in.”

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 - Use a county drop box
 - Mail your ballot by Oct. 26
 - Oct. 26: Registration deadline
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614 E. Morris Street.
Social Services Building, 17337
Reservation Road, Swinomish
Indian Tribal Community.
Ballots must be in drop boxes
by 8 p.m. Nov. 3.
Election day voter registration.
Register to vote, get information
at VoteWa.gov.
Skagit County Elections:
360-416-1702,
sselections@co.skagit.wa.us.

Pope Francis to us: 'You got mail'

In his new encyclical, "Fratelli Tutti," Pope Francis affirms and applies the principles of Catholic social teaching to the "new things" of 2020: a global pandemic, an economic crisis, political polarization and social isolation and exclusion. The pope insists that those who are poor or vulnerable, those who live with disabilities or discrimination and immigrants and refugees are not issues or problems but sisters and brothers, part of one human family.

Through the centuries, popes have written encyclicals on important issues, sometimes addressed to bishops, other times to all Catholics, more recently to all people. As its name implies, an encyclical is a "circular letter" to be spread throughout a community. (The word comes from the Greek egkyklios, with kyklos meaning a circle). By using the encyclical format, Francis is announcing he has something important to say and he wants people to pay attention.

This letter is addressed to ev-

eryone: women and men, Catholics and people of every faith and no faith, women and men of every nation, race, and ethnicity, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, every member of the human family. In the first sentence and throughout, the letter refers to "fratelli tutti" (all brothers and sisters). The document covers a range of topics from digital culture, migrants, economics, nuclear weapons and other global issues.

As the world grapples with a pandemic the new papal document calls for a politics that rejects the "virus" of radical individualism and builds up the common good, with the 83-year-old pope offering the gospel story of the Good Samaritan and the figure of St. Francis of Assisi, his namesake, as guides. The encyclical is an attempt to bring a "bleeding and broken world back to health" and is "a devastating challenge to our economic, political and ecological life."

Francis explains his encyclical was inspired by "brothers and sis-

ters who are not Catholic," such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and India's Mahatma Gandhi. He calls for all religions to build up human fraternity. Early on in the encyclical, he references St. Francis of Assisi's 1219 peace mission to cross the lines of the crusades and meet the sultan of Egypt in a bid to end the conflict.

Laying out a comprehensive vision for how the world should change after the coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis imagines societies that are more caring, more focused on helping those in need and fundamentally less attached to the principles of market capitalism. Among things the pope puts up for discussion: trickle-down economics, the world's unfair distribution of wealth, continued use of the just war theory and the death penalty.

The encyclical expresses strong views on capital punishment, war and economics, but the pope writes with nuance. He offers no simple solutions, instead encouraging dialog and inclusion: everyone must be brought into the decision-making process to deal with the world's challenges. He speaks eloquently of kindness that involves "speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation and encouragement" and not "words that demean, sadden, anger or show scorn."

Father Paul Magnano is parish priest in the Skagit Valley Catholic Churches. His reflections on "Fratelli Tutti" will continue next week.

Bruch . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

him in the Partners in Care case in Whatcom County Superior Court for over \$1.5 million "based upon fraud and the fraudulent acts of the defendant." Documents identified the plaintiff, Partners in Care, as a successor trustee for John Blackmore. On Aug. 14, 1998, Bruch was found in default for a second time, with a judgment against him based upon allegations of fraud for \$184,660 in favor of plaintiff Geraldine Dixon in the same court. Bruch did not appear or provide a defense in either case, court records show.

The Blackmore suit, brought in May 1998 by Partners in Care, as trustee, claimed that Bruch advised Blackmore that if he loaned money to Bruch for purposes of investing, Blackmore would "save on taxes," "get a high rate of return," "earn a steady income," and "have 100% liquidity" and based upon "the above representations and inducements made by Bruch, Blackmore gave Bruch a series of 'loans/investments' totaling \$1,044,225.38."

Bruch gave him receipts "showing that such funds were received by 'Agent Bill Bruch.'" Copies of all signed receipts, promissory notes and assignments are exhibits to the complaint. The complaint further alleged that the representations made by Bruch were "false," that Bruch "knew the representations he made to Blackmore were false," and he "intended" Blackmore to rely upon these representations. Finally, it alleged that "Blackmore lacked the mental capacity to make sound financial investments."

Contrary to Bruch's assertions and denials, court records show that in addition to being served a summons on June 5, 1998 in Bellingham, he was deposed by plaintiff's attorney about the fraud allegations in the complaint.

Similarly, court records in the Dixon case show that Bruch was served a summons and complaint on June 11 (just days after the Blackmore summons) at the same Bellingham address. Exhibits to this complaint show Dixon made Bruch loans/invest-

ments ranging from \$36,237 to \$74,445 in 1996 and 1998, monies that comprised her life savings and that of her ailing mother. The complaint alleges that Bruch told Dixon "about investment opportunities that he knew or should have known did not exist" and that he "made these misrepresentations in order to defraud plaintiff of her money." Additionally, the complaint alleged that Bruch violated Washington's Consumer Protection Act as well as applicable state and federal securities laws.

After a default judgment was entered against Bruch in 1998, he failed to pay the monies owing in full over the next seven years.

On June 27, 2005, the court entered a writ of garnishment to Associated Credit Service, Inc. to enable it to collect the judgment against "William Bruch Estate Planning, Inc. whose residence and/or business location is PO Box 804, La Conner, WA 98257." P.O. Box 804 is both Bruch's personal and campaign mailing address in La Conner.

These judgments were the basis of Bruch being denied a license to become a mortgage broker in May 2008. The Division of Consumer Services of the Washington Department of Financial Institutions reviewed his application and entered a Statement of Charges to deny his application based on "Factual Allegations" finding "Excessive Liens or Judgments," and citing the two 1998 Whatcom County Superior Court judgments. The "Grounds for Entry of Order" found Bruch failed "to demonstrate character and general fitness such as to command the confidence of the community and to warrant a belief that the business will be operated honestly and fairly within the purposes of the Act." Additionally, Bruch failed "to meet the requirements of RCW 19.146.300(1) and (2) and RCW 19.146.310(1) (b) by failing to provide an accurate and complete license application."

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