



Bronze art stolen from sculpture garden

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Limited supplies standing in way of COVID-19 testing

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Some stories in the paper this week are abbreviated in print, but the full stories (and more) are available at goanacortes.com.

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Virus takes toll on singing group

BY RICHARD WALKER
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It was March 10, and everyone at the Skagit Valley Chorale rehearsal in Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church was aware of the growing risk of COVID-19 and taking precautions.

The group was practicing for an April 25-26 concert at McIntyre Hall. Many people had bottles of hand sanitizer. “Nobody hugged, shook

hands or shared music,” chorale member Ruth Backlund of Anacortes said Tuesday.

Chorale member Cynthia Richardson of Anacortes said there were no signs of illness among the 56 or so people in the group. It was a big room with plenty of space to move around. Everyone practiced social distancing.

Nevertheless, COVID-19 was lurking unseen, and it made itself known within four

days. Forty-five people in the group members would be diagnosed with COVID-19. Within 11 days, one member would die. A second member died later.

Howard Leibrand, the Skagit County’s health officer, said this cluster of cases shows how easily the virus can spread.

“To our knowledge, no one who was there was symptomatic,” he said.

The precautions chorale members took at the meeting — increasing handwashing and maintaining distance from each other — are generally in line with what the county had recommended. “But that wasn’t enough in this case,” Leibrand said.

By March 14, Richardson, a 77-year-old former Anacortes City Council member, had extreme fatigue and body aches. “I had no difficulty breath-

ing, no high fever, no cough. I didn’t have those symptoms, but (on March 19) I tested positive,” she said.

Backlund developed a high fever and extreme body aches around her abdomen. Her husband, Mark, had no appetite, became dehydrated and just wanted to sleep. He had to force himself to eat and drink, she said.

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Message from the publisher

Due to the financial impact that COVID-19 is having on local businesses, Skagit Publishing will suspend publication of products currently being distributed for free until mid-May. That includes Your Fidalgo.

The Anacortes American will continue to be delivered to subscribers, and we invite all to follow our coverage of the COVID-19 impact on this community at goanacortes.com. We ask that all community members

consider subscribing to the Anacortes American, not only for times like these when vetted journalism is so important to getting factual information, but for the future.

Your support allows us to continue covering the important events and news of our local community. Look inside today’s edition for a subscription offer and how to subscribe.

Heather Hernandez,
president and publisher



CONTRIBUTED / ISLAND HOSPITAL

PACU (post-anesthesia care unit) nurse JoAnna Gagliardi stands by a sign that was posted by the front entrance to Island Hospital this week. She holds flowers donated by Sheely’s Floral and Gifts and some food donated for staff. The staff has received several gifts of support, spokeswoman Barb LeDuc said.

Hospital reducing staff, preparing for more cases

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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Island Hospital is preparing for a surge of new COVID-19 patients as the numbers continue to grow, but some staff reductions will also occur, hospital CEO Charles Hall said.

The hospital will be rolling out a mobile testing tent soon, but testing is limited until more supplies are received. A lack of supplies means only patients showing fever, shortness of breath or a new cough are tested, Hall said.

As of Monday night, the hospital had received confirmation of 15 positive cases of COVID-19

out of 258 tests it had received back from the lab, almost 6%. Another 18 tests are pending, he said.

Of the 15 positive cases, 10 patients were tested in their cars and sent home to recover. Four were inpatients who were treated and discharged to recover at home, with a positive test coming in later. The last case was seen in the ER and sent home, Hall said.

As of Monday afternoon, Skagit County had seen 121 cases of the virus and three related deaths. None of the deaths came through Island Hospital, Hall said.

A new respiratory

clinic set up by the hospital is seeing about 20 people a day, Hall said.

It includes all respiratory problems, not just COVID-19. The fear of the virus has brought a surge of patients seeking help, he said.

Meanwhile, to deal with the emergency cases, the hospital reduced many other health services. The result is the hospital expects to lose more than \$3 million a month in revenue while this continues.

That means cuts, both to operational costs and to the staff, Hall said.

Roughly 20% of the staff at Island Hospital will be affected, Hall

said. Some will see a reduction in hours while others will see furloughs, Hall said.

“These are difficult times, and these are tough decisions,” he said.

Many staff members who work in departments of the hospital that have stopped or greatly reduced services have been transferred to work in other departments, including the respiratory clinic, the call center or at hospital entrances checking temperatures and symptoms at screening stations, Hall said.

Reductions in staff

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Mental health can be affected by pandemic

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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COVID-19 has already been tough on some of its victims and the economy, but the impacts, isolation and fears of what might come cause their own damage to people’s mental health.

“There’s a lot of perception of being out of control,” said Island Hospital psychiatrist Paul Hammer. “... If you are really anxious, control the things you can control and try not to worry about the things you cannot control.”

The situation won’t go away overnight, he said.

“Take a deep breath,” he said. “This is a marathon, not a sprint. Things will get back to normal, but you need to remember to take care of your-

self.” When in doubt, reach out for online resources or to a mental health care provider, Hammer said.

He now sees most of his patients via telehealth, both in video and audio formats.

“We are only seeing patients in person if it’s urgent to do so,” Hammer said.

Meanwhile, organizations like the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (samhsa.gov) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.namh.org)

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Paul Hammer

Group sews fabric face masks to donate

BY MONIQUE MERRILL
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With face masks on a nationwide shortage from the COVID-19 pandemic, local sewers are making an effort to provide local care centers with some protection.

Carol Olsen is the director of the Anacortes chapter of Days for Girls, an international organization that usually makes sustainable feminine hygiene products. Now, chapters around the country have started to ask members to sew face masks to be donated to area care centers and Olsen has taken charge in Anacortes.

“I’m getting phone calls from lots of people,” Olsen said. “I’m working

directly with about 10 women.”

Since the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent rush to acquire materials to combat the spread, elastic has been hard to come by and sold out at most area retailers.

Luckily, Olsen has plenty of bias tape, which she has been fashioning into straps for each mask.

While the masks don’t offer complete filtration and aren’t suitable replacements for the N95 masks used for personal protective wear in hospitals, it does provide something of a barrier.

“Something is better than nothing,” Olsen said. The masks are made using

See *Masks*, page A4



CONTRIBUTED / BETTY CARTERET

Above: Betty Carteret sets a production line of materials and tools to sew masks to be distributed to Texas and locally. Right: Carteret’s husband Eric Shen demonstrates how to properly wear one of his wife’s handsewn masks.



Lack of supplies standing in way of testing

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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Testing facilities and scientists are finding faster and faster ways to get people tested to see if they are positive for COVID-19 as the pandemic continues to rage across the world.

No matter how fast results can come back, though, there is still one major roadblock, said Michael Sharp, Island Hospital director of laboratory services.

"The issue is supplies," he said. "They can't make enough to distribute across the country."

Island Hospital is doing about 20 tests a day now, Sharp said. Patients need to meet certain criteria to determine if they are in high need of the test.

"We have to preserve our supplies," he said.

A national test shortage has led hospitals to limit them to those people who are showing certain symptoms or who are the most vulnerable, Sharp said.

Right now, the hospital is now testing symptomatic patients at its respiratory clinic. By the end of the week, it should also have a mobile drive-in testing area, according to hospital spokesman Dennis

Richards.

One patient, who later received notice that he had tested negative for the disease, said it took him well over a week to get his test results. In the meantime, he didn't know how careful he needed to be about isolating himself.

Things have gotten much faster in the past couple weeks, Sharp said.

When a patient comes into the respiratory clinic and meets the criteria, a nasopharyngeal swab test is administered, Sharp said.

The flexible swab is inserted into the person's nasal cavity, held for a few seconds and then

removed and placed in the other nasal cavity.

It is put into a testing medium (also in short supply right now) and packaged.

A courier from LabCorp picks up packages four times a day on weekdays and two times a day on weekends. The packages are loaded onto a plane that goes to LabCorp in Arizona twice a day.

It takes LabCorp roughly two to three days to process tests. Those with positive results receive a call right away from their Island Hospital provider, Sharp said.

The hospital also

sends some tests to the University of Washington if they are high priority, such as hospital staff working with patients.

Those take one to two days to get back.

Both options are faster than the options that were available just a few weeks ago, which required all tests be sent to North Carolina, and took several days to get sent back.

More testing sites are working through their processes to be able to provide test results locally, Sharp said. Everyone is trying to figure things out as they go, he said.

"Turnaround is get-

ting better," Sharp said.

New tests are also becoming available.

Using a Cepheid machine, for example, could mean results by the end of the day.

The hospital has one of those machines, purchased a few years ago by the Island Hospital Foundation for another reason.

Once the test is ready for that machine, likely in mid- to late-April, the hospital could run up to 196 tests a day depending on supplies.

Those results would be available the same day, Sharp said.

"We just need enough of the product," he said.

Port approves rent relief for some tenants, adjusts operations

BY MONIQUE MERRILL
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The Port of Anacortes passed a motion to provide tenant rent relief in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in a special meeting held via video conferencing Thursday.

A three-month rent relief period will begin April 1 for any nongovernmental port tenants. Tenants will continue to pay leasehold tax, but have until Dec. 31 of this year to pay rent from April to June with no interest or late fees.

"We're proposing this rent relief but not because we're flushed with money, but because it's the right thing to try to do," Worra said.

Some marina tenants will be able to take advantage of the rent relief as well. Tenants with Airbnb and other short term rental moorage agreements, commercial business and charter agreements, commercial

fishermen and tour companies will also be able to opt into the program.

"It takes care of a lot of businesses we feel are most affected by this covid event," Worra said.

If every eligible tenant and business takes advantage of the program, the deferred rent equates to nearly \$500,000. The program also allows for some flexibility and extension if needed.

"We can continue to refine this as we move along," Worra said.

The daily operations within the port have also changed in accordance with federal and state COVID-19 response regulations.

As a safety measure, all group meetings have been discontinued, remote work schedules have been implemented, marina and port offices have been closed to the public, there is mandated social distancing, staff has been supplied with disinfectant wipes and industrial cleaners, and deep

chemical cleans have been added to shared spaces.

"Directors have met several times, all virtual," Worra said. The marina itself remains open and undergoes two chemical cleans per week and the bathrooms are only available to guests and tenants.

The port established an emergency leave policy for COVID-19 illnesses based on federal and state policies that grants 80 hours of paid emergency medical leave.

"Our intention is to keep everyone fully employed throughout this. We're coming up with creative ways for people to keep busy," Worra said.

All March and April events at the Transit Shed Event Center have been canceled, and almost all have been rescheduled to a different date within the year leading to a fully-booked weekend calendar through 2020.

Any events scheduled for May and June this year would have to be rescheduled for 2021.

Many port projects have also been post-

poned, including the airport and marina paving projects and the Transpac white tent repairs.

"We're really looking for guidance on what to

delay, postpone or continue for the next year," Worra said, adding that those questions will be discussed in the upcoming week.

Obituaries

**COLETA
"COOKIE"
CARPENTER**
July 8, 1933 -
March 14, 2020



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Coleta "Cookie" Carpenter in Anacortes, Washington on Saturday, March 14, after a long battle with dementia. She was 86 years old.

Cookie was born on July 8, 1933 in Carnegie, OK to Gladys Beckham and Lewis Bass and grew up with her brother Delyon, in the era of WWII. Just before high school her family moved to San Antonio, Texas where she enjoyed all things Texan which included horseback riding, turquoise jewelry, cowboy boots, and square dancing (even dancing on the Houghman Hayride program sponsored by local radio station, WOAI).

It was in San Antonio that she met her life long love, Jim, and they were married August 25, 1951 on Treasure Island, California. Their romance lasted 70 years and together they raised two sons, Michael and Robert. Jim joined the US Coast Guard and they spent 27 years at various stations along the coast of the US from Alaska to Connecticut and even Rhodes, Greece. They were stationed twice in Juneau, Alaska and twice in Kodiak where Cookie took part in the local outdoor drama, "Cry of the Wild Ram".

Cookie and Jim retired to Anacortes in 1982 and their home in the Skyline community became a fixed location for their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She eagerly involved herself in the Anacortes community by joining bowling leagues and singing with the Sweet Adelines and The Harmonaires. During the Christmas season, you could often find her selling wood carvings at the annual Christmas bazaars. Their home was filled with her beautiful creations of jewelry, stained glass, wood carvings, and paintings that now fill the homes of her family with fond memories of her.

She is survived by her husband, Jim; sons: Mike (Louise) Carpenter and

Robert Carpenter; grandchildren: Lydia (Brad) Kinnie and Paula (Quentin) Wagner; and 5 great-grandchildren: Cailyn and Ethan Kinnie; Elli, Jessalyn, and Owen Wagner. The whole family would like to say that they are very sad that Grandma Cookie has passed on and that she will be dearly missed.

Due to the current pandemic, a memorial service will be scheduled at a future date.

**JR (VERNON)
ETLICHER**
June 30, 1964 -
March 19, 2020



JR (Vernon) Etlicher, 55, of Anacortes, passed away at sea in Alaska while Captain on the F/V Sea Wolf Thursday, March 19, 2020.

He was born on June 30, 1964 in Anacortes, WA; the son of Vernon and "Peggy" Margaret (LaVine) Etlicher.

JR is survived by his loving wife of 25 (together for 35) years Kim Etlicher and two very cherished daughters Brianna (fiancé Braydon Cooley) and Elyse Etlicher, and father-in-law Lynn Coffelt; a sister Carol Yates (Marty); two loved nieces, Kelsy Graves and Katelyn Jones (Adam); two dear great-nieces Macy and Madison Jones, and one great-nephew Landen Durfee (Steve Durfee). He was preceded in death by his dad, Vernon Etlicher Sr., brother Ronnie Etlicher, mother-in-law Dora Coffelt and sister-in-law Karen Coffelt.

JR grew up in Anacortes and graduated from Anacortes High School.

He loved his family, playing basketball, motorcycles, and just relaxing at home with his family.

He was very well respected in the fishing community and had fished in the Bering Sea, AK, for over 30 years.

JR's favorite recreational pastimes were hosting BBQ's with friends and family, paddle boarding, kayaking and cruising around in his vintage Red 68 Pontiac Firebird convertible with his family.

He loved and was adored by his nieces and nephews and would tease them as often as he could. He also very much enjoyed playing with and walking Brianna and Braydon's dogs Hazel

and Maverick.

JR loved the outdoors, especially Whistle Lake where he could swim with the dogs and his daughters. He was always a happy and joyful soul with the brightest smile and contagious laugh. He was very loved by his family and will remain in their hearts for the rest of their lives.

JR's motto and what he always would say is "Just Be Happy".

JR is loved and very missed. His name will be placed on the Seafarer Memorial and a celebration of life with be scheduled at a future date.

Arrangements are in the care of Evans Funeral Chapel and Crematory Inc., Anacortes and the San Juan Islands.

To share memories of JR, please sign the online guest register at www.evanschapel.com.

**MATHEW DAVID
PAYNE**
July 18, 1964 -
March 24, 2020



Mathew David Payne, 55, of Anacortes, passed away on Tuesday, March 24, 2020.

He was born on July 18, 1964, in Santa Paula, CA; the son of John and Ann (Matson) Payne.

Mathew loved his family. He loved to take car rides with his daughter just to connect and hang-out with her. Mathew loved to watch politics with his mom and got quite animated in the process.

His favorite pastimes were music, cooking and watching football, being a great fan of Seahawks and the Raiders.

It could be said that he had a rough exterior but deep down he was a softy. As a teen and throughout his life he thought of himself as "The Fonz". He never complained about his illness, always joking, laughing and taking life events in his stride.

He is survived by his parents; his sister: Pamela Holden Beatty; his wife of 13 years, Amanda; children: Billy Nestle, Victoria Coonce, step-daughter: Mallory (Thomas Dodds); and grandchildren: David, Sophia, Jeremy and Alyssa.

To share memories of Mathew, please sign the online guestbook at <https://www.evanschapel.com>.

Virus

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As they struggled to recover, the Backlands heard that one fellow chorale member was getting better. But then "she crashed again," Ruth Backlund said. And then, their friend was gone.

Meanwhile, funerals for the two chorale members are on hold because of restrictions against gatherings.

"It's tough for everybody. There's no closure," Backlund said.

A COVID-19 cluster

The COVID-19 cases sparked a cluster investigation by Skagit County Public Health, which contacted all participants and close contacts of those with symptoms. All were advised to quarantine or isolate themselves.

Public Health reported that it was investigating a cluster, but at the time did not name the group. The contacts of the members were notified and told what to do next. But word leaked out and eventually caught the attention of the national media.

The Chorale contends that it followed the guidance of local and state health authorities. A statement released by the Skagit Valley Chorale noted that: "On the day of the rehearsal, there were no cases of COVID-19 announced in Skagit Valley. There were no closures of schools, restaurants, churches, bowling alleys, banks, libraries, theaters, or any other businesses."

On March 10, Skagit County recorded its first case and issue its own warning about limiting group sizes. But the notice came out around 3 p.m.

"It's understandable the group had not seen

(the guidelines) yet," said Kayla Schott-Bresler, deputy administrator with Skagit County.

And Gov. Jay Inslee's proclamation banning gatherings of 50 or more people statewide didn't come for nearly another week.

Participants in the March 10 rehearsal included residents of Skagit County, Whatcom County, Whidbey Island, Arlington and Lynnwood, Richardson said. Most have recovered at home, but chorale Director Adam Burdick said Monday that a third chorale member has been hospitalized.

Tragedy and blame

Burdick said he hoped that what happened to the Skagit Valley Chorale would serve as a cautionary tale to help people understand the risks — and that some of those risks are still unknown.

"Some people are understanding that, and some people are not," he said.

But the tragedy the group is enduring with the loss of two members and sickness of others has come with a great deal of scrutiny, as well. Not all of the feedback has been positive.

"We are getting a flood of national media attention right now," he said. "We're dealing also with people who are responding in a pretty unpleasant way, saying that we should know better, and that we're at fault. Which is hard to deal with."

Burdick said the group made decisions with information it had at the time, without knowledge that the virus was active in Skagit County.

"Things have changed dramatically since then," Burdick added. "And now, I'm hopeful that there's nobody who is unclear about it."

Recovery

The Backlands, whose son, Brandon, is an emergency room physician at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, said they hope to contribute to a cure for COVID-19 — perhaps through blood donation, if they've developed antibodies that can help others.

Richardson said this new strain of coronavirus is so dangerous because it's unpredictable, and symptoms are not the same in everyone.

"I was lucky to have a mild case," she said. "Some (in the group) had extreme symptoms. Some people tested positive who didn't have symptoms. Just because you don't have symptoms, you could be spreading it around. That's why it's important to stay home."

There are also concerns about how long someone who became ill should stay away from others.

"I'm beyond the date of isolation, but if you don't know when you contracted the virus, when do you start measuring those 14 days?," Richardson said.

She recovered by taking medication to ease her achiness, staying hydrated and resting, "which is easy to do because you don't feel like doing anything anyway," she said.

On Friday, Richardson was feeling better, but she's still cautious.

"When I was a kid, the biggest health concern was polio and tuberculosis," she said. "It took years for a polio vaccine to be developed. Scientists have more tools at their disposal than years ago, but there's still not going to be an instantaneous cure (for COVID-19)."

* Skagit Publishing staff contributed to this report.