

MERCER ISLAND REPORTER



Governor starts historic third term

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More sober kids: Healthy Youth Initiative now fully funded

Mercer Island has some challenges with students and substance abuse.

By ANDY NYSTROM
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Keeping young people safe, vibrant and sober is one of the main objectives of Mercer Island's Healthy Youth Initiative.

Situated within the city's Youth and Family Services Department (YFS), the initiative is now fully funded by two federal grants from the Substance Abuse and

Mental Health Services Administration: Sober Truth on Prevention Underage Drinking (STOP Act) and Partnership for Success, which focuses on mental health promotion and underage substance use prevention.

YFS project coordinator Rachel Montgomery said Healthy Youth Initiative is "really well-funded to help pivot in this time of crisis. The HYI can address current, new challenges, but also continue building on the ones that existed before COVID." Montgomery said that through Positive Community Norms campaigning, Island

youth can see that although most of their peers aren't engaging in that behavior, it remains a concern.

One new challenge that has surfaced during the pandemic is isolation, said YFS administrator Tambi Cork. She's deeply concerned about mental health across all ages, but particularly with young adults in the 18- to 24-year-old range.

"That's always been a demographic we've had some concerns in lack of access to. They launch into their adulthood and they leave the Island and they're

maybe on a college campus or off starting a career and so we don't have the same amount of wrap-around support for them," Cork said.

According to a recent city brief, one ongoing concern is availability of substances of abuse — namely vape products — and the media that targets youth to make online purchases.

"Recent Mercer Island data finds that the vast majority of Island youth are not using vape or e-cigarettes. The HYI supports keeping and improving upon this hopeful health metric," the brief

notes.

Cork said they are also concerned that the Island's rates of alcohol binge drinking in grades 10-12 and into young adulthood continue to rise higher than the state average. She said it's somewhat consistent with what is seen in affluent communities across the nation.

Concerns about students

Mercer Island Police Department Chief Ed Holmes said that

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Islander rescues great horned owl stuck in soccer net

Resident spots owl during walk at Homestead Park.

By ANDY NYSTROM
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Harold Abell usually walks his German shepherd every morning at Mercerdale Park, but on Jan. 11 he switched their trek to Homestead Park.

It's the first time the pair has ever hoofed around Homestead and it made for a memorable experience. As rain fell at about 8 a.m. in the empty park, Abell noticed something stuck in one of the soccer nets. Man and dog were standing about 30 feet away from the net when Abell phoned his wife, Kellee, and asked her to bring some scissors and gloves to the site near their Island home.

As they inched closer, Harold noticed that a great horned owl was wrapped up in the net.

Harold said he figured it was an owl at the onset, but didn't want to get too close and stress it out. They jumped into action by first calling the Department of Fish and Wildlife, who weren't able to send anyone out and asked the Abells to call PAWS (Progressive Animal Welfare Society) in Lynnwood. PAWS employees couldn't make it to the Island at that moment, either, but said if the Abells could transport the owl to Lynnwood, they could tend to it.

After talking to his friend at Fish and Wildlife about how to handle the situation, Harold — wearing leather gloves — cut a large circle in the net around the owl to make sure its wings wouldn't be impacted. He lifted the net at both ends — never

touching the owl — and placed the owl in a box.

"It was pretty calm, and once I put it in there, calm as well," Harold said. "The owl did get a little excited once I actually picked the box up and started moving it to the car. Then once I got the owl in the actual car, the owl was very calm."

The Abells drove the owl to Lynnwood and handed it off to employees, who took down their information and have been giving them updates on the owl's status.

According to PAWS, the owl was treated with some pain medications and anti-inflammatories on Jan. 11, and after being examined by its veterinarian team the following day was found to be strong and flying well. Another veterinary check and blood draw is planned, and PAWS is cautiously optimistic that the owl will make a full recovery and could be released back on Mercer Island soon.

"They said they get a lot of owls but not so many great horned owls as they can be quite elusive and aggressive. They were impressed with how well she was transported from tangled soccer nets to their care," Kellee wrote in a Nextdoor post.

"It was quite an exciting morning for our family. Our family named her Hedwig and we are thrilled she will be OK," added Kellee. Hedwig is the name of Harry Potter's pet owl.

It was not the way Harold expected his morning to go. The Amazon employee let his boss know that he had an owl situation to attend to, and he also called his friend on the Mercer



See OWL, Page 2 The great horned owl of Mercer Island.

COURTESY PHOTO

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State lawmakers propose bill to fast-track the governor's reopening plan

By CAMERON SHEPPARD
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If passed, Senate Bill 5114 will put all businesses, facilities and organizations into "Phase 2" of Gov. Jay Inslee's Healthy Washington — Roadmap to Recovery plan.

One of the bill's primary sponsors, Sen. John Braun (R-Centralia), said the bill will provide much-needed relief to small businesses in need of cash flow after COVID-19 restrictions forced them to either close or reduce their service.

"[Small businesses] are having a really hard time," Braun said. "This gives them a path to survival."

Braun said he believes some of the restrictions like those on restaurants preventing indoor service are "arbitrary" and not as effective in limiting the spread of

the virus as they were intended to be. He referred to some early statistics from the Department of Health that estimated a marginal amount of infections being contracted at restaurants. Private gatherings are what Braun believes have been more responsible for the spread of the virus, and he said they have only been made more common in lieu of restaurants, bars and venues.

Another sponsor of the bill, and the sole Democratic sponsor, Sen. Mark Mullet (D-Issaquah), said Washington is one of less than five states that still is prohibiting indoor dining at restaurants, with 41 other states allowing higher than 50 percent restaurant capacity.

Mullet said the bill allows the Legislature to make decisions about the state coronavirus

policies as it relates to public commerce.

It even includes provisions for the Legislature to "regularly review" public health data to make decisions about community-specific restrictions, potentially usurping the governor's authority to make those decisions during the legislative session.

"We can monitor it," Mullet said. "We have the same public health data [the Governor's Office] has."

Mullet also said the state's effectiveness in the fight against the virus has and will continue to depend on individual choices within the lives of private residents.

Braun said the Legislature can always vote to reinstate restrictions on businesses and communities if the data shows an uptick in infections.

Through the pandemic, Republicans in the state have been critical of the governor's unilateral approach to COVID-19 restrictions that bypassed legislative input.

"The goal is to provide perspective around the state that until this point has been missing," Braun said.

Braun said he trusts that customers will make good decisions about risk when it comes to public behavior in the future.

"We can work together in goodwill to support public health and the economy," Braun said. "They are not mutually exclusive."



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King County reports record numbers of drug overdose deaths

Preliminary toxicology testing shows most overdose victims used multiple types of drugs.

By CAMERON SHEPPARD
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Public Health - Seattle & King County announced it has

recorded 42 suspected or confirmed overdose deaths in the last two weeks, the highest number of overdose deaths ever documented by the county in a two-week period.

The 42 deaths from Dec. 27, 2020, to Jan. 9, 2021, are more than double the average

number of weekly fatal overdoses throughout much of 2020, according to a Public Health - Seattle & King County blog post.

Half of the overdose victims were between the ages of 36 to 55, and 45 percent of the overdoses were female, a percentage that Public Health

says is higher than usual.

According to the blog post, preliminary testing has found that the majority of the recent overdoses involved multiple types of drugs.

Preliminary testing also found that 17 fatal overdoses likely involved methamphetamine and seven likely involved

fentanyl, lethal drugs that public health officials say killed hundreds in King County during 2020.

"It is more important than ever to check on those who you think may be struggling, either with stress, anxiety, depression, other behavioral health issues or increase in drug misuse," said

Brad Finegood, strategic advisor for behavioral health in Seattle and King County, via press release.

To seek treatment for drug use disorder, call the Washington Recovery Hotline for treatment resources at 1-866-789-1511 or visit www.warecoveryhelpline.org.

Kids

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like most high schools across the country, Mercer Island has some challenges with some students using illegal drugs.

"Our school resource officer works closely with the counselors from Youth and Family Services, to include the drug and alcohol counselor to get the students the help and support they need. As

you can imagine, everything is very different now during this pandemic since students are not physically at the high school," he said.

Twice a year, the city coordinates with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to participate in the nationwide drug "take back" day. Montgomery said those events are a "preventative measure to make sure that youth are never getting the opportunity to progress into prescription medication use or misuse."

Students are also provided information through YFS school counseling about the risks, consequences and harms about abusing substances. Last spring, HYI brought the first virtual pilot of The Incredible Years program to the Island. Developed at the University of Washington, the program promotes social, emotional and academic competence before a child becomes an adult, its site reads.

"We're not just hearing feedback and digesting

it. We're processing it as a group and coming back with viable, relevant strategies that work on Mercer Island. So for me, I feel encouraged and motivated," Montgomery said.

Cork said she is proud to be involved with the HYI and added that the Island is fortunate to have secured the funding to bolster YFS's mission to support community members, especially during the pandemic. They have a well-informed prevention staff and experienced

treatment staff in their corner.

"It's a fairly unusual model, and to have the city government so engaged in behavioral health support is unique and powerful," she said. "It allows us to interface with first responders and the school district and be collaborative and wrap around kids and families that are struggling in a way that's not always possible in other places."

Learn more
The Mercer Island's

Healthy Youth Initiative (HYI) is a progression of the Mercer Island's Communities that Care Coalition, which was launched in 2005. It brings together community members from all walks of life and professions who are "motivated to respond to underage substance use and engage the community in collaborative problem solving," according to the initiative's website. For more information, visit www.mihealthyyouth.com/healthy-youth-initiative

Owl

From Page 1

Island City Council to say that one of the soccer nets now has a hole in it. There was no other way to rescue the owl, Harold reflected.

It was a full-circle situation for Harold, whose thoughts drifted back to when he was a child growing up in Oakridge, Louisiana. At the age of 6 or 7, his dad noticed that an owl and its offspring were nesting in one of his wood duck boxes he placed up a tree. He called Harold over to see the owls.

On Jan. 11, Harold phoned his dad and sent a photo while he tended to the Mercer Island owl. After taking a business call, his dad texted him back with four words: "Use gloves, protect wings." Dad has been excited about the rescue ever since.

Like the owl, Harold said he was calm the entire time. He was laser-focused and confident that he could complete his task for the day.

"I feel like it all happened really fast," he said. "I remember when I was telling my wife when we were driving back, I was like, 'Hey that felt really

good,' but I almost wish that I would have enjoyed, maybe even looked at the owl more. I mean, the eyes were so beautiful, you know, the big yellow eyes."

It was a good way to start the week, said Harold, whose daughters saw the owl before they went to school and now they're hooked on owls.

He figures it was serendipitous that he became bored with his walks to Mercerdale and headed over to Homestead that morning. He later told his wife that they'll probably never get a chance to be that close to a great horned owl again.



Harold Abell transports the great horned owl in a box to PAWS in Lynnwood. COURTESY PHOTO

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