



FOOD DELIVERIES LARGE AND SMALL – The La Conner Sunrise Food Bank was Greg Buxton's last stop Monday morning. US Foods partners with food banks in Skagit Valley to supplement their growing food needs as a result of the coronavirus crisis. Separately, Oyster & Thistle's Thomas Palmer baked 50 loaves of bread, preserving his yeast and doing a good deed – rising twice to the occasion. – Photo by Ken Stern

La Conner High seniors bask in glow of Friday Night Lights

By Bill Reynolds

It was a rare bright shining moment last Friday for a La Conner High senior class whose school hallways remain darkened by nationwide campus closures through the rest of the academic year in response to the COVID-19 threat.

The stadium lights at Whittaker Field were turned on for 20 minutes at 8:20 p.m. – 20:20 military time – to honor the Class of 2020 whose members won't walk the stage in traditional commencement exercises in June.

The "Be the Light" event, which began in Texas and quickly spread across the country, took on a distinctly La Conner flavor here.

Teachers donning cloth masks and maintaining social distancing lined a section of North Sixth Street, in front of the baseball field, holding placards that spelled out "We Miss You" as La Conner High seniors drove past.

The seniors and their families and friends gathered in vehicles in the school parking area, then looped the lot with horns and sound systems blasting in the glow of lights usually reserved for football games and soccer matches.

The sports imagery could not have been more apparent. All were longing for when scoreboards will read fourth-and-19, signifying COVID-19 is on its final down.

But Friday helped take away the sting of missing out on traditional springtime senior activities like outdoor athletics, concerts, stage plays, prom and graduation.

At least a little bit. "It's all good," said senior Morgan Sidzyk, who briefly peered out from her open sunroof. "It's a chance to see everyone."

"It's not how I expected things to go," classmate Mason Miles said through a protective cloth mask as he sat in his driver's seat. "I don't know quite how I feel about it yet."

But he, Sidzyk and other class members made the most of the moment.

They were celebrated by La Conner Hook & Ladder, which circled the parking lot with an ambulance and two fire engines, each with lights flashing and sirens blaring.

And it wasn't just because Addie Reinstra, daughter of fire chief Aaron Reinstra, is a member of La Conner's Class of 2020.

"Be the Light" was also designed to show support for emergency services workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was so good to see the fire department come out and roll through the parking lot," said La Conner Schools Athletic Director Kathy Herrera, whose older daughter, Morgan, is a graduating senior.

The family of senior Charlie Cram (including a new Springer Spaniel pooch) turned the Way Back Machine to the mid-70s by playing some classic Earth, Wind & Fire inside their SUV as they waited their turn to join the parking lot serpentine.

"I'm glad it's a pretty good turnout," said Charlie's mom, Lynette Cram. "It's pretty neat to be able to do this for the class."

The celebration went smoothly considering that with a statewide "Stay Home, Stay Healthy" order in effect there was no opportunity to rehearse beforehand as would be the case prior to graduation ceremonies.

Though minus a practice lap, all who took part were able to step up and put the spotlight back on La Conner High's Class of 2020.

eyes and ears" during a time of heightened anxiety.

"I think the mayor made a good decision during the shutdown to put one more layer of security on the town," said Willard, who worked back-to-back 10-hour shifts here Saturday and Sunday.

"They fill in the gaps when deputies aren't actually in town patrolling," he added, "even though we're always within a 10-minute response time."

Willard said any hike in crime "causes uneasiness and puts additional anxiety on folks."

Town officials are also exploring the feasibility of enlisting a trained volunteer citizens patrol at some point.

"I'm all for it," Council member John Leaver said. "See something, say something, call 9-1-1."

Willard said La Conner is ideally suited for block watch and citizen patrol programs.

"Neighbors take care of neighbors here," he told the Weekly News on Saturday.

Given present stress levels, Wohleb said the Town should take a cautious approach going forward.

"People are pretty anxious right now," she said. "We don't want to do anything that throws gasoline on the fire."

Teddy Bears wanted by Braves Club

The La Conner Braves' Club is having a Teddy Bear drive. We are collecting new and gently loved bears to distribute to local children during this unprecedented time. Research indicates how stressful the pandemic is on children. Teddy bears are often given as stress relief for youth. The hope is to gather a huge hug of bears, 250-300.

Anyone wishing to donate to the cause can place the bears in plastic bags and leave them at the door of the Braves' Club. With daily checks of the Club, the bears will not be out in the cold for very long. Each bear will be promised a home in the very near future: once we have reached our goal and each bear has been quar-

antined for safe delivery.

The club is located behind the La Conner School District's administrative building, 305 North 6th Street. Anyone with questions can leave a message at the Braves' Club: 360-399-1921.

• On a side note, what sparked the idea was a box of bears in my garage. They were gifts at Tim's (Brenton) memorial on 29th & Yestler where he was killed in his patrol car while on duty Halloween night in 2009. I carefully stored the little stuffed critters knowing they would be very useful one day. That day is here and Tim's hug of bears will soon bring joy to other hearts.

Source: Marlene Brenton, La Conner Braves' Club

Locals only . . .

"It did have an impact," said Hayes, "though not 100 per cent. The goal was to thin out the herd and permit social distancing. There weren't nearly the crowds and no shoulder-to-shoulder (congregating)."

Council member Mary Wohleb said it is understandable La Conner would continue to attract visitors despite the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival being cancelled and stores here being closed while the statewide 'Stay Home, Stay Healthy' order is in effect.

"I saw people escaping Seattle to see the tulips because everything is closed down there," she said, "and then coming into La Conner because it's a cute town."

The Locals Only sign is likely retired for good, Hayes indicated. "I can't take that kind of push-back again," he said of the sign flap. "My entire Saturday [April 11] was consumed with phone calls. If you go with Locals Only (again), prepare for the backlash."

But two weeks later Hayes was rethinking the volume of town visitors. Monday, the 20th, he said the quantity of tourists and their behavior the day before, Sunday, made him uncomfortable. In a phone call to the Weekly News he expressed his intent to reach out to community leaders, which could include the county commissioners and the sheriff's office.

Hayes is clearly worried that the coronavirus can be brought into La Conner by out-of-towners from larger communities.

Numbers matter as much as words. The Skagit County Department of Public Health's daily reports show a disturbing rise in COVID-19 cases since April 13. Since then positive test cases have climbed from 193 to 255, a 32% rise. Hospitalizations are up 50%, from 24 to 36. Another person, the seventh reported, has died. And while 32 people have recovered, there are 30 more active cases, 168, versus the 138 on April 13. More troubling is the report of 14 new cases each on April 14 and April 18, the highest single day totals reported to date.

Friday Public Health reported the number of confirmed cases in the 98257 zip code to be less than 10. A Skagit County COVID-19 Cases by Zip Code map, is updated weekly.

In other Council business:

• Hayes said he and Town Administrator Scott Thomas met recently with Swinomish Tribal Community General Manager Allan Olson and Police Chief Lou D'Amelio. "The goal of the meeting," Hayes said, "was to do a 'meet and greet' and get acquainted since there's new leadership on the Tribal Senate."

• Council member Bill Stokes asked Hayes and Thomas to address the issue of persons living in their vehicles at the west end of Caledonia Street. "It's an increasingly bad situation," Stokes said. Hayes vowed that the Town would "move on this in the most kind, compassionate manner possible."

Thefts . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

Town officials are taking the crash of misdeeds seriously.

"I don't think this is just kids playing a prank," Council member Bill Stokes responded.

Hayes said temporarily hiring a private company to provide night patrols augments regular coverage provided by the county.

"It's really no reflection on the sheriff's office at all," said Hayes. "They can't be everywhere all the time. It's more a reflection on

these times." Monday afternoon he used the terms "porch prowlers, thefts of opportunities and crimes of convenience."

Of the Sheriff's Office, Hayes said, Monday, "They are our police service. They are a great resource and we have a great relationship."

Skagit County Sheriff's Office Sgt. Jeff Willard, who administers the La Conner detachment, said the security firm offers "more

force," he added.

But the new statute's restrictions on the use of plastic bags do not start until Jan. 1, 2021, Thomas said.

"This means that from June 11, 2020 until the new statute's start date, there will be no applicable restrictions on the use of plastic bags," said Thomas.

Enforcing those restrictions had already been suspended here as the result of a Town emergency health order in place to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

The plastic bag ban encouraged shoppers to opt for reusable bags. But those have been linked to possible transmission of COVID-19.

"Reusable bags can be problematic with the coronavirus," Mayor Ramon Hayes told the Weekly News.

Council member Mary Lou Chamberlain noted how La Conner has led the way in Skagit County to lessen the impact of plastic pollution.

"We were so proud to be the first town to go this route," she said of the La Conner ordinance

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Town plastic bag ban repealed, replaced by state law

By Bill Reynolds

La Conner's role as a trendsetter has been confirmed by state lawmakers.

Legislators in Olympia have passed a statute taking effect June 11 that supplants a 2018 Town ordinance banning businesses from providing customers with plastic carryout bags.

The Town of La Conner was the first municipality in Skagit County to pass an ordinance targeting the disposable bags as a means of reducing plastic pollution.

The state action led the Town Council last week to repeal its nearly two-year-old ordinance to make way for the new law, which is more stringent and whose restrictions commence at the start of next year, said Town Administrator Scott Thomas.

"The new law was intended to make regulations consistent statewide," Thomas told Town Council members. "Toward that end, the new statute supersedes all local ordinances."

"The statute goes into effect on June 11 at which time the Town plastic bag ordinance will have no

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