

# Blaine grandparents visit new Canadian grandson through chain-link fence

BY JAMI MAKAN

Blaine residents John and Sharon Andes recently visited with their new grandson through a chain-link fence, as a result of border restrictions that prevent the couple from crossing into Canada, where the new baby was born and lives with his parents.

John and Sharon Andes previously visited with the new baby, Stephen Cyrus Waldner, on March 21 at Peace Arch State Park. That's the day border restrictions initially went into effect prohibiting "non-essential" travel across the border. That day, the grandparents parked on the U.S. side of the park, while their daughter, son-in-law and six-day-old grandson parked on the Canadian side. They then met in the free zone of Peace Arch State Park, where Americans and Canadians can gather without any border-crossing formalities.

After state parks were shut on March 25, the grandparents had to get even more creative. On April 13, they found a spot in a

residential area in Blaine immediately adjacent to "0" Avenue in Surrey. Their daughter, son-in-law and grandson drove to the same spot from their home in Cloverdale and met them on the other side of a steel fence. They set up lawn chairs on their respective sides of the barrier and began their meeting.

"We tried to meet at the park in March, and now we had to meet through a fence," John Andes said.

Within minutes, a border patrol agent approached the family. "The border patrol was right on us right away," Andes said. "They know you're there whenever they see activity around the border. We got our chairs out of our car and walked up to the border and right up to the fence, and within minutes they were there."

The agent told the family that he didn't want the baby passed across the border, and that the two parties were not allowed to touch each other through the fence. Other than that, the agent was polite and understanding. "He was a very nice gentleman,"

Andes said. "We told him what we were doing and he was totally fine with it and said that's great."

For about an hour, the grandparents chatted with their daughter and son-in-law. The baby, who was born in good health and is now one month old, was awake for part of the meeting and then fell asleep.

"People are still trying to connect with their families in any way possible despite the border being closed," Andes said, noting that he and his wife have friends in Lynden who have held similar cross-border meetings with their Canadian relatives, separated by fences, ditches and an invisible line.

The border restrictions were due to be lifted on April 21, but on April 17, it was reported that Canada and the U.S. agreed to extend the current restrictions for at least another 30 days.

Toward the end of their April 13 meeting, the property manager, an elderly woman, walked over to the Andes and told them they couldn't sit where they were



▲ Due to border restrictions, Blaine residents John and Sharon Andes visited with their Canadian daughter, son-in-law and new baby grandson through a metal fence on April 13.

Courtesy photo

sitting. "She didn't really want us to be there, so it kind of ended our time," John Andes said. "It ended not so well."

Andes said that the family will try looking for other spots along the border, and that they have also tried meeting digitally using FaceTime. In a recent video meeting, the Andes opened

up some presents for the baby and gave them to him virtually. The gifts included some sports-themed toys and a small stuffed kangaroo.

"We're grateful and we realize that these are unique times," John Andes said. "We're just going to have to keep doing what we can."

## Q&A with Blaine councilmember and district 42 candidate Alicia Rule

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Alicia Rule is a Democrat running for the District 42 – Position 1 seat in the state house of representatives in this year's elections. Rule is a Blaine city councilmember and has worked in Whatcom County as a social worker and small business owner. Rule discussed with *The Northern Light* what she's accomplished, the highest priorities on her political agenda and what she wants people to know about her election campaign.

*This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.*

**Could you talk about your personal history and how that led to public service?**

I probably became a public servant much younger than I realized. My family and my community instilled values in me early on that it's our job to take care of those around us and to do what we can to help our community members. I've looked for opportunities to use that wherever I can. When you volunteer enough, eventually I think you land in politics.

**What inspired you to take this path?**

I was expecting to look for an opportunity where I could help my neighbors and my friends and the community. When I arrived at city council, I found that I really loved the work. It's when we get deep in the work and really start thinking through problem solving that I'm at my best. As much as I enjoy working at the local level, I started to see the bigger picture. A lot of the issues we're bumping into for our community are influenced by stuff that's happening at the state and larger levels.

**How do you believe that you can support the people of the 42nd district?**

My family has been in Whatcom County for five generations. We have done so many different things, collectively, in this

county that I feel I have a good idea about who we are as a community, coupled with my background as a social worker where I've managed and led programs through difficult times through much of my career. Whether it's helping somebody individually work through a crisis or helping large organizations move through big changes, when things get difficult, I lean in and that's when I do my best work. Although I'm very impacted like everybody about the COVID-19 crisis that we're dealing with, I feel that those experiences throughout my professional background have suited me well to lead us through this and get to the other side. We will not always be in this crisis and we'll need a good, strong leader to be able to lead us into the future, including a lot of rebuilding of systems that aren't working well right now.

**What does the district mean to you?**

This is home to me. Everything I do here is connected to the people who live here and the land we live on. When I look outside my house, I see the bald eagles dipping in and out of the trees. Those are the same bald eagles that we worked so hard to protect when I was a child. When I go to the ocean and I taste how it tastes in the air, that's the same thing that I got to experience when I was a kid. I never want to be able to look back and say, "We didn't protect that." Whether it's our land or our community, we have really special values here and we look after each other. I see that so clearly in the current circumstances. When things get hard, we look after each other, we connect, we take care of each other and we don't leave anyone behind.

**What do you want people to know about your election campaign?**

We are working hard to thoroughly understand the district and bring the values and things

that are important from the real people who live here to Olympia. I'm looking forward to being able to help bring back good jobs. We're going to need them and I'm looking forward to supporting small business. Our small businesses are hurting, and being able to rebuild that system is going to be critical to maintaining our lifestyle in Whatcom County.

**What are the highest priorities on your political agenda?**

I think rebuilding the economy is going to be critically important, and I think rebuilding the economy in a way that includes everybody is even more important. We don't exactly know what it's going to look like in our future, but we do know that it's going to be challenging and we know that we are going to need a voice that really understands the diverse constituency we have in the 42nd district. **How has your work on the Blaine council helped prepare you for this position?**

One of the things I like about it is that we're a really, really mixed group of people. We have varying personalities and points of view, even varying political views, and we work together well, even when we disagree. I hope that experience is something I can bring to Olympia – that we can get to a point where we can talk about issues and do problem-solving that's beyond finger-pointing and the divisiveness that we've seen historically.

**What do you consider your biggest political accomplishments so far?**

One of the things I'm really proud of is the work we did with our downtown. What worked really well is bringing people together. No one person was able to put downtown together and no one person is going to be able to preserve and work hard for that in the future. It takes the work of business people, community leaders, community members

and elected officials as a team to get things done. It's a representative's job to take the voice from all the people in the district, even when they don't agree, and make decisions that solve problems.

**What initiatives did you take to get those things accomplished?**

Every time we meet as a council, there's a lot of preparatory work that happens before we get to the meeting. Some of the things make it into actual movement and other things don't, but it still can move the needle on things. One of the things I feel proud of is our economic development. The B&O tax might be something that's helpful at a time like right now when we're about to turn into what might be a recession. There are some businesses that are doing quite well. For example, grocery stores. If they're able to contribute when other people are not able to contribute to our tax space, it might be the thing that saves us. Another thing I'm really proud of: I moved forward a proclamation for a Sikh Awareness Day. That was especially important to me because I can see the 42nd district is changing. It's important that we make sure and celebrate our differences while being able to work together.

There have been some seemingly small things I've been able to do, like recently being a leader in the decision to suspend late fees for utilities. That was something important because I understand there are many people in Blaine against hard times and I wanted to be sure we were protective of them. I was glad to be able to make a case for that with the council, which made a unanimous decision to make that happen. There have been a few other projects like saving trees in Skallman Park. I feel really happy when I can go over to the park and see they're still there.



▲ Alicia Rule.

File photo

**What more do you hope to achieve?**

I think in some ways, the goals are the same. Something that's important to our area in Whatcom County is for all people to be able to access a quality of life that allows for fresh air, clean water and access to the outdoors while being able to have affordable housing and a good job. That was important before and now that we know we're up against some really unprecedented challenges to our way of life based on this pandemic.

**Is there anything else that you would like to add or you think that people should know?**

I want to be sure people understand that as a small business owner and as a manager of nonprofits, and some of my other experience as a school social worker, I've had a variety of experiences in my professional life that have led me to be able to really understand a good variety of people and their perspectives. When I go to meetings and I am in a decision-making capacity, it's the stories I've heard over the years from different people that help me arrive at decisions that are sound for everybody.

*An interview with a third candidate in the race for the District 42 – Position 1 seat, Dustin Gleaves, is available exclusively online at thenorthernlight.com.*