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Washougal residents Andy and Heidi Dryden take a photo with their children Eli and Johnny at Big Bend National Park in southern Texas.



Washougal residents Andy and Heidi Dryden, along with their sons Eli and Johnny, visited 45 states and part of Mexico during a four-month-long road trip.



Washougal residents Eli and Johnny Dryden kept up with their schoolwork, with the help of their mother, Heidi, during the family's four-month road trip.

LEARNING on the Road

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

Washougal resident Andy Dryden started talking with his wife, Heidi, about embarking on a cross-country road trip last summer after he learned that he would be working remotely and their two young sons would be learning remotely in the fall because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We sold our house right at the end of summer, so we thought, 'Let's get an RV and go on a big trip. We won't have an opportunity like this for a while,'" said Andy, an engineering professor at Mount Hood Community College in Gresham, Oregon. "I've always wanted to drive around the country."

They purchased a 1984 Winnebago, set out from their Washougal home on Sept. 25, 2020. The family returned to Washougal nearly four months later, on Jan. 15, after visiting 45 states and part of Mexico.

"We had a great time," Andy said. "This was a unique opportunity to be able to have a job and stay in school and travel, so we jumped at it. I kind of relate it to backpacking. I used

to love backpacking because you carry everything on your back that you need to survive. We drove a 1984 RV. It wasn't fancy, it wasn't super-cool, but it had everything we needed, and there was something pretty simple about that that we just really enjoyed."

And, as Heidi put it, "quarantining in a camper while seeing the United States beats quarantining in your mother-in-law's basement."

The trip developed out of the Drydens' original plan to travel from Deadhorse, Alaska, one of the northernmost points in North America to Patagonia, one of the southernmost points in South America.

"Two years ago, we did a portion of that trip. We drove from here all the way to the Arctic, and it was a blast," Andy said. "We were going to do the Central and South America part of that trip (this year), but because of COVID, we couldn't do that, so we decided to do the U.S. states."

The Drydens slept in the Winnebago — which they affectionately nicknamed "leggy" — every night for the first three months of their trip, taking advantage of their memberships with Boondockers Welcome, an online community that facilitates free overnight RV parking on private property, and Harvest Hosts, a travel club that offers self-contained RVers opportunities to stay overnight at wineries, farms and other attractions across North America.

"That was a delight," Andy said. "People were kind to us in so many ways. The last three months have been pretty divisive in our country, so it was wonderful to be able to travel and meet — from a distance — people from all walks of life, political persuasions, religions and all sorts of things. To be able to connect with them and realize the commonality we have and the diversity in the United States was really encouraging."

The Drydens didn't have any set plans other than to be in Maine as soon as they could to see New England's famous fall foliage up close and Texas by late November to visit friends for Thanksgiving.

"I've lived in different places, so to visit different friends and (former) roommates and people that I know who are spread around the United States was fun," Heidi said. "(But) my favorite thing was just having the family together."

Andy drove three to five hours per day while Heidi helped their sons, Eli, 10, and Johnny, 8, with their schoolwork.

"One of my main roles was to home-school the kids, so I enjoyed that we had the motivation because I could move around the table with them while they were doing schoolwork while we were driving," Heidi said. "I was more focused on helping them because I didn't have other things that I had to

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CAMAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Officials hit pause on reopenings

Camas school board sets new dates for elementary, high school transitions

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record editor

On Monday, Feb. 22, just one week before Camas elementary students were scheduled to return to full classrooms, four days a week, and high schoolers would have entered a hybrid schedule with twice-weekly in-person classes, the Camas School Board agreed to pause the district's school reopening rollout to give teachers, staff and families more time to adjust to the swift transitions.

Elementary students will now transition from hybrid to four full days of in-person learning on March 22 instead of March 1. High school students will begin a hybrid model, with two days of in-person learning each week, on March 8 instead of March 1.

"I know a lot of parents have been looking at (March 1), and I'm sensitive to the implications of the delay," Camas School Board member Doug Quinn said during the Board's Feb. 22 meeting.

Quinn and other school board members said they wanted to give elementary school staff more time to ensure classrooms can safely accommodate full class sizes with students spaced at least 6 feet apart.

"The challenge is to create a cohort of students that remain together, but maintain our spacing," Quinn said. "You can't just fake it and make it work."

Doug Hood, the school district's director of elementary education, told board members Monday that the district was experiencing some capacity challenges at the elementary level.

"To support our students and our staff, we need to look at classroom configurations," Hood said. "Those conversations have started ... but we also need to understand what our family and student interest is.

We need to do a survey of families and that will take some time."

Camas school district officials established school reopening timelines based on the county's COVID-19 rates in December 2020. At that point, COVID-19 rates had been steadily climbing for three months and showed no sign of slowing. That plan called for transitions from small-group to hybrid to four days of in-person learning for K-5 students as the county's COVID-19 rates moved from high to moderate to low.

In January, COVID-19 rates started to drop, moving the county into a more moderate zone, and elementary and middle schools in Camas began the transition from small-group to a hybrid that saw students attending classes in cohorts two days a week. As of Monday, all of the district's K-5 classrooms were operating in the hybrid model.

The December 2020 reopening plan called for another shift at the elementary level once COVID-19 rates dropped again, with students coming out of the cohorts to attend in-person classes four days a week.

On Monday, Camas School District Superintendent Jeff Snell told school board members the county's COVID-19 rates have continued to fall throughout February.

"The great news is that we've been seeing drops in rates," Snell said. "We've been seeing huge drops of 50-plus over the past few weeks."

The county's COVID-19 activity levels fell from 401.2 cases per 100,000 residents on Jan. 25 to 209.8 cases per 100,000 on Feb. 15, and Snell said county public health officials expected this week's rate to be down to 136.95 cases per 100,000 residents.

"With the drops happening across the region,

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Camas OKs capital facilities plan for fire department

Report will follow a 2019 master plan showing area needs 2 new fire stations

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record editor

Camas City Council members agreed this month to move forward with the creation of a capital facilities plan for the Camas-Washougal Fire Department.

The report should help officials in Camas and Washougal understand the best way to allocate fire impact fees from new developments, said CWFD Fire Chief Nick Swinhart.

"We initially talked

about updating our fire impact fees, but quickly found out we needed to build a new capital facilities plan," Swinhart told Camas councilmembers at the city council's Feb. 16 workshop. "This hasn't been done in over a decade ... and is something we're going to need outside help to pull together."

The capital facilities report would build on the 181-page fire department master plan completed by Emergency Services by Camas, page A2

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Camas will soon fill more than 20 vacancies

City held off on hiring for 28 open positions during yearlong COVID-19 pandemic, saved \$1.44 million

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record editor

Clark County's recent move into the less-restrictive Phase 2 of the Washington Roadmap to Recovery COVID-19 reopening plan means city leaders in Camas can begin to fill more than 20 staff vacancies put on pause during the yearlong pandemic.

"Over the last year, we've been able to save \$1.44 million (by) not filling 28 open positions," City Administrator James Fox told city councilors at the Council's Feb. 16 regular meeting. "Now that we are in Phase 2, we're looking at (filling) critical positions to alleviate strain in certain departments and meet the service delivery



Camas City Hall is pictured Tuesday morning, April 14, 2020.

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SPORTS

Football players ready to roll

Camas coach says 'games will feel like a scrimmage, but it's better than nothing'

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

Even though the Camas and Washougal high school football teams won't get the chance to replicate or improve upon their special 2019 campaigns this winter, players say they're elated to return to the field for competitive play after the COVID-19 pandemic delayed their 2020 seasons by five months.

Local football coaches said Papermakers and Panthers players simply want to play, no matter how short the schedule is or what kind of safety protocols they'll be required to follow.

"Really, at this point, it's all about just getting the players on the field and giving them a chance to play football," Camas coach Jon Eagle said. "The seniors will be able to say, 'Even though COVID-19 hit, I got one more chance



Camas football players run a play during a practice session at Camas High School on Monday, Feb. 22. The Papermakers will begin their 2020-21 season with a home game against the Union High School Titans on Friday, Feb. 26, at Doc Harris Stadium.

to play.' They're going to miss out on some special experiences, though. Playing in front of the hometown fans at Doc Harris Stadium when it's packed? There's nothing else like it. Games will feel like a scrimmage, but it's better than nothing."

With the Southwest Region advancing to the second phase of Washington Gov. Jay Inslee's "Roadmap to Recovery" plan earlier this month, Greater St. Helens League football teams are moving ahead with their condensed 2020-

21 seasons. Washougal began its five-game campaign with a 33-19 win over Mark Morris on Saturday, Feb. 20, at Fishback Stadium. Camas will play the first of its six contests on Friday, Feb. 26, against Union at Doc Harris Stadium.

"We've been through a rollercoaster of emotions, so when we get the go-ahead, (there was) a feeling of relief more than anything else," Hajek said. "We just wanted to give the kids a season. I'm excited and the kids are excited. I was always pretty optimistic that we'd have a season; it was just a question of when and how long. We'll take what we can get."

Papermakers led by star QB, RB

Camas won't get the chance to defend the 4A state title it won in 2019.

As one of the state's traditionally dominant programs, the Papermakers

usually set lofty goals that revolve around a deep post-season run. But with no state tournament, they'll try to motivate themselves in other ways this winter.

"It's totally different," Eagle said. "We don't have the answers yet as to what we want to accomplish. Is this season for the seniors? Is it to get the juniors ready for this fall? I'll probably be both. We can't go for a state title, but we can go for a league title. I guess that's going to be the goal. We're competitive, and as long as the scoreboard is on, we're going to play to win. But getting the kids back on the field, that's the (primary) goal."

The Papermakers lost eight seniors named to the all-4A GSHL first team in 2019, but returned enough talent and experience to put them in a position to win the league title once again.

"We graduated a pretty good group," Eagle said. "Most state champion teams are senior dominated, and we were (in 2019). But we had a lot of kids who backed up seniors and got a lot of playing time and experience. We're talented and athletic. I'd say our defensive front is very strong, our receivers and defensive backs are talented but our offensive line is developing. We have a great quarterback and running back, and our kicking game is all brand new."

The Papermakers' offense will be led by two seniors who will continue their careers at the college level. Quarterback Jake Blair, regarded as one of the best high school football players in Washington, has recovered from a collarbone injury that prematurely ended his 2019 campaign. Blair recently signed on as a preferred walk-on at Oregon State University.

Another senior who has garnered high praise for his football skills, Camas running back Jacques Badolato-Birdsell, ran for 1,559 yards and 29 touchdowns in 2019 and recently accepted a scholarship to the University of Nevada. The strength of Camas' defense will reside in the front seven, led by senior lineman Robert Silva, a 2019 all-4A GSHL first-team selection, and a group of linebackers, including Luke Jamison, Jarris Phillips and Logan Silva, "who are going to make a name for themselves," Eagle said.

Eagle also expects tight end/defensive end Quade Milhollin, offensive lineman Noah Christensen, safety/wide receiver Bryce Dewey, wide receiver/safety Mark Thorkelson and running back Gabe Guo to make positive contributions this season.

"(Guo) has been in the shadow of Jacques, but on any other team he could be a starter," Eagle said.

Young Panthers rely on skill players

Like Camas, Washougal is coming off a season to remember in 2019, when it advanced to the 2A state tournament quarterfinal round. But with no state tournament to play for this season, Hajek will focus more on the short term while also keeping the big-picture perspective in mind.

"We'll build (a series of) weekly goals," he said. "We want to continue the overall growth of the program. We've talked about wanting to tie the Hookinson for the most wins (in the league) and things like that. But it's not really about wins and losses. We want to have a great season, give the seniors something to be proud of and develop the younger kids to get them ready to go for next fall."

The Panthers graduated a talented group of seniors in 2020 and are returning only three starters on both sides of the ball. Still, the Washougal team has a core group of experienced players, including seniors Shawn Harris (offensive tackle), Peter Boylan (running back/linebacker), Gavin Muller (running back/wide receiver) and Theodosy Berry (safety).

"We have a younger team, especially up front," Hajek said. "We have some sophomores who are going to be pretty good. We also have some seniors and juniors who don't really have a lot of varsity experience. Whether we can sustain a full effort for five games, I'm not sure, because most of the guys haven't been tested over the long term. But we're comfortable with what we have."

Hajek has high hopes for starting quarterback Tristan Farrell, who threw for 255 yards and two touchdowns Feb. 20 against the Monarchs, and senior wide receivers Michael Egger and Brig Griffin.

"We've got some speed," Hajek said. "Our skill guys are as good as anyone we will play."

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Road Trip:

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be doing. We were studying slavery, so we had a lot of fun learning about the Southern culture. We had studied Plymouth Rock, and we drove through there. It was fun to put stuff that we saw along (the way) with what the kids were learning."

They witnessed a rocket launch in Cape Canaveral, Florida. They trekked through the Luray Caverns, one of the United States' largest cave systems, near Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. They learned how to make maple syrup in Maine and harvest pecans in Arkansas. They listened to a retired driller talk about the history of off-shore oil rigging while visiting "Mr. Charlie," the world's first transportable submersible drilling rig, in Morgan City, Louisiana. And they visited several museums, including two of Ellis favorites — the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., and the Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation in Dearborn, Michigan.

The Drydens said they were profoundly affected by their stop in Montgomery, Alabama, where they visited The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, which displays the history of slavery and racism in America,

and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, which commemorates the Black victims of lynchings in the United States.

"(The monument is) a documentation of the racist past of the South and hope for the future," Andy said. "It was incredibly moving. We really enjoyed seeing that."

Heidi was struck on a personal level by what she saw in Montgomery.

"There were different plaques about where people had been lynched," she said. "I went to college in Illinois and had done some volunteering in East St. Louis, Illinois, so to see there had been a massacre in East St. Louis (was) unsettling). We are so far removed from slavery here in the north, so to see, 'Wow, it was right here where I used to go,' was moving."

They drove through or stopped in every continental state except Nevada, Iowa and Nevada.

"We didn't actually set out to hit as many states as we did," Andy said, "so when we were by Nebraska and Iowa, we were only an hour away, but we kept going, and at the end when we realized how close we were (to seeing all of the states), we kicked ourselves."

After one of the boys expressed an interest in learning how to sail once they got to Mexico, Andy and Heidi purchased a boat in Denver, Colorado, hitched it to a trailer and

towed it behind them.

"On the first or second day that we had the trailer, we were driving through a big mountain pass, and we heard a squeaking noise," Johnny said. "My dad thought it was from the truck in front of us, but it was our trailer. The axle had broken. So we have a new axle on it."

Other than that, they didn't experience a lot of mechanical troubles over the course of their 18,000-mile trip, which required 2,103 gallons of fuel.

"It was pretty smooth," Andy said. "The RV ran great. And it was super quarantine-friendly because we could make our own food, we had a bathroom and we slept there."

Even though they're glad to be home, the family is already planning their next big adventure, which will probably take them to Argentina so they can finally complete their Alaska-to-Patagonia trip.

"When we drove to Alaska a few years ago, we found that we love camping and the people that you meet camping, especially going a long ways away from home because you meet other people that are a long ways away from home," Andy said. "(This trip) was a fantastic educational experience to see our world. I think it's important to try to expose our kids to people from all sorts of walks of life. This was a great opportunity to be able to do that."