



Steve Powell | Bainbridge Island Review photographs

Contact info

The FOG gallery with Jeff Oens and Jane Friedman is located at 8897 Three Tree Lane, NE. It is closed to the public due to COVID-19, but you can email them at inquire@friedmanoensgallery.com, call 206-295-9321 or go to their website at friedmanoensgallery.com.

Jeff Oens adds detail to an owl.

Ex-cowboy an accomplished bronze sculptor

BY STEVEN POWELL
Bainbridge Island Review

A former rodeo cowboy, taxidermist and meter reader is now one of the most successful artists on Bainbridge Island.

Jeff Oens of the FOG Gallery has sold his bronze sculptures around the globe. The artwork that put him on the map was an almost lifesize moose that sells for \$68,000 bought by Northwest Trek 20 years ago.

"One of their biologists saw my work, and it took off from there," he said.

But the route he took to becoming such an accomplished artist was a bit unconventional.

Early years

Oens grew up on a farm in Montana with horses and cattle. His dad wanted him to be a professional bull rider, but Oens wasn't into that. But he did compete in rodeo roping competitions.

"I was a pickup man for awhile," he said of the cowboy who rides a horse and picks up rodeo competitors after they're done with their event.

He worked in the family business, which traveled to rodeos during summers to train cowboys. Bronc riding was their specialty.

"My dad was an old cowboy. He loved the Wild West," Oens said, adding later in life his dad built stagecoaches.

Speaking of wild, Oens said some Native American events really got that way. "Reservation rodeos got a little on the wild side," he said.

Later, Oens became manager of a Black Angus Ranch, where they did artificial insemination. But he really wasn't into that either.

So he got a job as a taxidermist. Somewhat surprisingly, he said that was when he got the bug to become an artist.

"Many sculptors get their start in taxidermy," he said.

In that profession of preserving different animals that have been hunted, Oens said he learned about their anatomy. He learned how to make molds of the structures of the animals to stretch the hide over. Those skills transfer over to his artwork.

So while Oens didn't really like hunting, he did appreciate his time as a taxidermist. "I hunted to keep my boss happy," he said, adding the last thing he ever shot was a buffalo.

Moving more West

Oens went through a divorce and ended up moving with his kids to North Bend, where he became a natural gas meter reader. That didn't last long because the school system wanted to bus his kids to Seattle, which Oens wasn't in favor of. "I'm not a city boy," he said.

So they moved again, this time to Bainbridge Island, 33 years ago. He continued to be a meter reader for seven more years before opening a frame shop. A few years later is when he finally became a full-time artist.

Oens took some art classes in high school, but never took it seriously. After high school he taught himself to do some pen and ink drawings.

He was inspired to become a sculptor during his years in taxidermy, but because he had to pay the bills and had kids he took other work.

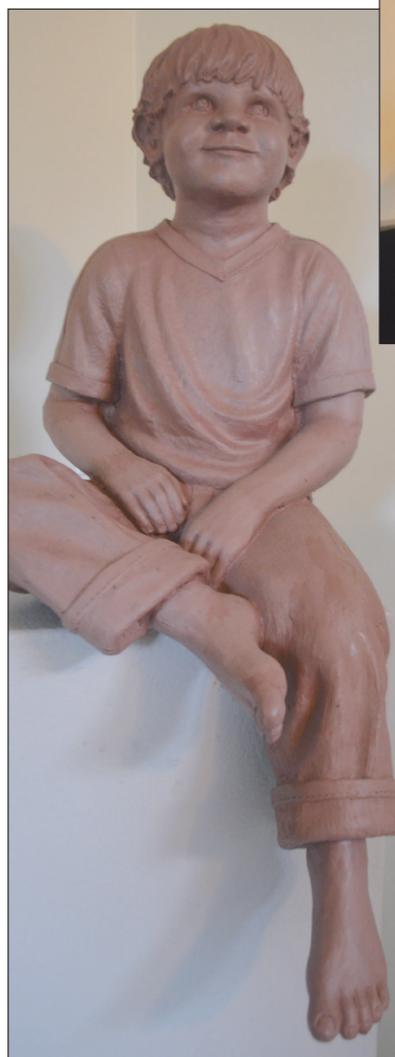
Once they were grown, and he got rid of his frame business, he made a bronze sculpture that won a competition at Olympic College, and he was hooked.



Gift ideas

For the person who has everything, a unique sculpture by Oens might be just what you are looking for. Prices vary according to size and complexity, but here are some examples: Moose \$68,000; Five wolves \$59,000; Doe and fawn \$55,000; Heron \$6,200; Salmon \$3,780; Orcas \$3,000; Jockey on horse \$2,550; Husky \$2,400; Lion \$1,850; Seals \$1,290.

Above: The studio where Jeff Oens does his artwork. Right: A jockey rides a horse in a race. Bottom right: Three chum salmon are a part of this piece. Below: The finished clay process of Jeff Oens' famous Eli Creekmore statue.



1st COVID-19 vaccines arrive in state

BY MARK KRULISH
Bainbridge Island Review

The first shipment of Pfizer/BioNTech reached Washington Monday, and doses will be administered beginning this week.

Vaccines were unboxed at the University of Washington Medical Center, and the first distribution of the week's expected 62,400 doses will be distributed to 17 sites across 13 counties statewide. The Food and Drug Administration approved an Emergency Use Authorization for the vaccine on Dec. 12.

The first round of vaccines will go to health care workers in high-risk situations, such as those who care for patients with COVID-19, along with the residents and staff of long-term care facilities.

"The vaccine is a sign of hope that the pandemic is something we can overcome," Secretary of Health John Wiesman said. "We still have a long way to go to beat COVID-19, but this is the tool that will start saving lives immediately."

A second vaccine, from pharmaceutical company Moderna, will have its application for Emergency Use



Courtesy photo

A total of 3,900 doses arrived at the UW on Monday.

Authorization reviewed this week, potentially bringing more vaccines to the state before the end of the year.

Washington is expected to receive approximately 222,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine by Dec. 31 — with regular weekly shipments beginning in January — and expects 183,800 doses of the Moderna vaccine, if approved, in the

same timeframe.

The Department of Health estimates that 500,000 Washington residents will be eligible for the vaccine in phase 1a. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is given in two doses, 21 days apart; clinical trial data shows it is 95 percent effective at preventing COVID infection beginning seven days after the second dose.

"We believe that if everything goes according to plan, we'll have most people in Washington vaccinated by mid-summer," said Michele Roberts, one of the leaders of the DOH vaccine planning group. "The rapid development of these vaccines, with such a high rate of efficacy, is a historic achievement, and will help us defeat COVID-19."

Jobless claims go back up

BY MARK KRULISH
Bainbridge Island Review

Initial unemployment claims rose back up as November transitioned to December with the Employment Security Department reporting a 10.1 percent increase from the prior week.

There were 24,587 initial claims during the week ending Dec. 5 and a total of 492,533 claims for all unemployment benefit categories, which is up 7.1 percent from the previous week. Statewide claims remain 145 percent above the same week in 2019.

In Kitsap County, initial claims actually decreased from 635 to 602. Kitsap has typically had one of the lowest unemployment rates in Western Washington in recent months.

The state's five largest counties — King, Pierce, Snohomish, Clark and Spokane — all recorded modest increases in initial claims.

Several industry sectors saw increases in initial claims over the week of Nov. 29 to Dec. 5, including manufacturing, construction, health care and social assistance and retail trade.

Construction claims are typical this time of year, the ESD reported, while the health care and social assistance losses were primarily tied to child day care services, general medical and surgical hospitals and services for the elderly and those with disabilities.

The industry sectors with the highest number of claims were accommodations and food services (4,693 claims, down 1,364); construction (3,569 claims, up 561); health care and social assistance (1,860, down 587); retail trade (1,733 claims, down 335); and administrative, support, waste management and remediative services (1,422 claims, up 371).

The Employment Security Department is approaching \$13 billion in payouts since the pandemic began, which has gone to over one million residents of Washington. During the week ending Dec. 5, over \$148.8 million was paid to 300,987 individual claims.

Another COVID-related death confirmed, 31 total

BY KITSAP NEWS GROUP STAFF

On Wednesday, the Kitsap Public Health District confirmed another COVID-19 related death, marking the 31st in the county since March.

No other details were given. Of the 30 prior deaths, all had underlying health conditions with a large majority over age 65.

Additionally, the health district confirmed 35 new positive COVID cases, bringing the total number since March to 3,246.

Of the new cases, North Kitsap had five and Bainbridge Island one.

Over the past two weeks, Kitsap County's positive case rate per

100,000 residents has skyrocketed to 223.4, meaning the county is well over a "high level" of COVID-19 activity, per state guidelines, with a case rate above 75 over the previous 14 days.

A total of 123 cases were considered in "isolation" by the health district, meaning they are "confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases who are in their recommended isolation period" (10 days after first symptoms.) 942 "total close contacts in quarantine" were also confirmed in Kitsap, meaning they are "residents who were determined to be close contacts of confirmed cases and are in their recommended quarantine period" (14 days after

last contact with case.)

KPHD and hospital officials are urging action to prevent strain on the healthcare system. "There is very real potential for our hospitals and clinics to become overwhelmed in coming weeks and months unless we take decisive action as individuals and as a community to slow the spread of COVID-19 and other viruses," district health officer Dr. Gib Morrow said.

Of the 3,246 total cases, 152 have been reported on Bainbridge Island, 794 in Bremerton, 791 in Central Kitsap, 546 in North Kitsap and 963 in South Kitsap.

Due to a high volume of testing

at the state Department of Health, the total number of negative tests along with the percentage of positive tests over the last 14 days are not available.

Based on contact tracing work, the district believes the spread among families and households was a key driver of recent case increases. To prevent spreading it is important for all members of a household to stay home and avoid contact with others if any member of their household has symptoms.

KPHD has temporarily reprioritized contact tracing strategies in response to the spike:

- It has paused daily monitoring calls, meaning staff are no longer

making daily calls to positive COVID-19 cases during their isolation period or to close contacts during their quarantine period.

- It is asking positive COVID-19 cases to notify their close contacts of potential exposure. Cases are provided with guidance to give to contacts. The district will resume direct close contact notifications as soon as possible.

- It strives to reach every positive COVID-19 case reported in the county as quickly as possible. Due to the overwhelming caseload, delays in testing, and challenges obtaining contact information, the district may not be able to reach every positive case reported.



Above: Jeff Oens and the lifesize moose sculpture that put him on the map. Right: A family uses this statue as a trophy for its golf tournament each year. It goes to the one who loses. Lower right: A pack of wolves in his yard is one of his more costly pieces.

OENS

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The process

Making a bronze sculpture takes a long time as there are many steps. Oens said 90 percent of his work starts with a customer coming to him with an idea. He draws a thumbnail sketch, and then makes a small version of it.

For the final product, he makes a metal mold of the frame of it. He uses rebar and bends and welds it together. He then glues Styrofoam around the metal. He shapes the foam with knives or a Sawzall.

He then shapes clay over the foam. He uses wax to

take out all of the imperfections. Up to a quarter inch of sand is then placed over the wax. The artwork is then fired at 1,700 degrees. When it cools the shell is broken off and a rough bronze is the result. It's then sandblasted and polished.

Oens said the NW Trek moose took him nine months to do, but if he had it to do again he would take a year.

"You can't rush artists," he said, adding smaller sculptures he can do in a month. "You have to be in the mood. But once I get it in my head I stay with it until it's done; that's my drive."

All of his sculptures are limited editions of five,

unless someone "wants a one-of-a-kind and buys the rights, but then the price really goes up." No one has done that yet, he said.

For awhile, Oens owned a foundry in Tacoma, but he got tired of working on other people's artwork. "I farm it out now," he said of casting the metal. "I want to work on my own; deal with my own art."

Favorite works

Oens is well-known locally for his piece on Eli Creekmore, who was killed by his father in 1986. That artwork is located in Poulsbo at Marrow Manor, which is transitional housing for domestic violence victims. Eli's tragedy led to changes in laws to

protect children.

But the work Oens is most proud of is the NW Trek moose.

"It's my most popular piece," he said. "I've gotten a lot of publicity with it. It's taken me further than anything else."

Some of his larger works have been sold to places in Hawaii and Ontario, Canada, along with Colorado and Virginia. His Five Wolves pack was sold to a private residence in a gated community near Eatonville. Most of the time he attends the installations because the buyers want him there.

"I've been so lucky, the people I've met," he said. "It's taken a lot of work over a lot of years."

