



Wednesday, September 9, 2020

SEQUIM GAZETTE

www.sequimgazette.com

Sequim's Hometown Newspaper

\$1.00
Vol. 47, Number 37



Irrigation Festival returns Sept. 19, Oct. 10

Some events omitted
or made online-only

BY MATTHEW NASH
Sequim Gazette

The Sequim Irrigation Festival's streak as Washington's most continuous festival will remain intact despite some amendments and omissions later this month.

A virtual unveiling of the festival royalty's float is slated for Sept. 19

followed by its Kickoff Dinner and Auction. A condensed number of events including the Grand Parade in downtown Sequim will go on Oct. 10.

However, some events are cancelled, such as The Logging Show

and Strongman Showdown, while others are virtual only, such as Family Fun Day.

Organizers postponed this year's events for its 125th year under the title "125, the Fields are Alive" because of growing concerns and

provisions for the 2019 novel coronavirus. Its first event, the Royalty Scholarship Pageant in March, was held just prior to the postponement of later events.

"(This year's events) will look See FESTIVAL, A-18

Sequim mayor backs QAnon on local broadcast

BY MICHAEL DASHIELL
Sequim Gazette

Mayor William Armacost supports QAnon, a conspiracy theory that has gained political traction recently and he thinks others should too.

The Sequim mayor explained his support for the controversial QAnon theory in a recent radio interview, calling it a "movement that encourages you to think for yourself."

He was responding to a written question from a listener to a "Coffee With the Mayor" broadcast on KSQM 91.5 FM on Aug. 27.



ARMACOST

Armacost, who was on the air with City Engineer Matt Klontz and Police Chief Sheri Crain, said, "If you remove Q from that equation, it's patriots from all over the world fighting for humanity, truth, freedom and saving children and others from human traffic — exposing the evil and corruption of the last century in hopes of leaving a better future for our children and grandchildren.

"In specifically addressing your question," Armacost continued, "those who are corrupt will do everything they can to suppress the truth. Ask yourself a question: Why haven't Antifa and Black Lives Matter been called the same?"

He urged listeners to listen to a YouTube video on the topic.

QAnon began in 2017 and is traced back to an anonymous online persona claiming to be a government insider seeking to expose the "deep state" allegedly working against President Donald Trump.

According to media reports, QAnon claims that public figures and institutions are secretly involved with child trafficking and civil unrest, and that President Trump has a secret plan to bring this group to justice.

According to the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's "Genesis of a Conspiracy Theory: Key Trends in QAnon Activity Since 2017," QAnon is also tied to ideologies such as "anti-vaccine, anti-5G ... antisemitic and anti-migrant tropes."

Multiple national news outlets point out that the theories have no basis in fact.

See MAYOR, A-12



Sequim Mayor William Armacost answers questions about City of Sequim activities in lieu of an in-person "Coffee with the Mayor" session on May 28. Sequim Gazette file photo by Michael Dashiell



a study in ceramics

Sequim's Sydney Swanson, 18, recently started up Sunshine Ceramics Studio as an outlet for her to relieve the stresses of the day. To help bring some light to others, she places a few mugs each month along the Olympic Discovery Trail. Sequim Gazette photos by Matthew Nash

Sequim High graduate promotes business with ODT hide and seek

BY MATTHEW NASH
Sequim Gazette

Normally a stray cup on the ground or on a fence post may not get a second glance, but Sequim's Sydney Swanson hopes you'll give her mugs on the Olympic Discovery Trail another look.

The 18-year-old Sequim High graduate started a mug marketing campaign to boost spirits and help promote her business, Sunshine Ceramics Studio. Before school closed in-person sessions because of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, Sydney's parents Dan and Tracy surprised her with a

See CERAMICS, A-12



One of the many aspects Sydney Swanson said she loves about pottery is experimenting with glazes. Photo courtesy of Sunshine Ceramics Studio

FIRST DAY DRIVE-THRU



Third-grade teacher Emily Ellefson snaps a first day of school photo of Emma Chapman, 8, as the youth picks up supplies at the Helen Haller Elementary parking lot on Sept. 2. Each grade level had specified time for families to see their teachers and get assignments. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash

Downward COVID-19 trend continues in Clallam, Jefferson

BY ZACH JABLONSKI
Olympic Peninsula News Group

Clallam County is now three days without confirming a new COVID-19 case and continues to be in the moderate-risk category with 41 cases per 100,000 population for the past two weeks, continuing its downward trend.

Jefferson County has dropped into the state's low-risk category for COVID-19 transmission, going eight days without a new case.

While the downward trends are promising, both Locke and Clallam County Health Officer Dr. Allison

See COVID, A-12

Gardening A-8, 9 • Police blotter A-10 • A&E A-11 • Sports A-13 • Opinion A-14, 15 • Obituaries A-16 • Milestones A-17 • Classifieds B-1 • Crossword Section B

weather outlook:

	THURSDAY, SEPT. 10 ▲79 ▼56
	FRIDAY, SEPT. 11 ▲73 ▼53
	SATURDAY, SEPT. 12 ▲69 ▼52

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Ceramics

From page A-1

potter's wheel, kiln and studio space in half of her mom's greenhouse.

"They gave it to me the day before school closed down," Sydney said.

"I had the same kiln at my school, so I was able to figure out how to use it by asking my teachers for the one day I was in school and by watching a whole lot of Youtube videos."

Sydney began getting into a groove experimenting with glazes and designs; a pot for her mom on Mother's Day helped push the idea of a business to the forefront of her mind.

"I always joked about doing a business but it wasn't really viable because I was just using the school's resources," Sydney said.

Eventually Sunshine Ceramics Studio started in-part after Tracy shared some of her daughter's early projects on social media. With her mom's word-of-mouth, Sydney received 40 orders in two days for mugs with Sequim's GPS coordinates and the #SequimStrong hashtag on them.

"I didn't know what to think," Sydney said. "I learned a lot in that first month."

Hike and seek

As a marketing effort, Sydney has gotten into practice of making extra items to place in the Sequim area, typically between Carlsborg and the City of Sequim along the Olympic Discovery Trail. She'll go on a bike ride and drop off a few with a note, hoping to brighten someone's day while asking them to check out her studio's social media pages on Facebook and Instagram.

Mike Walker of Central California was one of the few to spot a mug so far. He and his wife Mary Jo are educators who have visited Sequim each summer for more than a decade. Walker said he bikes and walks on the Olympic Discovery Trail when he visits. In late July, he recalls spotting a mug on a fence post on the trail near Priest Road.



In her freshman year at Sequim High School, Sydney Swanson, 18, said she was introduced to ceramics and it has become so much of an outlet for her she started her own business, Sunshine Ceramics Studio. Sequim Gazette photo by Matthew Nash

"It was camouflaged well," he said. "Anyone worried about COVID probably wouldn't have touched it, but me being a sucker, I grabbed it."

At first he thought someone forgot their mug, but then he saw a strip of paper from Sydney describing her effort and business.

"I thought, 'This is so cool,'" Walker said.

Since he isn't on social media, Walker connected with his daughter, who in turn communicated with Sydney. Walker's niece eventually met Sydney and bought some items.

Balance

Ceramics became a balance for Sydney's life.

"Art was my outlet, a stress reliever from school," she said.

"It's brought me a lot of happiness. I kind of lost myself in high school and struggled with depression."

Now Sydney has found a sense of peace in her busy schedule, working two jobs along with starting her business.

"I try to get out here every day," she said of her studio. "The goal is to get half an order done every day."

Later this month she'll begin



Mike Walker of Central California found this mug along the Olympic Discovery Trail. He discovered it was placed by Sydney Swanson of Sunshine Ceramics Studio. She hopes people who find her mugs on the trail enjoy them and check out her social media pages. Photo courtesy of Mike Walker

classes at Peninsula College while working at Solar City and John Wayne's Rustic Waterfront Resort.

Before work though she sits behind the potter's wheel for an hour, and also sometimes at night with her mom nearby working in her greenhouse.

"Making beautiful things out of the dirt is a reminder to me to keep going," she said.

Ceramics 101

Sydney recalls weighing whether to take cooking or ceramics her freshman year. Former SHS teacher Jake Reichner helped Sydney discover the joy of ceramics, she said.

Sydney said she was a little scared of the potter's wheel.

"I was going to stick to sculpting, but I picked it up and it was super easy," she said, noting help she received from Sequim High teachers.

Much of her experience comes from plenty of practice. Many of her early projects were not what she was expecting. Now, however, she boasts a growing line of products like stemless wine glasses, earring holders, bowls and plates and multiple styles of mugs.

Her mugs and plates with lavender impressions sold out at John Wayne's Rustic Waterfront Resort this summer, but new products are available there seven days a week at 2634 W. Sequim Bay Road.

More products are available through her social media pages on Instagram (Sunshine.Ceramics) and Facebook (Sunshine-ceramics-studio-202612019773658).

Free product is also available to the lucky few who find her mugs along the ODT, too.

COVID

From page A-1

Unthank are urging people to not let down their guard, especially because of the Labor Day holiday weekend, after spikes in cases were reported following Memorial and Independence Day weekends.

"We will see the cases from the holiday weekend, if we do have a spike, in a week or two," Unthank said. "So, we can't get too excited until we see those results, but we are hopeful that this means that — especially with the recent spike in cases — that people are starting to buckle down and take this seriously."

"One thing that we've definitely learned before is that once we see numbers fall, folks have a tendency to let their guard down entirely a little too fast, so reminding folks that we're not through this yet, but this is all very promising," she continued.

"I think if people can continue to keep doing what we're doing, we can do quite well."

The influenza vaccine is now available for the public, and both health officers are urging residents to get vaccinated as soon as possible in order to avoid a bad flu season combined with the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Flu will still be with us and, like COVID-19, flu is a killer virus," said Dr. Tom Locke, Jefferson County health officer. "We see tens of thousands of people die of influenza every year."

"I very much agree that it is important to get a flu shot for its own benefit, but also it's going to be hard for us to differentiate [the flu] from COVID-19, and it also puts extra stress on the hospitals in terms of having to manage that illness," he continued. "I think that, every year, there has been a strong argument for flu vaccinations, but this year it's the strongest ever."

The current social distancing, mask wearing and hand washing measures people are taking are expected to help limit the spread of the flu and colds this season as well, Unthank said.

"I think another thing we've been learning more about is the effect of viral load on people," she said. "So, even if you don't do everything perfectly, if they do a lot of the stuff, wearing a mask, limiting the amount of people, moving things outdoors, it can make a lot of difference in how severe your infection is if you do get exposed."

Clallam County has had 221 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since March, with 199 cases recovered as of Friday and one death, officials reported.

Jefferson County has had 70 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since March, with 55 cases recovered as of Friday and no deaths, officials reported.

Mayor

From page A-1

Sequim City Manager Charlie Bush and Assistant City Manager Charisse Deschenes said as of late last week, Sequim city staff had received one contact about the mayor's comments.

Both deputy mayor Tom Ferrell and council member Dennis Smith, former Sequim mayor, said they hadn't heard of QAnon nor listened to Armacost's comments.

"I think it's best we ignore that stuff, especially in positions in government," Ferrell said.

Staff Sgt. Sean Madison of the Sequim Police Department said the department does not have a position on the group and that the department has not received any calls or concerns about QAnon specifically.

In a Sept. 3 interview, Armacost said he has heard some criticism of his QAnon comments.

"I would remind people that I have constitutional rights that they choose to ignore," he said. "I've got some strong opinions (that are) not in agreement (with) other people."

"The sad part is, it doesn't seem to be what the item is, whenever you have an organization that is inclined to expose evil things to humanity, there's going to be a push-back. It (QAnon) is an opportunity to ... dig up the information, maybe look at a different channel."

"We know the truth is sometimes hard to find in mass (and) social media."

Armacost, a local salon owner, said he "has the ear to the public" and that he will "speak on the side of the citizen."

He added, "We need more transparency and accountability in all levels of government. I hope that we have an engaged community."

FBI, other agencies

In May 2019, Yahoo News obtained and reported on an

FBI document distributed to field agents in Phoenix, Ariz., regarding the risks posed by people who believe in theories including QAnon, noting that "fringe political conspiracy theories very likely motivate some domestic extremists to commit criminal, sometimes violent activity."

The document lists several instances of criminal activity by believers in such theories, NBC News and PolitiFact report.

On Friday, the FBI National Press Office said in answer to an inquiry that, "the FBI does not and cannot designate domestic terrorist groups. The FBI can never initiate an investigation based solely on an individual's race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, or the exercise of First Amendment rights."

The FBI National Press Office added: "When it comes to domestic terrorism, our investigations focus solely on the criminal activity of individuals — regardless of group membership — that appears

to be intended to intimidate or coerce the civilian population or influence the policy of the government by intimidation or coercion.

"It's important to note that membership in groups which espouse domestic extremist ideology is not illegal in and of itself — no matter how offensive their views might be to the majority of society. Membership in a group is not a sufficient basis for an investigation."

West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, an academic institute within the United States Military Academy, cited a number of examples of violence related to QAnon in a July report titled "The QAnon Conspiracy Theory: A Security Threat in the Making?"

"QAnon has contributed to the radicalization of several people to notable criminal acts or acts of violence," the report states.

Chad Wolf, Department of Homeland Security's acting secretary, told CNN on Aug.

23 that QAnon is not a "significant" threat to the U.S., but he condemned the conspiracy theory when pressed on his stance.

Armacost said in a Sept. 3 interview that rather than a threat, QAnon is a movement of "people around the world focused on fighting for truth and freedom and, most importantly, how we can shine the light on evils of humanity."

He said that "it's matter of time" that movements such as Antifa and Black Lives Matter are labeled a terrorist threat, pointing out the protests in Seattle that resulted in vandalism of stores and deaths in the "CHOP" protest zone.

"That is the rule of mob, not the rule of law," he said.

Politicians linked to QAnon

Marjorie Taylor Greene, the Republican nominee for Georgia's 14th congressional district in the 2020 general election, came to prominence for her support of QAnon in videos; Politico uncovered hours of Facebook videos in which she reportedly expresses racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic views.

Among other political

candidates tied to the QAnon theory are Jo Rae Perkins, Republican nominee for a U.S. Senate seat in Oregon; Lauren Boebert, Republican nominee in Colorado's 3rd Congressional District; Mike Cargile, Republican candidate in California's 35th Congressional District, and Theresa Raborn, Republican candidate for Illinois' 2nd Congressional District.

According to The Washington Post, at least 11 candidates seeking seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in the November election had expressed belief in or support for QAnon.

According to an internal Facebook audit obtained by the NBC News, QAnon groups on the social-media platform have millions of members.

"The top 10 groups identified in the investigation collectively contain more than 1 million members, with totals from more top groups and pages pushing the number of members and followers past 3 million," NBC News reported, adding that it's not clear "how much overlap there is among the groups."

Peninsula Daily News Executive Editor Leah Leach contributed to this story.

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