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CHINOOK OBSERVER

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Twister hits Ilwaco, 1st in county since '91

Windows broken but no injuries

By JEFF CLEMENS For the Observer

ILWACO — The Portland National Weather Service office has confirmed that a tornado did touch down in the Vandalia neighborhood of Ilwaco late in the evening on March 19. The tornado came on the heels of an extraordinarily active weather pattern along the Washing-

'IT WAS A VERY BRIEF TORNADO, AS THEY OFTEN ARE WHEN THEY AFFECT US. IT LIFTED BACK UP OFF THE GROUND RIGHT NEAR CHINOOK VALLEY ROAD AND [U.S. HIGHWAY 101]. WE ESTIMATE THAT THE MAXIMUM GUSTS WITH IT WERE ABOUT 65 MPH.'

NWS Meteorologist Shawn Weagle

ton coastline where special marine statements were issued for possible waterspouts, and tornado warnings near the Olympic Peninsula towns of Kalaloch and La Push. "Yesterday, we had a lot of active

storm cells off the coast, just pretty strong showers that were brushing along the coast," NWS Meteorologist Shawn Weagle said. "One of them got a bit of rotation with it as it started to move inland. So basi-

cally it got just enough spin at the right time where you ended up with a weak tornado."

It didn't seem weak to those in its path. "He said it sounded like a freight train hit the side of his house,"

according to a witness statement to the police officer who responded to the call at 8:24 p.m. Saturday. "All the neighbors there said that no one was hurt and they were helping each other to board up broken windows. ... There was a fence that was torn up and a metal awning that had been torn off of a house. Multiple windows had been broken including the rear driver-side window on a pickup truck." At least four homes were damaged during the storm.

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Cases drop as county enters Phase 3

So far so good on staying in Phase 3

By BRANDON CLINE Chinook Observer

SOUTH BEND — Pacific County is seeing a reprieve in covid-19 cases at a critical time, as the county and the state as a whole entered Phase 3 of Washington's reopening plan on Monday.

The Pacific County Health and Human Services Department reported a total of 21 new cases and zero new hospitalizations from March 8 to 21, low enough to keep the county in Phase 3 if the metric check from state health officials took place today.

To remain in Phase 3, smaller counties with a population of 50,000 or less must maintain a 14-day average of new cases at 30 or fewer, and have a new seven-day hospitalization average at three or fewer. If a county fails either or both of the two

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Drug court hit hard by court ruling

Simple possession defendants drop out

By JEFF CLEMENS For the Observer

SOUTH BEND — Last chances are hard to come by, and many Pacific County residents were given one when they were accepted into drug court and had an opportunity to turn their life around. The success has primarily been due to consequences for failure hanging over participants' heads.

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PATRICK WEBB/FOR THE OBSERVER

When Naselle's move to 1B meant a switch to 8-man football, Coach Jeff Eaton had a special T-shirt made. "Army of 8" became the motto for the team. The longtime coach announced his retirement Thursday after three decades of coaching. Achievements include one state final and two semi-final appearances.

Naselle stalwart mixed life lessons in with sports skills



By PATRICK WEBB For the Observer

NASELLE — Does a coach teach football or life lessons?

Jeff Eaton hopes he has done both.

The Comets' long-time head coach is retiring after being the program's backbone for three decades.

He made public his decision to retire at Thursday's season-ending game against Mossyrock.

"I have been thinking about it for a couple of seasons," said Eaton, who built a squad of just 12 into a winning unit. "This one has been a pretty challenging year."

With free time looming this fall, he is eager to catch up on 30 years of missed elk and deer hunting.

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'I AM PRETTY LAID BACK, BUT FOOTBALL DOES BRING OUT SOME STUFF.'

— Jeff Eaton

Retiring Naselle football coach

Naselle applauds Coach Eaton for his community service

By PATRICK WEBB For the Observer

NASELLE — Football coach Jeff Eaton's retirement brought loud community applause for his service.

"He is going to be missed," said Brian Macy, athletic director, who attended Eastern Washington University with Eaton in the 1980s. "Just think of the positive impact he has had on our community."

"It's just amazing — you don't get people who are willing to stick around in one place for so long. He has done it longer than most of the people in the stands have lived. He loved doing what he was doing — it didn't seem like work for him."

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County's high-speed hopes hang on Legislature, satellites

SpaceX board member Steve Jurvetson holds a Starlink user terminal, a satellite-based broadband internet service coming online in Pacific County and elsewhere.

BY STEVE JURVETSON FROM LOS ALTOS/COMMONS.WIKIMEDIA. ORG



Group declines \$3.3M grant-loan offer from state

By BRANDON CLINE Chinook Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — The Pacific County Broadband Working Group met virtually for the first time in 2021 on March 17, covering an array of topics critical in the effort to bring high-speed, affordable broadband internet to the area.

Along with recapping local developments, the group vigorously discussed a pair of bills making their way through the Washington State Legislature. Each bill, if enacted into law, would respectively alter the landscape of how broadband services are offered in rural Washington communities moving forward.

The working group was formed in 2019 and comprises the county government, all four cities, all four ports, Pacific County PUD No. 2, Pacific County Economic Development Council, Shoalwater Bay Tribe and the Pacific County Visitors' Bureau.

House bill shows promise

Of the two bills currently in the legislature, House Bill 1336 is the one that is clearly favored by members of the working group. Passed in the state House in February on a 60-37 vote, it would allow an array of local governments — including PUDs, ports, counties and small cities — to get back into the broadband game.

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Eaton

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So how will fans remember the Eaton Era?

“I think I have done a good job,” he said, uncomfortable when asked to measure his own success. “I did it because I always wanted to — I wouldn’t have wanted to do it anywhere else. I love the community and the school and wanted to give back.”

Taking on a challenge

Eaton is 57. He grew up in Naselle, sharing a Halloween birthdate with life-long friend Kevin McNulty, who lived next door and also became a coach and educator. Eaton was initiated into the mysteries of the offensive line in seventh grade, and even kicked field goals during his school years.

He graduated from Naselle High School in 1982 then played lineman at Western Washington University for three years before transferring to Eastern to complete his degree in community health and physical education.

He returned to his hometown to work at the Naselle Youth Camp. Eaton joined McNulty as Ilwaco’s defensive coordinator for a year in 1988 before coaching legend Lyle Patterson, their highly respected mentor during high school, asked both men about the Naselle job. Eaton said McNulty declined because he had made a commitment to the Fishermen.

“It was a challenge and something I wanted to do,”



PATRICK WEBB

Coach Jeff Eaton, left, was still giving positive encouragement to his Naselle team at the WIAA state semifinal, even when they were down 82-28 to eastern Washington powerhouse Almira-Coulee-Hartline in December 2018. He announced his retirement Thursday at the Comets’ last game of the Covid-changed 2021 spring season.

Eaton recalled. It meant taking a demotion at work so he could switch to the graveyard shift to allow evenings for coaching, a lifestyle that lasted an unexpected five years.

As the years passed, Eaton served as head coach, occasionally taking supporting roles, such as when Robin Andrea took the helm in the early-mid 2000s. Assistants have included his current trusted crew of Matt Scrobeck and Pete Riley, who also work at the Naselle Youth Camp; Francis Fabela also contributed greatly to the Comet program, Eaton noted.

He recalled many highlights. One was in 2008 when Naselle advanced to the state 2B semifinal against powerful Napavine. “They were supposed to beat us up,” said Eaton, remembering the 18-13 scoreline with pride, even though it was a loss. “They went on to win a close

final against Asotin, which was highly favored that year.” (28-24, with a long passing touchdown in the final minute.)

Football family

For the Eatons, football is all about family. Jeff’s wife, Amber, has baked countless batches of chocolate chip cookies that refuel exhausted players after the handshakes are done. It’s been common for a dozen boys to cram into their home Sundays to watch videos of upcoming opponents.

In the years that followed that Napavine loss, Eaton coached his two sons to statewide recognition in Comet uniforms. “That was probably the biggest highlight, looking back,” he said. “Both boys were good football players. They played all sports, but football was their best sport.”

The oldest, Robert, now an oysterman, was an all-state

football player selected for the east-west all-star game in 2012. Dustin, a deputy with the Pacific County Sheriff’s Office, received all-league recognition at quarterback, all-state football honors and selection for the all-star game. Unsurprisingly, daughter, Abbie, was active in sports, too.

The brothers’ playing years coincided with success for Seth and Sam Scrobeck, sons of Matt Scrobeck, now in charge of Comet special teams.

The four boys contributed greatly to Naselle’s success in that era, with Jeff Eaton mindful to allow his other coaches more direct contact with his sons, especially when Dustin played quarterback.

“I knew that I could not be the offensive coach,” Eaton laughed, adding a guarded reference to fathers who coach their children setting unreasonable expectations. “If I had been the offensive coach, we probably wouldn’t have talked at dinner!”

‘Army of 8’

Little changed in 2015 when the WIAA shuffled the Comets into 1B, insisting they play eight-man football with the likes of eastern Washington powerhouses Odessa and Almira-Coulee-Hartline. Eaton had a blue and yellow “Army of 8” T-shirt printed, and wore it whatever the weather.

With three fewer players on the field, one missed tackle almost guarantees a score. But Eaton reminded his speediest runners they had

larger gaps to run through.

His last two “normal” seasons were measured by play-off success. Quarterback Cole Dorman and Eaton’s nephew, Jacob, spurred the Comets through a sparkling season into a state semifinal loss to Almira-Coulee-Hartline in 2018; the following year saw Ethan Lindstrom lead Naselle to the state championship game. A rainy day and a pulverizing by mighty Odessa couldn’t dampen Comet fans’ spirits as they celebrated the rare achievement of reaching the final.

“Those semi- and final highlights were when we were getting into the groove with 8-man,” he said. “We had a good solid group of kids those years — they were big moments.”

This school year the covid pandemic wrecked hopes of fall sports and eventually forced the WIAA to switch football to a February start, with a curtailed season and no traditional championship path.

With only 12 boys turning out, and only 10 available for each game, Naselle walloped Mossyrock in its home opener 46-0, swamped Winlock 38-14, defeated Ocosta 52-12 then piled on 58 unanswered points against Taholah. Thursday’s second matchup with Mossyrock ended 48-22 and the Comets were undefeated as Region 4 champions.

Lessons in football and life

For Eaton, a coach’s mission is not just repli-

cating the perfect three-point stance at the line of scrimmage.

“One of the biggest reasons for me is to be out there with the kids and teach them some things to help them along the way,” he said. “Maybe in years to come, they will be saying, ‘Old Coach Eaton said that way back.’”

Lessons from the training field continue, he believes.

“There are life things — sticking to it, not quitting, showing up for jobs. Life lessons,” he said.

Among his favorite achievements has been guiding boys who were not immediate stars.

“It’s seeing those successes, especially kids that were not the great athletes, who found a niche. They were able to do good kinds of things. That was pretty rewarding, especially when they learned things like when not to quit.”

Eaton rarely publicly laments his players’ errors. Instead, a withering look or a brief, quiet word guides them back on track.

But sometimes his voice reverberates across Rueben Penttila Field, amplified this season with fewer fans at the stadium because of covid rules. The decibel level rises mostly when referees didn’t penalize opponents making unsafe tackles.

“I am pretty laid back, but football does bring out some stuff,” he conceded. “It’s the safety things that really concern me — I yell a bit more.”

Cases

Continued from Page A1

metrics, they will be moved down one phase of the reopening plan. Counties will be evaluated on an individual basis once every three weeks.

With higher capacity levels in restaurants and other indoor spaces now in effect, county health officials are warning that precautions such as mask-wearing and social distancing are more important than ever if the county wants to continue to enjoy the relaxed restrictions.

“It will take all of us working together to ensure that Pacific County can stay in Phase 3,” the department said in a March 21 news release.

The county’s total count sits at 822 cases since the pandemic began. With just five active cases, Pacific County’s case rate per 100,000 people over a two-week period stands at just 92.4, down sharply from 217.2 a week ago. Recent new cases, health officials say, are largely attributed to social gatherings. Coronavirus deaths in the county stood at 10 as of March 23.

Clatsop County reported 816 total cases as of March 23, an increase of 19 cases since March 16. Statewide confirmed covid-19 cases totaled 334,392 on March 22, with 20,154 patients hospitalized and 5,183 fatalities reported since the pandemic began.

CDC issues new school guidance

Last Thursday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced new recommendations that opened the doors for schools to provide in-person instruction to students more than just twice a week.

The updated guidance for K-12 schools now calls for all elementary, middle and high school students maintaining three feet of distance while in the classroom — less than the six feet the CDC had previously called for. The guidance is for all elementary schools that practice universal masking, and for middle schools and high schools that have universal masking and are located in communities where virus transmission isn’t high.

The CDC’s guidance continues to recommend six feet of distance between adults in school buildings, as well as between adults and students. Six feet of distance is also still called for in common areas, when masks can’t be worn (such as during lunch), in band, choir and gym classes, and in community settings outside of the classroom.

The CDC’s new recommendations must first be adopted by the Washington State Department of Health before they can go into effect in the state and in Pacific County schools.

Ocean Beach School District Superintendent Amy Huntley said the district is currently working to figure out how many students its schools can accommodate if the state Department of Health sign off on the new guidance — which Huntley expects they will. She said OBSD will start with its younger students and work its way up, but she was “pretty sure” that not every student would be able to be on-campus five days a week.

Also on the schools front, practices began last week for the traditional spring sports season, including baseball, softball, golf and track and field. Competition is set to begin this week, and a full schedule can be found at <https://fishermenathletics.com/events>.

Service

Continued from Page A1

Lisa Nelson echoed that. “Jeff Eaton of football has become the Lyle Patterson of basketball for Naselle athletics,” the superintendent said. “While they may not share the same personality — off the field or court — they both exhibited a great passion and love for what they do. They stand for a long tradition of dedication and success for our student athletes.”

Following district policy, she will post the job and see who applies. Macy noted that will happen rather quickly, because if WIAA reverts to traditional season dates for fall 2021, the new coach will want to open the weight room this summer.

“Jeff will leave a huge hole to fill,” Nelson added. “He has been such a stalwart for our program and a great role model for our kids. We were really lucky to have a quality

guy like Jeff at the helm to run a classy program for so many years. He has had a great career and will be missed dearly.”

Eaton’s lifelong friend Kevin McNulty, the former Ilwaco football coach, was his next-door neighbor when they were kids in Naselle. The two share a birthday, were best man at each other’s weddings, and coached with and against each other.

“He is a class act and is well respected by coaches and officials,” said McNulty. “Jeff is a good man, a great role model, a motivator, passionate and easygoing yet fierce competitor. His laid-back style works for him, but don’t let that fool you — he can get excited!”

Respect and development

Naselle stadium announcer Chris Dorman added to the applause. “A calm, fair man with an occasional ‘bite’ that garnered the respect of players and led programs to

big stages,” he said, when asked to describe Eaton’s impact.

His son, Cole, captained the Comets to the state semi-final in 2018. “Since he didn’t get after us too much, we knew that when he did, we were doing something wrong which had to be fixed,” said Dorman.

As quarterback in his senior year, he benefited from Eaton’s extra lineman drills. “I sure do appreciate how he coached them, because the linemen that I had throughout my career protected me very well, which made my job easier,” he said.

Carson Bergeson, a 2018 graduate, played on Naselle’s offensive line. In eight-man football, extra-point plays are passes or runs. When Eaton signals “Jumbo,” one lineman moves to the backfield to receive the ball and power into the end zone.

The play was called twice for center George Wilson in the next-to-last home game this season against Northwest Christian. The cheers from teammates when the enthusiastic 265-pound junior scored

were the loudest of the night.

Bergeson savored his moments handling the ball and was full of praise for Eaton. “He is very passionate about the game of football,” he said. “He loves to work with kids and give them as much knowledge as he can about the game — and always has a good attitude.”

“I’ll never forget his voice at the end of practice saying, ‘Everybody on the goal line!’ — which means it was time to run.”

‘Enjoyable times’

Hayden Gudmundsen, who is married to Eaton’s niece, Taylor, cherishes his memories, too. He played quarterback for Naselle in his 2015 senior season.

“For the past 30 years, Jeff Eaton has been Naselle football,” Gudmundsen said. “Dedicating so much of his life to not only coaching but mentoring so many players has led to an incredible impact on kids and the community. Personally, Jeff made being a Comet football player one of the most enjoyable times of my life.”

Twister

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The NWS sends a team to the location of any suspected tornado touchdowns to investigate the damage and determine its strength using the enhanced Fujita scale, which involves surveying the damage. The team arrived in the area around 8 a.m. March 20 and concluded that a low-intensity EF-0 tornado touched down at the

intersection of Redwing Way and Captain Gray Drive.

“It was a very brief tornado, as they often are when they affect us,” Weagle said. “It lifted back up off the ground right near Chinook Valley Road and [U.S. Highway 101]. We estimate that the maximum gusts with it were about 65 mph.”

It has been about three decades since the last confirmed tornado in Pacific County on June

13, 1991, which touched down near Megler and was rated as an F-0. The year before, on Dec. 1, 1990, a tornado touched down in South Bend.

“I would be willing to bet there has been weak tornadoes in that time period [but] just affecting rural areas, and nobody sees them,” Weagle said. “But this one actually touched down in a neighborhood. The damage definitely looked tornadic, albeit a weak tornado.”

While tornadoes are relatively scary to hear about, Pacific County Emergency Management Agency Director Scott McDougall, who has followed the incident closely, mentions that the weak storm’s strength is something fairly common to be seen along the coast, just without it being a rotational storm cell.

“I think that one thing that’s real important to remember is that we don’t

usually see tornadoes here at all, and obviously this was a tornado,” McDougall said. “I want people to understand that this was something that had 60 to 65 mph winds. Even though the tornado part of it is really a scary term, we also know that we had some straight-line winds up and down the length of the peninsula, and those potentially were just as damaging as the tornado was. I think the tornado becomes more intense because the winds swirl, and it did do some damage clearly.”

“I don’t want to take anything away from the people who suffer damage because of this, and I don’t want to take anything away from the scariness of it, but this is something in a lot of ways [that’s] very similar to what we normally see. A lot of times, we get those gusty winds, and this just so happened to have sustained winds,” McDougall added.



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