



# FEDERAL WAY MIRROR



## Police blotter

Page 6

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# Top Federal Way stories of 2020

By OLIVIA SULLIVAN  
osullivan@fedwaymirror.com

I hate the word “unprecedented” just as much as the next overworked journalist in 2020, but this year did enter so many realms of new, unfamiliar, and frankly terrifying, territory.

They say all news is local news. In Federal Way, we experienced the national and global events of this year on a local level with some close ties into the community, too. The impacts felt just as all-consuming and massive

in our city of just about 100,000 residents.

Even with the New Year, 2020 and its aftermath won't be wiped away at the strike of midnight, no matter how much we want to wish or pretend it may.

As we trek forward into the future, I hope you continue to cling to the good in your life for your mental, physical and spiritual health, find hope wherever possible, and keep wearing your masks.

In all the madness of 2020,

here are the top stories within your Federal Way community from the last year about politics, art, first-ever milestones, crime, and yes, the COVID-19 pandemic.

### January

On Jan. 15, former Federal Way City Councilmember Jesse Johnson was appointed as the 30th District state representative, a seat vacated by Kristine Reeves. Johnson would later be elected to Position 2 in the

November General Election, along with Jamila Taylor for Position 1.

The United States' first case of the novel coronavirus is believed to be found in Snohomish County. The resident, a man in his 30s, had recently traveled overseas and months after his initial diagnosis, King County health officials refute claims that the man is “Patient Zero.”

See STORIES, Page 2

## Inslee extends Covid-related restrictions another week

An updated reopening plan for stores, restaurants and gatherings will be released next week.

By JERRY CORNFIELD  
jcornfield@soundpublishing.com

Dining indoors will be off-limits in Washington a while longer.

On Dec. 30, Gov. Jay Inslee announced a one-week extension of a ban on indoor service in restaurants and bars and to a host of other statewide restrictions intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Those restrictions, imposed by the governor in November, were to expire Jan. 4, but will now remain in effect through Jan. 11.

His action means that fitness centers, movie theaters, bowling alleys and museums won't be reopening next week, as hoped. And retail stores, hair salons, barber shops and tattoo parlors must continue to limit the number of customers they serve at any one time.

The governor is working on an updated reopening plan to be released next week, according to a statement from his office.

“Our consistent mission has been keeping Washingtonians safe and ensuring health care system and hospital capacity,” Inslee said in the statement. “We understand the profound impact COVID is having on our health care system, families, and businesses, but I am heartened by the number of Washingtonians who continue to do the right thing.”

Inslee's announcement came as vaccination efforts across the state were gaining traction.

As of Dec. 30, 56,491 people in Washington had been vaccinated with either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, state health officials said.

Among them are doctors, nurses and other health care workers at high risk of exposure to COVID-19. Also, some first responders and residents and staff of long term care facilities — where the pandemic's toll has been greatest — have received the first of their two-shot vaccine regimen.

Overall, 356,650 doses of Pfizer and Moderna vaccines have been earmarked for delivery to the state, officials said at a Wednesday news conference. That represents allotments through three weeks and includes roughly 102,000 doses due to arrive in the next few days.

Officials said 58,500 doses are designated this week for long term care facilities, and to several tribes and one urban Indian health center. Another 43,375 will be sent to providers at 87 sites in 26 counties, they said.

Under a partnership with the

See INSLEE, Page 5

# US Navy punishes suicidal sailor who sought help

Federal Way native's mental health case has attracted the attention of a national advocacy group.

By OLIVIA SULLIVAN  
osullivan@fedwaymirror.com

A Federal Way native's struggle to find mental health treatment in the U.S. Navy has attracted the attention of a local Congressman and a national advocacy organization.

Michael Gregg sounded eerily quiet on their October phone call, his mother said.

His mother, Farrah Gregg, said she and her son are very close and talk on the phone several times a week. On that October evening, he confided in his mother the words she never expected to hear.

“He said ‘Mama, I almost committed suicide. I worked the night shift and I almost jumped off the boat,’” Farrah Gregg said. Michael Gregg had never been stationed on a Navy ship before and one night during underway, which is a training operations session out at sea in preparation for deployment, he had found himself at a point of the ship where only a thin rope separates an individual from the 40-meter drop to the water below.

“It scared him,” Farrah Gregg

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said, adding that she asked him to go get help immediately, and he went to Naval Medical Center Portsmouth hospital in Virginia. “I said ‘Baby, go. Go.’”

But when Michael Gregg sought help for what would later be diagnosed as severe depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder, he was met with rejection and demotion from commanders of the United States Navy.

“I'm afraid of the Navy now,” Farrah Gregg said. “I don't trust the Navy.”

### A plea for help

Michael Gregg, 24, graduated from Todd Beamer High School in 2016. He enlisted in the Navy in March 2018 and was stationed on the USS Dwight Eisenhower in Virginia.

In mid-October, Michael Gregg checked himself into Portsmouth Naval hospital where he was diagnosed with adjustment disorder, severe anxiety and severe depression, deeming his suitability for continued service as “highly doubtful,” according to doctors' notes provided to the Mirror.

The following day, Michael Gregg saw the ship's psychologist and explained his suicidal thoughts. The lieutenant allegedly told him to come back for breathing exercises the next Thursday — 10 days away.

At his October walk-in appointment, Michael was screened by the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) ship psychologist and there was “no indication of an acute risk of ASAN Gregg engaging in suicide-related behavior, and a hospitalization requirement was not indicated,” said Cmdr. Jennifer Cragg, Commander of the Naval Air Force Atlantic.

The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower has two Fleet and Family Support Center Deployed Resiliency Counselors, chaplains, a psychologist, psychologist technicians, and 65 trained resiliency mentors embarked to support crew health, Cragg said, noting that the USS Eisenhower is committed to ensuring all sailors receive immediate, holistic and well-rounded mental health care.

Michael Gregg said he was presented with three options,



PHOTO COURTESY OF FARRAH GREGG

U.S. Navy Seaman Michael Gregg.

including taking medication, which was discouraged due to his religion; a six-day therapy session; or voluntary commitment on the ship.

Each option had Michael Gregg returning to the USS Eisenhower, and doctors had determined the ship was a trigger point for his suicidal thoughts.

“I've never heard of somebody going back the third time in two days after being rejected to still be rejected,” Farrah Gregg said of her son's multiple attempts to seek professional help.

The alleged lack of help sent Michael into a depressive state where he could not leave his bed and would not eat for several days. At this point, Farrah Gregg said, Michael's lieutenant sent a note to Michael that said he has

an unauthorized absence (UA), and if he didn't return to the ship by Oct. 26, his pay would be cut.

The Naval Military Personnel Manual (MILPERSMAN) sets standard procedures for commands to follow when an enlisted member is absent without proper authority, said Cmdr. Cragg. On the fifth day of an unauthorized absence (UA), the disbursing office will stop all pay allotments and may be determined a deserter after being absent without authority for 30 consecutive days.

Cragg said Michael was informed that his pay would be stopped if he remained absent for more than five days.

“ASAN Gregg absented himself without authority on

See NAVY, Page 8



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# Navy

From Page 1

Oct. 19, 2020. On Nov. 17, 2020, command leadership notified ASAN Gregg that he would be declared a deserter in accordance with standard policy unless he returned to work by November 18, 2020," Cragg said.

The physical and mental health, safety, and spiritual wellness of all Sailors continues to be a top priority for USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69) leadership, said Cragg.

## 'They're going to hurt me, mama'

With her son seemingly out of ways to advocate for himself, Farrah Gregg took a redeye flight from Seattle and landed in Virginia on Oct. 25.

"Your people have failed my son," Farrah Gregg said of the Navy. "This is why I'm doing it."

She took her son to Riverside Behavioral Health Center and was issued a five-day excuse as they also diagnosed him with severe depression and anxiety due to the ship.

Farrah and Michael Gregg sought help from psychologist Dr. Mary Lou Rubert of Hampton Mental Health Associates in Virginia. She diagnosed him with major depression, anxiety and PTSD and said he should



USS Dwight D. Eisenhower.

COURTESY PHOTO

be medically separated from the ship, according to the doctor's notes. Rubert wrote a letter to excuse Michael Gregg from work from Nov. 6-17.

Psychologist Dr. William Bates also evaluated Michael Gregg, urging Navy command to assign him shore duty as his progression of panic attacks made him

"fear not performing his duties could result in personal injury or injuries to his aviation team and command," and that "being aboard [the] ship exacerbates symptoms of his mental health disorders."

Despite the alarm of the psychologists' notes, the Greggs were told separation from the

Navy is a lengthy, time-consuming process that would consist of baby steps.

"Baby steps? It could take two seconds for my son to lose his life," Farrah Gregg said.

Farrah left Nov. 7. A few days after her departure, Michael was ordered to the ship to sign paperwork pertaining to his offenses.

He had a severe panic attack onboard.

On Nov. 16, a lieutenant texted Michael Gregg that if he did not show up the next day, he was going to be arrested under deserter charges. Michael Gregg said he had been back on

See NAVY, Page 9

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# Navy

From Page 8

the ship twice in the last month.

Michael Gregg went to the ship the following day to meet with command staff. After he took a photo of paperwork, Michael says a command staff member allegedly began to yell at him for photographing classified government paperwork.

After that meeting, Michael called his mother again.

"He said 'Mom, I love you, I'm sorry, I can't take it,'" Farrah Gregg recalled, voice trembling as she began to cry. "I'm going to drive my car off the cliff, I'm going to commit suicide, Mom ... they're going to hurt me, Mama."

With his mother's urging, Michael Gregg checked himself into Portsmouth Naval hospital and remained there until he was released on Nov. 24.

Upon leaving the hospital, Michael was told he had two hours to gather his things and report to the ship. On the ship, Michael Gregg attended Captain's Mast, a non-judicial punishment used when sailors allegedly commit minor offenses.

On Nov. 24, non-judicial

punishment, also known as Captain's Mast, was imposed on Michael Gregg for violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice Article 86 - Absence without leave, Cmdr. Cragg said.

"ASAN Gregg pled guilty to the charged offenses and was awarded forfeiture of one-half month's pay per month for two months, reduction to the next junior paygrade (E-3), and restriction to the ship for 60 days."

This order was Michael's tipping point. His suicidal thoughts returned. He was checked back into the Portsmouth hospital just hours after his initial release on Nov. 24 and was released on Dec. 4.

On Dec. 4, the Commanding Officer exercised his discretion to suspend the restriction portion of the punishment, Cragg said.

## Progress

On Nov. 28, Civilian Military Defense Counsel Stephen Carpenter wrote to Capt. James Mauldin of the USS Eisenhower refuting the punishment.

"The basis of this appeal is that the punishment of 60 days restriction is disproportionate because this Sailor was struggling with debilitating mental

health issues at the time of this offense," Carpenter wrote. "To keep him in the U.S. Navy longer is simply inappropriate, if not wholly problematic for his continued safety."

The punishments were lifted and Michael returned to his E-4 rank after drawing the attention of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) on Dec. 2.

Roman Palomares, who is national chairman of the Military and Veterans Affairs Committee of LULAC, said the Washington, D.C.-based organization is taking steps to protect Michael Gregg.

"The actions of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower Command and its failure to acknowledge Seaman Michael Gregg's risk of suicide aboard the ship are unacceptable," Palomares said. "This is the latest example of leadership lapses by Commanders charged with the care of our sons and daughters entrusted to the U.S. military."

Congressman Adam Smith said the next steps are to ensure the Navy has an accurate account of Michael's situation, and receiving care to ensure he can leave the military in good standing.

"I was glad to be alerted to Farrah and Michael

Gregg's case so I could help bring it to the attention of the Navy," Smith said. "Farrah Gregg did all the right things in advocating for her son and getting him the help he needed."

Smith said he will continue to work with the Greggs in the future to shed light on the issues concerning mental health in the military.

Michael was officially separated from the US Navy on Dec. 23 with general discharge under honorable conditions. Farrah Gregg says the family is going to fight for a status change to medical disability discharge in the coming months.

The family feels as if they are decompressing from the "nine weeks and three days of 24-7 hell," Farrah said. Happy tears flow when thinking about how Michael's life was saved, but turn grim when thinking of how different the outcome could have been.

"I know what happened to me and Michael is still happening to other people in the military," Farrah said on Dec. 28. "I refused to give up ... If you get 20 no's, don't stop until you get a 'yes.' Never give up — you can't give up. You have to fight. It's saving your kid's life."

## Suicide in the Navy

In 2020, a total of 62 active duty sailors and 12 reserve duty sailors have died by suicide, according to US Navy statistics data updated on Dec. 4.

The Navy recorded 73 active members died by suicide in 2019, the highest number their data tracking shows from 2006.

In April 2019, USNI News reported the Navy was taking several initiatives to combat the rising suicide rates, such as increased access to mental health providers, additional trainings for those

in leadership roles, and equipping sailors with skills to deal with the stress of life in the Navy.

"I would be lying to you if I said we had every location covered with mental health resources. We do not," said Capt. Tara Smith, a subject matter expert assigned to Navy's Suicide Prevention Branch (OPNAV N171), to USNI News. "We certainly need more mental health resources in the military, and we're addressing that."

## Suicide prevention

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours a day at 800-273-8255 or visit [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org).



## pet of the week

### Hi! My name is Cairo!

I'm a 7yr old male domestic short hair cat, black with white (ID #A626495). I'm a big and beautiful boy! As you can see from my photo, I'm always ready for the red carpet in my tuxedo - if you're looking for a fancy and independent gentleman who also happens to be a great conversationalist, I might just be the cat for you!



I was surrendered by my previous owner after I developed an issue with the other kitty living in my home, so my caretakers feel I would do best as the only cat in my new home; however, I have also lived with adult humans and large dogs, and I get along great with both!

I really love attention but I sometimes get overstimulated with petting, so please move carefully with me and keep an eye out for signs that I might need a break. I am happy and playful, and really enjoy feather toys! I also drool when I'm happy, and my favorite thing to do here at the shelter is weave around people's legs while they are visiting with me.

My personality color is RED. I am a spirited cat with a fun-loving personality! I may be sensitive to handling, so I would do best in a home with a cat savvy family who knows when to give me some space.

I am neutered, current on vaccinations, and micro chipped. My adoption

fee comes with a free visit to the veterinarian of your choice, and 30 days of opt-in pet insurance through Trupanion. Also, I was nominated for Pet of the Week on 12/26/2020! This means my adoption fee has been waived! However, please note that a pet license is a requirement and therefore a fee may be applied. This helps my safe return home should I become lost, and comes with additional benefits such as Vacation Pet Alert, Free Ride Home, and more (visit our pet licensing page for more information)!

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