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School District Explores Options for KGHP-FM

The value of a community radio station depends upon whom you ask.

LISA BRYAN, KP NEWS

Kris Hagel, executive director of digital learning for Peninsula School District, commissioned an appraisal and educational assessment in July of KGHP-FM to consider its options as a school district and a radio station owner.

“Peninsula High School no longer offers classes in radio broadcasting due to a lack of student interest,” according to an email from Aimee Gordon, director of communications at PSD, sent to KP News.

“The study will tell us what’s needed to support the station if student interest increases,” Gordon wrote. “It will also help us determine the current value of the assets we have in the station. As a public agency responsible to the local taxpayers, we want to explore all of our options with KGHP.”

It is not the first time KGHP General Manager Spencer Abersold has been informed by the district that the local community radio station was at risk.

“I’m speaking out for the people who have put time, money, commitment and effort, thoughts and prayers — everything that has gone into making this radio station happen,” Abersold told KP News.

According to Abersold, KGHP was created when community members Keith Stiles, Don Hoffman, Max Bice and Bill Boyd decided the community needed a radio station and went to the district, which

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Abersold on the air. Lisa Bryan, KP News



Rendering RGA Gig Harbor

More Than a Food Bank, GH FISH Breaks Ground on New Digs

The Gig Harbor Peninsula FISH Food Bank & Community Services center will have its own home in fall 2022.

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

After decades of cramming food and clothing into rented spaces splitting at the seams, the secular FISH, Friends In Service Helping, broke ground on its own new facility at a private ceremony July 13.

The 11,595 square foot building will be located at 4304 Burnham Drive, 100 yards from the current rented facility at the Eagles Club in Gig Harbor.

The new building will house extensive warehouse spaces for both food and nonfood items, and will include walk-in coolers and freezers, much larger display and distribution areas, and dedicated office space for interviewing clients.

FISH assisted 4,210 families last year, including 1,501 on the Key Peninsula, with household items and clothing and over 210,000 meals. FISH also gave away \$300,000 in rent and utility assistance and another \$8,000 in student aid.

“The idea for our own building started in 2014 when we expanded into another large room at the Eagles and even that was taxing for us trying to manage all the donations,” said Jan Coen, the Gig Harbor FISH founder and food bank coordinator. “We started looking for places all over to buy, but it was too expensive or unavailable.”

After researching the possibility of building their own place, a local property owner offered to give FISH a 99-year lease on a buildable lot for \$1 a year.

“It was incredible,” Coen said. “People just began jumping on board, backing us, being willing to help, just all kinds of people with incredible skills.” The staff of approximately 100 are all volunteers except for the part-time facilities manager and the capital campaign manager.

FISH began its capital fundraising campaign in August 2020 and has already collected \$5.3 million of its \$8 million goal, including over \$2 million from the state Legislature with the help of Rep. Michelle Caldier (R-Port Orchard) and Sen. Emily Randall (D-Bremerton).

“We have a team that has been getting some grants for us and we’ve had a lot of leadership gifts, and the state has been very helpful,” said Amy Gartlan, FISH fundraising coordinator.

The new facility, designed by Ratcliffe Gagliano Architecture and to be built by Washington Patriot Construction, both of Gig Harbor, is estimated to cost \$2.9 million. Permits, site work, furniture and other incidentals should cost \$1.8 million, with another \$1.8 million budgeted for city fees, traffic impact and taxes. An additional \$500,000 will go to an endowment to help fund FISH services in perpetuity. The balance is budgeted for contingencies.

“A lot of folks didn’t realize all of the things that FISH does, so it’s been more of a community outreach project,” Gartlan said. “We are much more than a food bank, and just connecting with the public has been significant.”

“We look to the needs of the community and do what we can,” said FISH spokesperson Lynne Demichele.

“We try to get as much fresh food, fresh vegetables and fresh meats as we can,” she said. “We have a wonderful relationship with backyard farmers who like to grow vegetables and they bring them in.” But it has been tricky to find adequate storage. FISH also receives nonperishable food from 10 local outlets.

“Most of the financial contributions go toward buying things to fill in the gaps.” Laundry soap, toilet paper, tampons and diapers are especially needed.

“We have a significant elderly clientele, but during Covid we’ve had an awful lot of families who’ve been laid off or just let go,” Demichele said. “When you can’t get anything going and you’ve got some hungry kids, you come here.”

FISH also distributes household goods like frying pans, clothing and toys, as well as financial aid for family and student expenses such as AP test fees, summer school classes, and even shoes for a high school wrestler. Sometimes it’s as simple as getting someone a CPAP mask or diabetic supplies, or arranging transportation for a Covid vaccination. There’s also a closetful of birthday presents from Legos to Barbie dolls ready to go.

“We don’t require people to produce an income statement or anything like that. If someone comes in and says ‘I’m in need

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agreed to be a partner in the endeavor in 1988. The community fund-raised to pay for all the equipment and the licensing, and gave it to the district.

“It began as a community station,” Abersold said. “I stand on the shoulders of giants and I want to ensure the kids growing up in this community have the same opportunities in life that I did.”

KGHP provides live-action radio coverage of home football games for both Peninsula and Gig Harbor high schools. They cover boys and girls varsity basketball at home games whenever possible and sometimes remotely at Gig Harbor High. They also cover high school baseball games occasionally at special events at Cheney Stadium in Tacoma. KGHP produces live broadcasts of Key Peninsula candidate forums, informs the public during outages, emergencies and disaster situations, and plays a wide variety of music.

Abersold said the station takes in around \$40,000 a year in local sponsorships.

“This year we got a check from the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department for \$25,000 in addition to sponsorships from Pen Met Parks, the City of Gig Harbor, Gig Harbor Fire & Medic One, the YMCA and many others.”

In the early days of Covid, KGHP went into action. A hospital needed gloves and masks to be donated, information about meal deliveries and schedules had to go out, and other resources were made available.

For the first six months of the pandemic, the only people allowed in the school building were the principal, Abersold, and a custodian or two.

“It was kind of creepy. There were moments it was absolutely surreal,” Abersold said.

Before the pandemic, he said he thought of emergencies as fires, earthquakes, and natural disasters. The emergence of Covid delivered the message that disaster can strike in many forms at any time. He believes that radio remains the best communication tool to reach everyone in an emergency.

“KGHP gives students an opportunity to learn and grow in a field they are passionate about. Maybe they aren’t a football star or a math genius ... but they like to talk about things and can be entertaining,” Abersold said.

David Takehara, a junior at PHS, began broadcasting his own show, “The After School Drop,” as a freshman in a radio broadcasting class with Leland Smith, who retired last school year. His show counts down the top 30 songs in the U.S. each week, takes requests, and interacts on air with listeners who call the station.

“Right now, I’m one of the only student

DJs,” Takehara said. His time in the studio in 2020 was cut short by Covid, but he was back on the air in late March and into July, hoping to return this fall.

Takehara thought of pursuing journalism for a while but found himself more interested in the technical aspects of broadcasting.

“That’s why I like KGHP, because not only do we get to produce our own shows but we also get to do everything behind the scenes,” he said. “It’s not just flipping switches and pressing some buttons. It’s learning how to use different programs and the best ways to transition this audio into that audio, figuring out how different audio files work together.”

There is no question Takehara wants to continue. He said Smith was “hip to the podcasting craze,” and students each produced a podcast as part of the class.

“I think there’s some crossover,” he said, “but I still like radio more because of the live aspect of it and being able to interact on the air with people.”

KGHP-FM broadcasts at 89.3, 89.9 and 105.7 with online streaming available on *Tuneln*. ■

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and this is why,’ then the only thing we have to know is that they’re in our service area so that we’re not overlapping another service agency,” Demichele said.

“We also have a homeless population. They have access to basics like Sterno, for example, sleeping bags, and tents when we can get them.”

Before moving to Gig Harbor, Demichele volunteered at a food bank in Indiana. “I always felt so sorry for the clients because when they came in they almost automatically hung their heads, and you don’t ever see that here because there’s a premium on treating clients with respect, not assuming anything, not asking a bunch of prying questions. Very often our clients start donating once they get back on their feet. In fact, the gal that trained me was a former client — a single mother who came back to volunteer.”

Jan Coen founded Gig Harbor FISH food bank in 1976. Her grandparents homesteaded the property that is now Peninsula High School. Her dad built and operated the gas station at Purdy. She and

her husband Ron, the president of the FISH board of directors, live in Minter, where Ron grew up.

“The whole idea of FISH originated in England in 1967,” Ron said. “The whole concept was neighbors helping neighbors and that each group was designed for its particular neighborhood. We are an independent volunteer organization and the way we operate is designed to fit the needs, mindset and ethics of the neighborhood we’re a part of. I think that’s one of the reasons we’ve got the kind of support we have, because we fit the community and the way it thinks about itself and its neighbors.”

“After we got started, a child called and asked us if someone would go with him to talk to his parents about his bad report card,” Jan said. “It seemed unimportant but it was important, because it was that kind of simple request you get when someone doesn’t have a friend or neighbor to help. And it’s just grown. The more you do the more you learn we have to help each other out.” ■

Groceries bagged by volunteers ready for curbside delivery. *Ted Olinger, KP News*

