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Joyce Johnson shares her 103rd b-day with friends • p 8

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Heat hurts some farmer harvests

By Anne Basye

For three or four days, Dean Swanson could hear the corn grow.

The corn he planted Saturday, June 26 was up four days later. Stalks that was already a foot tall doubled in a week.

"It was fun to watch things grow so fast," he said. "Like they say in the Midwest, you could hear it!"

Meanwhile, Swanson's raspberries took it on the chin. He estimates the heat bleached about 20 percent of his crop, mostly berries on the west side of north-south rows.

Kai Ottesen saw the same phenomenon at Hedlin Family Farms, on berries higher on the cane that did not have good leaf shading.

"But by and large, we did alright," he said, except that the crew had to quickly pick all the snap peas before the cool-weather crop "completely gave up."

Hedlin's blueberries are fine. Swanson's blackberries are fine. Strawberries were almost over anyway. Upriver, berries were hit hard.

"We are fortunate that we are on the water, which buffers the heat a bit," said Ottesen. "We don't have quite the same highs as they get in Mount Vernon or up in Rockport. And it cools down faster at night."

Crops that like heat are thriving and are one to three weeks ahead. Crops that do not like heat "are wilting," said Ray De Vries of Ralph's Greenhouse.

Soil type also makes a difference. "If you're farming in something that will retain moisture or is close to the river where water is easy to get to, the fields are fine. In sandier soil, they are turning brown," he said.

With the Skagit River swollen with snowmelt, there is adequate water for irrigation now. Looking ahead, De Vries is concerned that that river levels will drop in August and September, just when farmers most need water.

In hot weather, potatoes shut down, said John Thulen of Pioneer Potatoes. "They stop growing and even go backwards as they lose moisture."

Some potatoes will be smaller. Yields may be lower. But at least the heat wave "is a burden shared by the whole west coast," he said. "It's worse when it's just you, when the flood just hits your field."

The heat did not bother the pumpkins growing at Gordon Skagit Farms, but over at Dona Flora, many of Beth Hailey's flowers "crisped and turned white," she said. "The Sweet Williams that were in the sun looked like someone threw bleach on them."

Jason Vander Kooy's alfalfa "grew like crazy" last week but pasture grass did not like it much. His Harmony Dairy irrigation is "going full bore" as he tries to keep the grass alive until rain comes.

"Heat is dangerous for cows," said Vander Kooy. "They can't cool themselves like a human can. When it hit 100 degrees, the cows were uncomfortable. They were eating less, drinking lots of water and didn't want to move."

His cows made it through – but had the heat wave gone on one or two more days, the story might have been different.

Sheds and coops tucked under the west side of Pleasant Ridge meant morning shade for the Mesman Farm's sheep and chickens, said Anita Mesman.

Because the Katahdin sheep they raise have a smooth hair coat rather than fleece, they adapt better to high heat.

Still, they sought shade under tarps and buildings when the sun came over the Ridge. "I walked through the flock four to five times a day to make sure they were not in distress and that they were drinking enough water," Mesman said.

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THIS IS WHAT INNOCENT AS A NEW BORN LAMB LOOKS LIKE – "Oh my gosh, couldn't you have waited?" thought Anita Mesman when this lamb was born at 1 a.m. on the hottest night of the year. The new Mesman Farms resident weighed 10.25 pounds at birth and has since gained five pounds. Mother "Charlie" and baby "Junior" are both doing fine, Mesman reports. – Photo courtesy of Anita Mesman



OH, SAY, CAN YOU SEE THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE? – Fireworks sponsored by the Town of La Conner once again lit a night sky on Sunday. Before and after the 15 minute display, Native firework vendors put on a show lasting some five hours, with perhaps the last boom heard either side of 2 a.m. July 4th photos, pages 3 and 4.

– Photo by Nancy Crowell

Parade, concert, fireworks fill July 4

By Ken Stern

La Conner's once again annual July 4th parade started up First Street shortly after noon – 12:20 p.m., actually – Sunday, greeted by spectator cheers and applause. On this picture perfect weather day – it was 70 degrees at noon and 76 degrees at 4 p.m. – everyone, paraders and attendees, was smiling, with many on both sides decked out in red, white and blue in all kinds of permutations, from head to toe.

Locals arrived early with their chairs, staking out prime space at the curb. Jo Mitchell brought family and friends visiting from Mesa, Arizona. Yes it was pretty hot a week ago here, wasn't it? They were at the Washington Street corner of the post office. Others claimed benches along the street.

The parade seemed about a third longer in length and to take a third longer – 20 minutes, instead of 15 – to pass by. La Conner's 1941 white Ford firetruck, following a Sheriff's Office motorcycle, led the way. Some 12 tractors, almost all John Deere, from almost as many decades, rode through. Lots of classic cars also stretched the parade out.

Candy abounded as paraders tossed handful after handful of the curbs. At least one considerate man gathered some up and gave it back to kids on a float, perhaps for them to

toss it out again.

Local elders from the La Conner Sunrise Food Bank, Rotary Club and Soroptimists marched behind their organizations' banner. Jim Airy, Tami Mason and Bob Raymond rotated their food bank banner around. Anne Airy and Stuart Hutt followed behind, passing out bottles of water from mini shopping carts.

Brad Bradford, on his tricycle, was not the only Uncle Sam, but his beard was probably the whitest.

There were dogs, too, seemingly not as many in the parade and more in the crowd.

Bill Stokes, sporting an American flag tie, actively campaigned, his red, white and blue adorned pickup truck carrying his name as a town council candidate. A woman in green attire reminiscent of 1920s dress could have been a suffragette. Her sign: "Independence for All."

Alas, if it was a perfect parade, it was different, missing Shriners in their little cars. There were no bands, the most audible organized music being the Catmobile. La Conner's Kiwanis and senior center staff and volunteer sat this year out. There seemed to be fewer kids on bicycles.

The crowd spread out from Center down to Commercial streets, but there were holes. Still, everyone came, from babies in arms and strollers to grandparents in walkers. Afterwards, Charles Talman reflect-

ed on the generations of families he saw: "The kids have grown up. The parents are gray haired. Their kids are having kids."

The parade lasted longer because La Conner's firetruck and the Catmobile brought up the rear, having circled around for a second go.

Blues blare in Gilkey Square

Mary Ellen Lykins and the C.C. Adams Band played the first concert in Gilkey Square since September 2019, performing for over three hours. People danced, flowing on and off the space in front of the band depending on the song. They filled the dance area for Stevie Wonder's "Superstition."

Councilmember John Leaver gained Town approval for bringing the band in.

Fireworks light night sky

Town sponsored fireworks returned after a coronavirus pandemic one year absence. The contractor started shooting his arsenal from the west side of the Swinomish Channel north of the Three Hats park promptly at 10 p.m. and residents and visitors alike were treated to a solid 15 minute performance. But an hour or more before, Swinomish fireworks vendors started launching their leftover inventory from at least three sites on or near the channel as well as from Snee Oosh beach on

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Will Nelson now school superintendent

By Ken Stern

July 1 started a new month and was the day Will Nelson was sworn in as La Conner's new school superintendent at a school board meeting called for that purpose. Board chair Susie Deyo called it a very special day, "obviously," for the school district and for Nelson. She asked Lynette Cram, the longest serving board member, to administer the oath to Nelson.

"Excited" was the word most repeated Nelson said he was "super excited to be a part of the community here. I am excited to start the journey" with you. He promised to roll up his sleeves and get to work.

Deyo asked all board members to speak and she, and they, were also excited. She noted Nelson's extensive work in improving academic perfor-

mance as a sign he will "take the district to the next level."

Board member John Agen noted how Nelson engaged "warmly and openly and honesty" and the need to reach all students. Board member J.J. Wilbur welcomed Nelson to the district and said he looks forward to his attending a Swinomish Indian Tribal Community senate meeting. Wilbur is a senate member.

Cram expressed her appreciation that Nelson's "heart is with the kids ... (and) that is the center of his work."

The first action item on the agenda was unanimous approval of Christine Tripp as middle and high school principal. The board lacked a quorum at its June meeting and could not vote than. Cram recused herself from voting on hiring her sister.

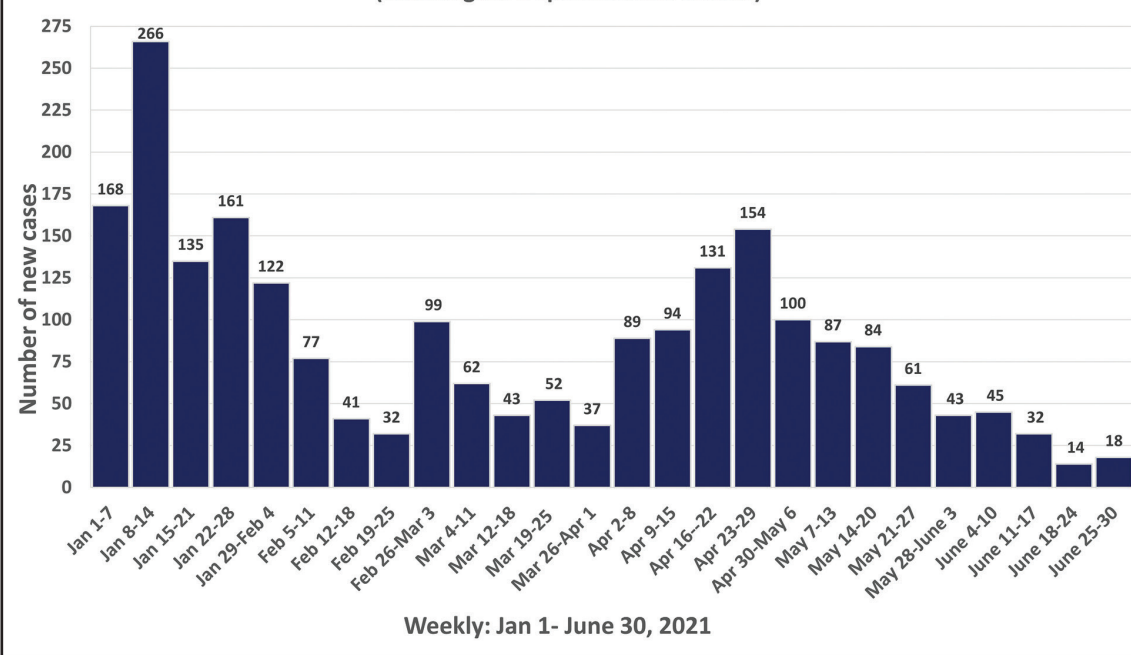
Nelson's photo will hang on a wall

in the administrative building, the start of a new tradition, Deyo said.



WILL NELSON

New COVID-19 cases in Skagit County, January-June 2021
(Washington Department of Health)



County COVID-19 case drop drastic

By Ken Stern

Skagit County recorded 32 new COVID-19 cases the last two weeks of June. These are the lowest weekly totals since Sept. 2020. The state Department of Health reports 48.3 cases per 100,000 residents in the last two weeks, through July 1.

There has been a steady decline in new cases since May 1,

Heat . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

Water mattered to humans too. “We started earlier and didn’t work as long, made sure everybody was drinking a lot of water and took a juice break every afternoon,” said De Vries.

Both Ralph’s and Hedlin’s comply with the Washington state heat rule, which requires employers to provide heat stress training, monitor employees, provide water and implement a heat illness accident prevention plan May 1-Sept. 30.

“We gotta take care of people,” said De Vries. “They are the ones that make the farm work.”

“Nothing we grow is worth passing out for,” added Ottesen.

The bottom line on last week? “It was miserable for employees, cows, everybody,” said Vander Kooy. “I don’t want to do go through that again.”

Parade . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

the west side of the peninsula. These displays went on right through the Town’s show and continued to either side of 2 a.m. on the channel.

Some in the audience on the boardwalk and gathered in Gilkey Square left at 10:15 p.m. But most had come early for the extended version of the night’s celebration and many stayed another 30 minutes or more. It was 11 p.m. when a last teenager was left alone on the stone wall.

the result of county residents getting vaccinated at an increasing rate. Through June 30, 149,680 total doses have been given to Skagit County residents, DOH reports, while 62.7% of all Skagitians 12 years and older are at least partially vaccinated against COVID-19, Skagit Public Health reports.

The graph of new COVID-19 cases in Skagit County in 2021 shows that cases spiked post-Christmas holidays in mid-January and then declined generally through March. Gov. Jay Inslee’s March decision to move the entire state into Phase 3 of his Healthy Washington: Roadmap to Recovery reopening plan led to sharp increases in new cases across the state in April. In Skagit County, cases doubled more than doubled, to 494, from 215 in March.

Individuals’ social behaviors probably changed little in May with regard to mask wearing and safe social distancing, but spring weather and residents seeking vaccinations reduced May’s total new COVID-19 cases 30%, with total cases dropping to 61 the last week of the month. New case counts continued to drop in June. The 107 total cases are 31% of May’s new cases.

Washington fully reopened to social and economic activity June 30 with limited exceptions for healthcare facilities, schools and childcare centers and indoor events of over 10,000 people.

In a June 29 news release, Inslee said, “Because folks listened to science and stayed home to stay healthy, wore masks and got

vaccinated, we can now safely fully re-open our state’s economy and cultural centers after 15 long months. It hasn’t been easy, but I’m proud of how Washingtonians came together, persevered and sacrificed to fight this virus, and now we’re finally in a place that is safe enough to end this chapter.

“We still have work to do. Continued success depends on everyone getting vaccinated and encouraging any loved one who has not yet received this lifesaving vaccine to do so, and quickly.”

The DOH defines the Delta variant of the virus as a “variant of concern,” stating it “is more transmissible compared with other variants” on a June 22 website posting.

Personal and social public behaviors, as the graph shows for new Skagit County cases in 2021, resulted in increased COVID-19 cases.

Evidence shows that when people who are eligible to get vaccinated, and are able to, get vaccinated, the number of new COVID-19 cases declines drastically. With the vastly increased social contact the full reopening of Washington brings, this indicates that the health of the population depends on those who are not vaccinated to wear masks, social distance and get vaccinated if they are safely able to.

Skagit Public Health has vaccine clinics scheduled for:

July 7 and 14 at Skagit Transit Station, downtown Mount Vernon, 5-9 p.m.

July 13, Skagit Valley Family YMCA, 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Joyce Johnson has a birthday

Joyce Johnson turned 103 last week. She celebrated with 10 fellow Civic Garden Club members July 1, attending an evening meeting planning the Aug. 5 Pioneer Picnic. Their long and focused discussion set the menu – it is the same as in 2019: BBQ salmon, green beans, pickled beets, scalloped potatoes, roll and butter and cupcakes and brownies for dessert. Price is \$20.

The best part of the evening came last: Members honored Johnson by bringing her roses and sharing sentiments with her while she blended the flowers together into a bouquet. She seemed to enjoy that as much as the business meeting, trimming stems, adding



JOYCE JOHNSON

baby’s breath and making a rainbow of colors, bright and subtle. Happy birthday, Joyce.

Summer is Here!

Make Your Yard & Garden Beautiful!

Trivia test by Fifi Rodriguez

1. GEOGRAPHY: How many states are in Australia?
2. LITERATURE: The character of Miss Havisham appears in which 19th-century novel?
3. ASTRONOMY: What is the name of the boundary between Earth’s atmosphere and outer space?
4. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE: What creature was a hood ornament on the 1933 Hudson Essex Terraplane car?
5. TELEVISION: What were the names of the boys on the 1990s sitcom “Home Improvement”?
6. MUSIC: The Jug saloon was the setting in which Lynyrd Skynyrd song?
7. MOVIES: What was Charlie Sheen’s nickname in the 1989 movie “Major League”?
8. ANIMAL KINGDOM: What are the offspring of echidnas (Australia) called?
9. U.S. STATES: What is the state flower of West Virginia?
10. FOOD & DRINK: Which country produces Gouda cheese?

Answers

1. Six
2. “Great Expectations,” Charles Dickens
3. The Karman line
4. A griffin
5. Brad, Randy and Mark
6. “Gimme Three Steps”
7. Wild Thing
8. Puggles
9. Rhododendron
10. The Netherlands