



Holiday movie favorites



MIKE DE FELICE | INDEPENDENT

Port Orchard activist and small business owner Bobbie Stewart shares her favorite Christmas movies, as do other South Kitsap notables, on page 2.

City purchases Kitsap Bank property as it advances waterfront redevelopment project

By **BOB SMITH**
Kitsap News Group

PORT ORCHARD — The city is inching closer with its plans to build the South Kitsap Community Events Center and redevelop the downtown waterfront by closing on a real estate agreement to acquire the Kitsap Bank property at 619 Bay St.

The commercial property along the waterfront was acquired for \$2.5 million. The state Legislature contributed \$1.2 million for the acquisition, according to City of Port Orchard officials. Kitsap Public Facilities District also contributed \$1 million. In addition, \$300,000 in local funding was secured to help procure the property.

The acquisition is the next step in the city's plan to redevelop the downtown waterfront and relocate the Port Orchard branch of Kitsap Regional Library to the community events center.

Officials said as part of the agreement, Kitsap Bank will lease its current building from the city while a new regional headquarters on adjacent property is built over a four-year period.

"Planning for this major project has been in the works for a number of years," Port Orchard Mayor Rob Putaansuu said in a news release.

"Kitsap Bank has been a fantastic



CITY OF PORT ORCHARD ILLUSTRATION

The City of Port Orchard has closed on a \$2.5 million purchase of the Kitsap Bank property at 619 Bay St. The acquisition is the next step in the city's plan to redevelop downtown's waterfront and build the South Kitsap Community Events Center on the acquired property.

collaborator and their new headquarters will be a perfect complement to the events center. The property acquisition is a meaningful step in the process as we complete the design phase of the new community center."

When completed, the South Kitsap Community Events Center will provide a central gathering place and multi-purpose facility in downtown Port Orchard that will support various local and regional events and activities, officials said. In addition to housing

the relocated local library branch, the facility will host large and small public events and meetings.

Concurrently, city officials said they are performing cost estimates on schematic drawings developed by Rice Fergus Miller, the architectural and planning firm that has been contracted to develop the facility. The cost evaluations are being done in advance of the start of the final design phase of the downtown revitalization project, Putaansuu said.

Port Orchard mom identified as deceased inmate

Stephanie Melton had been jailed on charge related to her daughter's death

By **MIKE DE FELICE**
Kitsap News Group

PORT ORCHARD - A female inmate at the Kitsap County Jail died Monday, the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office announced Monday.

On Tuesday, the Kitsap County Coroner's Office identified the deceased woman as 40-year-old Stephanie Ann Melton.

She had been arraigned in Kitsap County Superior Court on Dec. 10 following an investigation by the Port Orchard Police Department. Melton, of Port Orchard, was accused of contributing to her 11-year-old daughter's death by giving her the drug fentanyl at home.

The coroner's office said an autopsy is to be conducted on Wednesday, and the manner and cause of her death will then be determined.

Melton was found unresponsive Monday morning by a corrections officer

on a routine check, the social media post said. The officer and medical staff immediately attempted lifesaving measures on the woman until medics from South Kitsap Fire and Rescue responded to take over, the post stated.

Officials said the woman was transported to St. Michael Medical Center in Silverdale, where she later died.

Monday afternoon, detectives from the Kitsap Critical Incident Response Team (KCIRT) were at the jail investigating the death, said KCIRT public information officer Lt. Aaron Elton, who is from the Bremerton Police Department (BPD).

Port Orchard Police Chief Matt Brown requested that KCIRT investigate the circumstances surrounding Melton's death, the sheriff's office said.

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Mother charged in daughter's death after giving her fentanyl

... but 40-year-old woman is found dead in county jail; KCIRT investigating

By **MIKE DE FELICE**
Kitsap News Group

PORT ORCHARD — The Port Orchard mother accused of giving her 11-year-old daughter the powerful drug fentanyl, which allegedly led to the girl's death, was found dead in her cell at the Kitsap County Jail, Kitsap County Sheriff's Office officials said on Monday.

On Tuesday, the Kitsap County Coroner's Office identified the deceased woman as 40-year-old Stephanie Ann Melton.

She had been arraigned in Kitsap County Superior Court on Dec. 10 following an investigation by the Port Orchard Police Department. Melton, of Port Orchard, was accused of contributing to her 11-year-old daughter's death by giving her the drug fentanyl at home.

The coroner's office said an autopsy is to be conducted on Wednesday, and the manner and cause of her death will then be determined. The Kitsap Incident Response Team (KCIRT), a collaboration of multi-agency law enforcement officials, is investigating the circumstances surrounding Stephanie Ann Melton's death.

The deceased woman earlier had entered a not guilty plea of controlled substances homicide in

Kitsap County Superior Court on Friday. Melton, 40, was arraigned before Judge Tina Robinson following an investigation by the Port Orchard Police Department.

"The facts of the case are astounding, disappointing and heartbreaking. I struggle to find words that capture how amazing this tragedy is," said Chief Matt Brown of the Port Orchard Police Department.

At 3 a.m. on May 6, Port Orchard Police and South Kitsap Fire and Rescue were called to an apartment at the 100th block of Lippert Drive West for a person in distress, according to court documents.

On arrival, police officers reported seeing an 11-year-old girl laying on the living room floor, unresponsive and not breathing. Melton, who was identified as the girl's mother, was on her knees leaning over the girl and appeared to be giving rescue breaths. (The Independent generally does not identify individuals in court reports who are minors.)

Officers began CPR until aid arrived. The girl was transported to Mary Bridge Children's Hospital in Tacoma, where tests showed fentanyl in her system, according to court documents.

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Espy appointed to fill vacant SKSD board seat

By **BOB SMITH**
Kitsap News Group

PORT ORCHARD — Following interviews conducted by the South Kitsap School District's board of directors at a special session on Wednesday, Kate Espy was appointed to replace Eric Gattenby as the District 1 representative on the school board.

Espy, who has had a 40-year career as a registered nurse and had two children attend South Kitsap schools, was selected to replace Gattenby over candidate Rene Hernandez Greenfield by a 3-1 vote.

Director Jeff Daily selected Greenfield following a public interview session with Espy, Greenfield and a third candidate, former board

member Rebecca Diehl. Prior to the vote, the board evaluated the candidates during a 30-minute executive session.

Espy will serve until the next regular school board election takes place during the summer and fall of 2023.

"I really appreciate this," Espy said following the vote. "I'm looking forward to this. I'm excited, I'm honored and can't wait to be part of this group. As we used to hear, there's no 'I' in team, and I want to keep that going, and work and learn."

Espy is a longtime South Kitsap resident who has been a volunteer in several service organizations. Her involvement included time spent with the South Colby Elementary

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You'll need to request single-use utensils at restaurants, starts Jan. 1

STAFF REPORT

When your local fast-food server asks if you want fries with your order, you'll also need to ask for utensils, condiments or straws to toss into the bag.

That's because beginning Jan. 1, Washington restaurants will no longer automatically include single-use food-service items with food orders. A new state law restricts the use of these items and prohibits packaged bundles of single-use items in order to reduce waste and litter — although customers can still request items.

Single-use service ware items covered by the new requirements include:

- Utensils (knives, forks, spoons or chopsticks).
- Cocktail picks, splash sticks and stirrers.
- Straws.
- Condiment packets, sachets or saucecups.
- Cold cup lids, except

those provided at drive-through windows or events with over 2,500 people in attendance.

To receive a single-use item, customers must request it, confirm their choice when asked or select the item from a self-service station.

"Automatically including disposable silverware, straws and condiments with every order create a huge amount of waste, much of which ends up littering our roads and damaging our environment," said Laurie Davies, manager of the Solid Waste program at the state Department of Ecology.

Davies said nearly one trillion single-use food-service products are disposed or littered each year in the U.S., according to a 2021 Upstream report. Single-use food service ware items are also major contaminants that decrease the value of recycled materials.

Espy

CONTINUED FROM 1

PTO, South Kitsap High's Football Parents Association, Soroptimist of Port Orchard, Girls on the Run, and the Kitsap Support Advocacy and Counseling Board.

In a news release, the new board member said that "The children in our community are so important and their education is paramount. I have the ability to stay calm and listen during high stress situations. I'm ready to learn and will bring a fresh

perspective to the group." During her interview, which was streamed live during a Zoom session to the community, Espy emphasized that she has a history as a registered nurse of working well with people during stressful situations in the emergency room. She said her presence on the board will help bring continuity and calm during what have often been disruptive and contentious meetings.

Espy is scheduled to be sworn in at the board's Dec. 15 regularly scheduled meeting, which will begin at 5 p.m.

Lively Lotus is looking for a home

STAFF REPORT

PORT ORCHARD – Lotus, a black and white four-legged tail-wagger who loves attention and tummy scratches, is looking for her forever home.

The three-year-old Pit Bull Terrier mix is the focus of a campaign by the Kitsap Humane Society to connect the lively girl to a loving owner this holiday season. An adoption meet-and-greet is planned at the humane society from noon to 4 p.m. on Saturday. The event offers would-be "pawrents" the opportunity to come and interact with the canine.

The pup came to the shelter in March after being found as a stray in Port Orchard, according to shelter officials. Lotus was fostered by Joshua Cox and his wife for some of the time after she was taken in.

"She has puppy energy and loves people," Cox said of the time the dog lived at their house.

The 70-pound canine — built like a



KITSAP HUMANE SOCIETY PHOTO

Three-year-old Lotus is looking for a home.

tank — is intelligent and was quick to learn commands like "sit" and "stay," Cox said.

When the mood strikes her, the pup enjoys running around a fenced yard. "One of her favorite games is to run at you as fast as she can while you dodge

out of the way," he said. "Lotus does zoomies when someone comes home. What she needs every day is a good 10 minutes of focused playtime and then she calms down."

In foster care, the dog spent most of the day happily sleeping next to Cox, who worked from home.

Lotus is house-trained and does well with crate training, humane society staff members say. Since she loves to play outside, she would do best in a home with a fenced yard. If she is going to live with kids, it's recommended the children be 12 or older. She needs a home with no other pets, as she does not do well at dog parks or around visiting dogs.

Prospective adopters are encouraged to read about Lotus on the Kitsap Humane Society's website: kitsap-humane.org. There also is a link on the site to view a short video showing the dog with her foster family.

The Kitsap Humane Society is at 9167 Dickey Road NW in Silverdale.

Inmate

CONTINUED FROM 1

When there is an in-custody death, state legislation calls for an independent review of the fatality to be conducted,

Elton said. The review by outside law enforcement agencies is intended to maintain the integrity of the investigation, he added.

The county jail, operated by the sheriff's office, is in Port Orchard. As a result, the county sheriff's

office and Port Orchard Police Department will not participate in the KCIRT investigation.

Agencies conducting the KCIRT investigation into the inmate's death include the Bremerton, Bainbridge Island, Shelton and Poulsbo police

departments, as well as the Washington State Patrol, Elton said. In this case, Bremerton Police will be the lead agency and Captain Mike Davis from BPD will direct the review, the KCIRT spokesman said.

Fentanyl

CONTINUED FROM 1

On May 9, the young girl was officially declared brain dead. She was kept on ventilation to allow time for organ harvest, police said. An autopsy report by the Kitsap County Coroner's Office stated the girl's death was caused by acute fentanyl toxicity, court filings stated.

According to medical experts not connected with this case, fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is up to 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. The drug depresses parts of the brain that control breathing. An overdose victim can suffer breathing problems and severe drowsiness, rendering them non-responsive, which can lead to death, according to

medical experts.

When police arrived at Melton's apartment on May 6, Melton, her daughter and an acquaintance of Melton were at the residence. The 36-year-old acquaintance, who had been with the mother and daughter, gave a recorded statement to police outlining her version of events.

The witness told police that she and Melton had been smoking fentanyl that morning and that Melton gave her daughter some of the drug contents. The fentanyl came from Percocet pills broken up and placed in foil, where it was heated by a lighter. The girl had taken multiple hits of the substance, according to the witness.

The witness said she previously had gotten angry at Melton for allowing her daughter to do drugs. Melton said she "would rather have her daughter do it at home than do it on the street or where she can't be watched," the

witness said.

After smoking the pills, Melton left the room and the girl sat in a reclining chair in the living room eating candy. The witness said she believed the girl had fallen asleep after hearing the girl snoring.

At some point, Melton returned to check on her daughter. Melton told police that when she brushed the hair away from her daughter's face, she saw that the girl's lips were blue. The mother said she tried to wake the girl after noticing she was not breathing. Melton then moved the girl onto the floor and began CPR.

The witness reportedly called 911 for emergency assistance.

Detective Beth Deatherage and Sergeant Andrew Brandon headed up the investigation. Melton's court date had been scheduled for Dec. 30. She was held in the Kitsap County Jail on \$750,000 bail.

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