

# CAMAS-WASHOUGAL POST-RECORD

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## Camas seniors to have in-person graduations

Commencement ceremonies planned for CHS on June 11, Hayes Freedom on June 12, both at Doc Harris Stadium

By **KELLY MOYER**  
Post-Record editor

The Camas School District said this week it will celebrate its 2021 high school graduates with in-person commencement ceremonies in early June. “We’re really excited

about it,” Camas School District Assistant Superintendent Charlene Williams told Camas School Board members during the Board’s Monday, May 24 meeting. “We have gone through several iterations of what this could look like — from last year’s drive-up ceremony to (the in-person

celebrations) and every iteration in between.”

Camas High School will host a commencement ceremony at 7 p.m. Friday, June 11, at Doc Harris Stadium. Camas High graduates will each receive four tickets for guests.

“We had (to limit it to) four tickets per graduate, since we have over 500 seniors graduating and ... physical distancing is required,” Williams said.

Hayes Freedom High School graduates will celebrate their commencement

at 2 p.m. Saturday, June 12. The Hayes Freedom graduation ceremony also will be held at Doc Harris Stadium. Since the school is much smaller than Camas High, Williams said Hayes Freedom graduates will each receive 12 tickets for the commencement.

Attendees at both events will be required to wear face coverings and physically distance due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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Class of 2019 graduates from Camas High School walk at a commencement event at Doc Harris Stadium on June 14, 2019. KELLY MOYER/POST-RECORD FILES

## Fox gives notice

Camas administrator has resigned nine months into role

By **KELLY MOYER**  
Post-Record editor

Camas City Administrator Jamal Fox has announced his resignation less than one year into his role managing the city’s day-to-day business and overseeing 200 city employees.

In a statement released by the city on Tuesday, May 26, Fox said former mayor Barry McDonnell — who resigned unexpectedly in April — and city

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## School board OKs recovery strategy

By **KELLY MOYER**  
Post-Record editor

The Camas School Board unanimously approved the school district’s proposed Academic and Student Well-Being Plan, meant to address student needs that resulted from the closure of school buildings and the move to remote-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The plan, required by the federal government if school districts hope to receive money from the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund established by the American Rescue Plan

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## Teens tackle toxic algae



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO COURTESY OF AYN LAVAGNINO

Camas middle-schoolers Rafa Lavagnino, 13, (left) and Tenzin Kelsang, 13, test their mobile, algae-filtering “algaegator” invention at Camas’ Lacamas Lake in the spring of 2021. The seventh-graders’ work recently earned them a spot in a national STEM competition sponsored by the United States Army and the National Science Teaching Association, as well as a \$5,000 grant to improve the toxic-algae filtration device.

Camas seventh-graders earn spot at national STEM competition with ‘algaegator’ invention

By **KELLY MOYER**  
Post-Record editor

Intent on competing in a science competition that could win their team up to \$9,000 in savings bonds, the two Camas middle school students were looking for a local problem in need of a solution.

The teens didn’t have to look far.

The problem, said Odyssey Middle School seventh-grader Rafa Lavagnino, 13, was right

there, in the middle of their hometown, threatening to ruin one of their favorite outdoor meeting spots.

The solution? Getting rid of the toxic blue-green algae in Camas’ Lacamas Lake.

Lavagnino and his friend, Tenzin Kelsang, 13, a seventh-grader at Skyridge Middle School, grew up swimming and paddleboarding in Lacamas Lake. The lake was where they’d hang out with friends during the summer months.

Recently, however, the stu-

dents had noticed something amiss at the lake: toxic algal blooms, which can sicken humans and kill pets, had gone from rare events to near-constant disruptions.

“One year, the lake was closed the entire summer, pretty much,” Lavagnino said. “There were only a few times when it was open.”

Lavagnino and Kelsang had been hoping to enter the 19th annual eCYBERMISSION competition, a science, technology, engineering and

mathematics (STEM) program sponsored by the United States Army and the National Science Teaching Association.

To enter, the middle school students had to develop a solution to a real-world problem in their local community. Their solution? Invent a mobile device that could help clean toxic algal blooms at Lacamas Lake.

Soon, the Camas teens realized their invention might have much farther-reaching appeal.

See Algae, page A5

## VOTE 2021

## Candidates throw hats in for Camas-Washougal elections

Few local races draw enough interest for primary election; voters will choose new mayors, city councilors, school board members

By **KELLY MOYER**  
Post-Record editor

It may be a quiet primary election season in East Clark County despite mayoral races in both Camas and Washougal and 16 open positions on city councils, school boards, the Port of Camas-Washougal and other commissions.

A total of 32 candidates filed to run in the local, non-partisan elections by the May 21 deadline. Of the 16 open positions in the Camas-Washougal area this election season, only three races — to determine Washougal’s next mayor and two Camas City

Council members — attracted enough candidates to appear on the Aug. 3 Primary Election ballot.

Ballots for the primary election go out to Clark County voters in mid-July.

Washougal voters will select that city’s new mayor this year, as well as three council members and two school board members. In Camas, voters also will select a new mayor, three council members and two school board members. The Port has two of its three commission seats up for grabs, and the East County Fire and Rescue Commission also has

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Longtime city councilor running for Washougal mayor  
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WHS to perform ‘That’s Emma’ this weekend  
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## Washougal School Board discontinues in-person meetings

District reverts back to remote mode after chaos

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**  
Post-Record staff writer

The Washougal School District has reverted back to remote-only school board meetings following a disruption by audience members that resulted in police action during a May 11 meeting.

“Moving back to the virtual meetings will support meeting the safety restrictions currently in place in

Phase 3 for public gatherings,” said Les Brown, the district’s director of communications and technology. “Once the COVID health restrictions and requirements are lifted per the Open Public Meetings Act and it is safe to do so, we look forward to returning to our in-person meetings. Because we don’t know the timing of the changes in the restrictions and requirements, this could happen at any time.”

The change took effect this week, for the school board’s May 25 meeting.

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# SCHOOLS

## Washougal students to perform ‘That’s Emma!’

Free performances on Friday and Saturday, May 28-29; seating limited to 150 per show

**By DOUG FLANAGAN**  
Post-Record staff writer

While watching “Emma,” the 2020 film production of the famous Jane Austen novel, last August, Hayley Courtney started picturing some of her Washougal High School theater colleagues in the different roles. She envisioned Emma Free rather than Anya Taylor-Joy as Emma Woodhouse, and saw herself as Augusta Elton instead of Tanya Reynolds.

“I thought, ‘Wow, the people that we have in drama (club) this year are perfect for it. We should do it,’” said Courtney, a Washougal High senior. “And it has a small cast, so it would be good for COVID. I just thought, ‘If we do this at any time, it should be now.’”

After a drama club meeting earlier this year, Taylor and fellow student Aubrey Turner “ambushed” Washougal High theater teacher Kelly Greersen with a PowerPoint presentation, complete with music and animation, that listed

many of the reasons why they thought he should choose “Emma” as their next production.

The pitch was a success. The Washougal High drama department will present “That’s Emma!” at 7 p.m. Friday, May 28, and Saturday, May 29, at the Washburn Performing Arts Center, free of charge.

Gregersen’s script reimagines the Regency Era comedy of manners as a reality television show, using a combination of live performance and video.

“I started looking at scripts, and I didn’t find a lot that really excited me. Scripts based on a book from 1815, some of them get a little dry,” Gregersen said. “The kids came up with a really fascinating idea of creating it as a reality television show, and we just ran with it. It’s a pretty light-hearted novel to begin with, so when I wrote the script, I thought of keeping true to those (themes) but also letting it resonate with a modern audience. It was originally written as a comedy, and we have definitely worked the comedy into it.”

In “Emma,” Austen ex-

plores the concerns and difficulties of genteel women living in Georgian-Regency England, focusing on issues of marriage, sex, age and social status.

“Specifically in our take, I really enjoy the humor in it and exploring the mind of this young woman who thinks she’s doing some really good things, but is actually doing the opposite, and I think that’s kind of relatable,” said Free, who had the right talents — and coincidentally, the right first name — to be chosen for the lead role. “It offers a unique take and brings forth (certain) perspectives. The time period is wonderful, and we get to see that with our costumes and mannerisms. It’s very different from anything I’ve done at Washougal.”

Even though the source material is more than 200 years old, the students “are connecting with how universal some of the themes are,” according to Gregersen.

“A girl wants to match-make her friends but doesn’t realize what she needs. I think that definitely connects with them,” he said. “I think doing it in a modern setting even brings that a little bit more (into focus). A

lot of the lines are straight from the novel, so it still has a Victorian or restoration flair to it, but the kids are finding the modern pieces in it as well. And the script is a little glib with that — it plays around with the modern (aspects) quite a lot.”

Courtney believes that “Emma” has maintained its popularity because “it’s a good story that people can relate to.”

“There are themes of controlling other peoples’ lives, themes of class, all of these different things that go together, and you can say, ‘I know someone like Emma’ or ‘I know someone like Harriet,’ and you can relate to them,” she said. “You can take these characters and see them in other people because they’re so relatable in many cases.”

Free, a Washougal High senior, is “having a lot of fun” in her role as a high-spirited, intelligent and slightly-spoiled young woman who vows she will never marry but delights in making matches for others. She doesn’t realize the impact of meddling in other people’s lives, and her imagination and perceptions often lead her astray.

“It’s fun to take her and put her in this gaudy, over-the-top setting of reality television and really play up a lot of her qualities,” Free said. “I can see a fair bit of myself in her. I tend to err on the side of (dramatic roles), so it was really exciting to play more of a comedic character.”

The play marks the first time in more than a year since Washougal High students last performed on a stage in front of a live audience. Their most recent project, “War of the Worlds: The Panic Broadcast,” was produced virtually and broadcast on the Broadway on Demand website in March.

“It’s been so long since we’ve been able to perform in front of people, and it’s definitely different from filming, like the ‘Panic Broadcast,’” Free said. “You miss the energy that people give in a room. I really hope that everyone laughs and has a good time. If they can relate to the plot, that’s great. I hope they can recognize all of our silly references. I hope that everyone has a good time and remembers what live theater is like.”

Seating will be limited to 150 spectators, but groups of up to 10 family

members will be allowed to sit together, according to Gregersen.

The theater department will also film the performance and broadcast it at a later date.

“The protocols have certainly changed how we do things,” Free said. “They’ve presented a little bit of difficulty in comparison to what we’ve done before. Things seem a little more awkward. But I think they’ve provided a healthy level of challenge. They’ve challenged us to work in different ways and rely on other ways to tell stories — without touch, for example. (We’ve learned) that there is humor in that, and that’s very funny in certain circumstances. It’s exciting to get a step closer to what we would normally do.”

Courtney has been involved in most of the department’s productions in the past four years, but has no doubt that she’ll remember “That’s Emma!” as her favorite.

“The cast is so great, and we’ve not had as many problems as we did in the last shows,” she said. “I had a huge role in making it happen, so I’m really happy to see it come along like this.”

## Algae:

From page A1

appeal.

“We thought a really local problem would be this algae problem,” Lavagnino said, “but we started to figure out it’s literally everywhere.”

Coming up with a solution to the toxic algal blooms was never going to be an easy proposal, but the COVID-19 pandemic put an extra kink into the two young inventors’ plans.

“It took us about a year ... and it was mostly remote at the beginning,” Kelsang said.

The students wanted to invent a mobile algae filtration system that could help clean Lacamas Lake. They experimented with filters and pumps — using sawdust and water solutions to test the filtration capabilities of cheesecloth material and figuring out which types of pumps would be just the right weight to float along the lake.

Toward the end of the project, the students were able to meet in-person to test their prototypes at the lake, and to test other components of the mobile algae filtration system they called an “Algaegator.”

“We tried first with amphibious vehicles but they couldn’t push it,” Lavagnino said. “So then we connected it to a tow rope with a kayak and that worked pretty well.”

The Algaegator filters the algae when it is still at

levels considered safe for humans to swim and recreate in the lake, the students explained.

In their virtual presentations for the eCYBERMISSION competition, the students said their prototype could be scaled up to help clean algal blooms in larger lakes.

The Camas students presented their work to the competition judges in April. In early May, they discovered they’d been named the regional finalists for the West Region, beating out competitors from 10 other states in the Western U.S., and winning a \$5,000 grant to improve their prototype.

“The grant will help us make it sturdier, so if it gets hit by a boat or a branch it won’t break down or crumble,” Kelsang said.

The students will now advance to the national eCYBERMISSION competition, which takes place virtually June 21-25.

“The eCYBERMISSION competition is an amazing showcase of the creativity and passion of so many extraordinary students from across the country,” said Elizabeth Allan, president of the National Science Teaching Association.

Christina Weber, with the U.S. Army Educational Outreach Program, called the young competitors — all in grades six through nine — “the next generation of thought leaders in science and technology.”

“It’s always exciting to see so many talented students participate in our competitions, summer en-

richment activities, and apprenticeship programs, and to watch them develop as they progress from one program to the next,” Weber said.

As one of just 20 national finalist teams chosen to compete in the next round of the STEM competition, the Camas “Algaegators” each received \$2,000 in savings bonds separate from the \$5,000 STEM-in-Action grant. The students will have a chance to earn more money in the national competition in June.

Regardless of the outcome of the national competition, Kelsang and Lavagnino plan to share their hard work with the rest of the world.

“We want to make this

an open-source design so anyone can use it,” Kelsang said.

Kelsang and Lavagnino said they might be interested in working with the four-person teams the competition normally requires during non-COVID years.

“It would be interesting to do this again with more people,” Lavagnino said.

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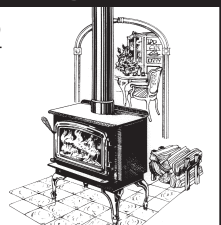
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