

# BAINBRIDGE ISLAND REVIEW

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**INSIDE:** BI swimmers dominate meet, A13



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## BI parks picks Strawberry for major improvements

BY STEVEN POWELL  
*Bainbridge Island Review*

Strawberry Hills Park is ripe for improvements.

The Bainbridge Island Metro Parks and Recreation board decided last week to take a serious look at what that facility should look like in the future.

The board hopes a concept plan can be done before its retreat March 10 and 24 from 6-8 p.m.

The board discussed having a concept plan for other parks, too, but commissioner Dawn Janow said there wasn't time for that.

Strawberry Hills Park already is undergoing major changes. A new skateboarding area for

those with less experience is being planned. And, thanks to a land donation of 10 acres nearby, so is a mountain bike trail system.

The park already has a tennis court and some ballfields, but the board would like to improve those, possibly even with turf fields.

New park commissioner Tom

Goodlin said the district should come up with pros and cons on where the best spots would be to put turf fields. Other possibilities include Battle Point Park, at the high school, at Sands Field and between Sakai and Woodward. Dan Hamlin of the parks department said the same should be done for new tennis courts.

Chairman Ken DeWitt said they are limited at the high school and Sands Field because they are owned by the BI school district. Commissioner Tom Swolgaard said he mentioned last year the district should do a master plan. "We need to get going on it."

See **STRAWBERRY** | A15

## It's not a fairytale; it's a school on Bainbridge Island

BY STEVEN POWELL  
*Bainbridge Island Review*

Once upon a time, there was a storybook A-frame in the woods, similar to the one used by the likes of Hansel and Gretel, the seven dwarves and Little Red Riding Hood.

Children come from all over Bainbridge Island to go to school there. They learn about nature on the 10-acre property by going outside and exploring. They plant and harvest a garden. They learn how to swim in an indoor pool. There's also a covered sports area, a play shed and a country barn with a built-in theater. The children interact with animals like four Nigerian goats, two lop-eared rabbits and one giant Bernese Mountain dog named Wyatt, who has become the school mascot. This year they added Mason Bees to the collection of natural critters that pollinate the native trees surrounding the property.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

The story really starts in 1906 when Ollie Pedersen's family homesteaded on BI from Norway. Their claim to fame is helping to build the Port Madison Lutheran Church.

One day, 46 years ago, Ollie met Janice, who grew up on a ranch in Montana on the Missouri River. They were married and raised a family of four on BI. Coming from Montana, "Living on an island was a real draw for me," Janice said.

In 1989 they bought their dream property on Koura Road. Her grandma used to teach in a one-room schoolhouse so they named a stream on the property after her — Hazel Creek.



Kids enjoy playing with goats on the property.

STEVE POWELL/BAINBRIDGE ISLAND REVIEW PHOTOS

**Children come from all over Bainbridge Island to go to school there. They learn about nature on the 10-acre property by going outside and exploring.**

Growing up, Janice wanted to be a veterinarian,

but while she did some work in animal husbandry once her kids started attending a Montessori school she decided she wanted to be a teacher there. After she earned her certification, Janice and Ollie Pedersen decided to start their own Hazel Creek Montessori School.

Children love Maria Montessori's learning style. She believed that kids learn by actively manipulating interrelated materials. She observed that children have critical learning periods when they absorb lessons faster than they ever will again. Hazel Creek's daily

activities promote growth in academic, physical, social and emotional development. They also include race equality and social justice in their curriculum.

Janice likes how it promotes independence and self-confidence in children. "There is so much here to explore just on this piece of property," she said. "Kids need to be outside as much as possible."

Just that day, they went on about a 3-mile hike to some wetlands. The 3- to 5-year olds were "cheering when they saw the end of

the trail." On the hike, they learned about five species of trees, all kinds of plants, including invasive ones that can hurt an environment. And they learned about what Native Americans use bark and wood for.

"These children just eat it up," Janice said.

She added that in Japan they call it, "forest bathing. Receiving energy from the forest."

Normally an administrator, Janice said she was excited to get back into a class as they were short-staffed that day. "They're so eager to learn and participate."

See **SCHOOL** | A4



Students gather around the school mascot, Wyatt.



Owner Janice Pedersen at a scenic bridge on the property.

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## Super Bowl: You can bet on it, locally

Seahawk legends Largent, Zorn at grand opening

STAFF REPORT

Just in time for the Super Bowl this Sunday, the new sportsbook has opened at Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort between Bainbridge Island and Poulsbo.

To mark the occasion of sports betting being legal in Washington, Seattle Seahawks legends — receiver Steve Largent and quarterback Jim Zorn — connected once again to open the FanDuel Sportsbook last Friday.

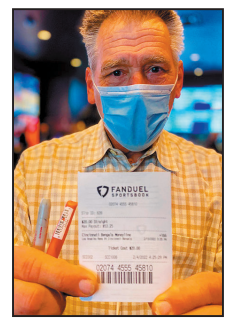
Largent placed the ceremonial first bet, a \$20 wager (-198) on the Los Angeles Rams to win the Super Bowl, while Zorn placed a

\$20 wager (+166) on the Cincinnati Bengals.

The Sportsbook is located just off the casino floor near the Agate Pass Deli and Seafood Bar. The 2,086-square-foot sportsbook features three live betting windows and 12 IGT PlaySports self-service betting kiosks. Sports bettors and customers will be able to enjoy game-day atmosphere with wagering options for all major sporting events.

"We are excited to have formed a partnership with FanDuel, America's No. 1 Sportsbook, and be their exclusive partner in Washington state," said Rion Ramirez, CEO of Port Madison Enterprises, the business arm of the Suquamish Tribe. "The joint effort between the Suquamish Tribal Gaming Commission, the Washington State Gambling Commission, FanDuel and a number of our casino employees made this all possible."

Leonard Forsman, chairman of the Suquamish Tribe, said the sports wagering will further help the local community. "With the launch of our Sportsbook, revenue from sports wagering will help support the Suquamish Tribe's important governmental services offered to both tribal members and the local non-tribal community."



Jim Zorn



Steve Largent

Greg George, Port Madison Enterprises board president, said the Sportsbook has been highly anticipated. It enhances "our gaming offerings and provides an exciting amenity to our casino guests."

Visitors will be able to place bets on all major U.S. sports, including professional football, basketball, baseball, tennis, MMA, soccer, golf, motorsports racing and more. Bets can also be placed on NCAA sporting events, however, bets cannot be placed on college teams located in Washington state.

"This has been a special project for us because it has allowed us to expand our

See **BET** | A15

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# School

CONTINUED FROM 1

The children love the garden — where hundreds of sunflowers grow up to 12-feet tall and broccoli grows the size of a basketball - and that's no fairytale. Some of the plants they can transplant at home. Others they harvest and make a salad right at school in a cooking class.

As might be expected, there is a waiting list to get into the school. Parents expecting a child now are checking to see if they might be able to get in by 2024.

"It's not just our school," Janice said. "There are not a lot of daycare schools (around) for the numbers of families that are moving to our island."

She said it's tough to start a childcare because of the expense, getting permits, licenses and such.

"We're fortunate we did this early on. There are a lot of hurdles," she said, adding Ollie did much of the work over 31 years developing the property. He also had a landscape business on BI for 40 years. "We couldn't afford to do this if we hired it all out."

Janice said she's glad she has her own private school rather than dealing with the politics of public school, where they have issues like banning books. She said students appreciate the difference. "Kids in college write me letters saying it made such a difference in their lives," she said.

Parent Julia Jolley said her family picked the school after moving to BI from Seattle five years ago and was delighted to pay half the price of what it cost there.

"There are so many perks of Hazel Creek including the farm feel," Jolley said. "In the summer they help with horses who are boarding there and go down a slip and slide on the big hill."

She said her kids even learned how to ride bikes

at the preschool. "They are safe and have a blast."

Jolley added that the school was a lifesaver for many when public schools shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said they hired extra teachers, opened up the Kids Country Barn, and set up small classrooms to help elementary kids with their online schooling.

"This allowed our kids to have the continuity of Hazel Creek and a small group of friends to interact with while taking the pressure off us to handle home-schooling during a really difficult time. When schools reopened, they went back to after-school care with no hiccups," Jolley said.

Even though they've been doing this for a long time, the Pedersen's are in no hurry to stop. At 67, Janice said she was thinking lately if she'd still be able to hike in her 80s and 90s.

"Like my husband says, 'This is the most important work on the planet,'" Janice said. "We're fortunate to be born with passion and motivation. When you have those things ingrained in you, you're not going to lose that. This is our happy place."

She said her staff of 20 for the 80 students is amazing. "We really, really love each other. We don't have drama at our school."

Justin Donais went to the school almost 30 years ago, and is back now to teach. He said he loved his two years there so much that after working in the culinary industry for a dozen years he wanted to return.

"I wanted to work in a more compassionate industry," he said. "I learned a lot of my compassion from" Janice.

Some students enjoy the preschool so much they become part of the family, and want to return for after-school care. Stella McFarland is one of them. She was proud to say they made jewelry and sold it to raise funds to help elephants in



Pavement is marked up with chalk as students let their imaginations run wild.

STEVE POWELL/BAINBRIDGE ISLAND REVIEW PHOTOS



Stella McFarland, left, and the other older students make jewelry for a fundraiser.

Asia. She said it costs \$112 to sponsor an elephant for a year, and they've raised over \$200, with a goal of over \$400.

The school goes year-round, except for two weeks at Christmas and federal holidays. In July and August it's more like a camp.

While most of their life is devoted to the school, the Pedersen's have two sailboats and like to play golf. They drive their sports car

down the Oregon and California coasts to Carmel, Calif., for about a month each year to play at the famous Pebble Beach Golf Course in picturesque Monterey. They also spend time with their two daughters who still live on the island and their eight grandchildren.

Regarding the villain of this tale, the COVID-19 pandemic, Janice said the school has been fortunate.

It didn't have to shut down for any length of time as there have been very few cases. Students are situated in small groups, and they spend a lot of time outdoors, which limits the chance of it spreading. They might have to shut down a class, but not the entire school.

"We've kept our population very safe. When you step into a classroom you wouldn't know COVID exists, except for the masks.

They still experience preschool as we know it," she said.

Janice said they keep the kids busy all day. "If they're not tired by the time they go home we haven't done our job."

As for a happy ever after, Janice said she plans to make arrangements so the property will remain a school in perpetuity as a gift to the community.



Swings are always popular with kids.

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