

The Leader

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PT on a roll



Despite another year's absence of Rhododendron festivities, a crowd of 50 or so bystanders gathered for the Running of the Balls, an event that would normally kick off the official Grand Parade. The annual fundraiser of the Port Townsend Sunrise Rotary was held last Saturday, May 15, beginning at the top of Monroe and Lawrence streets in Port Townsend.

At top, the winning balls await retrieval
Above, golf balls bounce down Monroe Street.
At right, Chuck Henry reads the winning balls.

Leader photos by Alli Patton

Port Ludlow fire board puts chief on paid leave

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Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue has found a new interim chief at the end of a two-week scramble to replace Brad Martin.

Martin was placed on paid administrative leave May 3 by Port Ludlow fire commissioners.

In a May 4 letter to the chief, Port Ludlow Fire Board Chair Gene Carmody noted Martin's departure was "non-disciplinary paid administrative leave effective immediately consistent with your request."

"The action of placing you on paid administrative leave is not disciplinary in nature," Carmody added.

Even so, Martin was told he was relieved of all job duties and ordered to return his fire department vehicle, office keys, pager, radio and other computer or electronic equipment to the fire station.

Martin was also told he was prohibited from removing or accessing any district computers or digital information without Carmody's permission.

see **CHIEF**, Page A9

Sparks fly as fire commissioner is removed from volunteer firefighter role

Coordinator warns of dangerous impact to emergency response times

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Port Ludlow Fire Commissioner Raelene Rossart was told to return her firefighter gear after she was abruptly removed last week from the ranks of the volunteer firefighters for Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue.

Rossart has been a volunteer firefighter and EMT for the Port Ludlow fire department since moving to the area in 2003. She became a fire commissioner in 2012.

Rossart's removal came via a single vote of opposition against her volunteer status was lodged at last week's fire board meeting by Fire Commissioner Ed Davis.

Davis did not detail his reasons for wanting to stop Rossart from her volunteer role, and the suggestion was met with immediate criticism by Lt. Wicus McGuffey, the department's volunteer coordinator.

With just four volunteers in the department, McGuffey said the loss of Rossart would cut volunteer staffing by 25 percent and leave no one to respond to calls from the Paradise Bay fire station.

"We have four volunteers that are response volunteers that actually reside in the jurisdiction," McGuffey

see **ROLE**, Page A9

"That's life and death."
Lt. Wicus McGuffey
VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR,
PORT LUDLOW
FIRE & RESCUE

Jefferson County wants to buy 14 acres in Port Townsend for homeless housing

Proposal would create campus on city's southern end

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Jefferson County is hoping to buy a 14.4-acre property in Port Townsend to build housing for the homeless, and the proposed campus would "include a shelter and full wrap-around services," according to county officials.

The land is located on the south side of West Sims Way just east of Mill Road. County commissioners met Monday to talk about a letter of intent to buy the land for the homeless housing project.

In their unveiling of the proposal this

week before county commissioners, officials noted that Jefferson County has an "intractable homeless problem" that was made worse by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Homeless people have been staying at the county fairgrounds in Port Townsend since last year, resulting in continuing complaints from those who live in the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

The land near West Sims Way has been listed for sale by John L. Scott Real Estate, with an asking price of \$1.495 million.

The property has a market value of \$316,308, according to the Jefferson County Assessor's Office. It is owned by Pacific Funding, FPH Land and Winchester Investment Corp. of Edmonds.

Related story inside

Homeless campers at county fairgrounds to be moved out, A20

Jefferson County hopes to grant funding from the American Rescue Plan Act to pay for the property. Officials expect the proposal to fit with provisions of the federal COVID-19 funding law because the project is considered infrastructure.

The concept for the homeless campus was developed by Cherish Cronmiller, executive director of OlyCAP.

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PORT TOWNSEND POLICE LOG

The Port Townsend Police Department received 132 calls for service Between Monday, May 10 and Sunday, May 16. Below are selected reports.

At 6:45 a.m. Monday, May 10, officers were called to the 600 block of Water Street for graffiti that was discovered on the back of a building. A chalk-and-paint message was described by police as “gibberish.” Cleanup costs were estimated at about \$250. Police have no information on any suspects at this time.

At 10:28 p.m. Monday, May 10, police responded to the 1800 block of 21st Street after receiving a report of an argument in which one of the parties had been pushed. Officers made contact with two women and a man who had a criminal trespass for an assault in the fourth degree. None of the parties wanted to pursue further charges. Officers noted that the man involved in the incident had a long knife or a sword but the man did not produce it in the incident.

Police issued a trespass warning to the man.
At 4:21 p.m. Tuesday, May 11, police were called out to the 100 block of Logan Street for a report of

vandalism and a possible attempted break-in. Upon their arrival, officers noted a vent cover had been removed from an exterior wall leading into a crawlspace. Officers also saw damage had been done to the building’s downspout but were unsure if that was from the incident in question. Police were unable to determine if entry was gained to the building. Repairs costs were estimated at less than \$100. Additional patrols were requested for the area.

At 8:15 p.m. Wednesday, May 12, officers responded to a viewpoint area near the intersection of Elmyra Street and Cook Avenue for a possible intoxicated driver. After arriving in the area, officers were unable to locate the described vehicle.

Approximately one hour later, police made contact with the vehicle, parked at a middle school near San Juan Avenue. Police found a young man and woman near the vehicle, but not driving. Both of the pair were under the age of 21 and appeared to be intoxicated. The officer cited them for being minors in possession of alcohol and released them to walk back home. The officer told

the couple they could retrieve their vehicle the following day.

At 3:05 p.m. Friday, May 14, police arrested a man for DUI near the intersection of Hastings Avenue and Sherman Street. The Ford F-150 was turned over to the man’s spouse and he was taken into custody.

At 6:27 a.m. Saturday, May 15, a caller alerted police to the sound of an animal trapped in a dumpster outside an apartment complex in the 600 block of Hancock Street. Police arrived and examined the dumpster, discovering a number of rats inside were unable to escape.

The responding officer informed the callers that they needed to contact their property managers to handle the infestation.

At 9:50 a.m. Saturday, May 15, a woman was reported screaming in the 700 block of Lawrence Street.

The caller said the incident had been ongoing for 10 minutes and at one point she was heard screaming, “Help me, help me, please!” Officers arrived at the house and spoke with a woman there who explained she was experiencing

computer issues while working over the phone with tech support.

At 4:39 p.m. Saturday, May 15, Port Townsend police were alerted to vandalism at a public restroom in the 600 block of Water Street.

The graffiti appeared to exhibit hate speech and was scrawled on the wall of a the bathroom. An officer arrived at the scene and took photographs to document the incident. Damage was estimated at less than \$100.

At 8:34 a.m. Sunday, May 16, police were called to a report of a man slumped over the steering wheel of a pickup truck in the 2600 block of Washington Street.

The caller said they’d seen a needle and spoon inside the vehicle, suggesting the individual had been using intravenous drugs.

Officers arrived and made contact with a man who was responsive but denied any drug use despite showing signs of impairment.

Police took note of the man’s suspended driver’s license and informed the man he shouldn’t be driving due to his suspended license.

Chief: Martin was coming to end of contract agreement

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Martin was given the OK to travel “for job search related reasons,” but was told he had to notify the fire commission’s chair beforehand and use personal leave for such time away.

At a special meeting Monday marked by three executive sessions, the board unanimously picked Gary Kavanagh as interim chief. Kavanagh, a volunteer firefighter/EMT with the department, will be paid \$40 an hour.

Commissioners also approved a contract to have a duty chief supplied by East Jefferson Fire Rescue to assist with Port Ludlow emergency calls.

Under the agreement, the duty chief from East Jefferson Fire & Rescue will take command of all major incidents that happen within Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue’s territory.

Martin was still on paid administrative leave this week, despite earlier plans by the board to take additional action at its board meeting May 11.

The board did not make any new decisions on Martin’s status at last week’s meeting, nor at Monday’s special meeting.

Martin, who was appointed chief in 2012, has been under intense scrutiny within the department since last year.

The fire department’s board of commissioners ordered an investigation into Martin last year after the firefighters union took a vote of “no confidence” in Martin and submitted multiple letters alleging misdeeds by the chief.

The move by the union last September was the first-ever “vote of no confidence” taken by the firefighters of IAFF Local 3811, Jefferson County Professional Firefighters.

In a statement at the time,

IAFF Local 3811 president Wicus McGuffey said the chief had failed “to lead this department effectively and has demonstrated an unwillingness and an inability to provide the leadership necessary to strategically lead Port Ludlow Fire & Rescue.”

The union said there were “a litany of issues” that contributed to the lack of confidence in Martin, but the major factors included the chief’s resistance to conducting strategic planning and “the alarming loss of career members through resignation, not due to retirement, but to pursue career positions with other agencies in our immediate area.”

The union said the lack of planning in the department was a primary factor in the departure of five career firefighters in the previous two years, and in two letters submitted to fire commissioners, McGuffey also claimed the chief had failed to properly manage the

department’s staffing, and recalled an aid call to assist a 100-year-old man in August that left only an off-duty firefighter who was on probation to respond.

McGuffey criticized Martin for not responding to the medical emergency, calling it a “gross failure.”

“There is also the issue of Chief Martin frequently responding to emergency incidents, both in the district and outside the district, with his family members in the command vehicle, to include minor children who are left without adult supervision on emergency scenes,” McGuffey wrote in the second letter of allegations.

McGuffey also raised additional allegations of what he said were examples of a lack of organizational oversight and mismanagement in the department by Martin, which included staffing issues as well as the purchase of a new command vehicle, which McGuffey noted exceeded by \$18,600 the \$75,000

that was budgeted for the vehicle and was made without fire commissioners’ approval.

Martin said in a statement last year the complaint was without merit.

Commissioners eventually decided to hire an outside attorney to look into allegations against the chief.

In a vote after the board received the investigation report, commissioners decided 3-2 against firing Martin.

The investigation, which cost more than \$16,000, was finalized in February but was not released publicly by the fire department.

Martin declined to comment on the report after it was finished.

Martin is paid a salary of \$125,000 a year. His current employment contract was approved by the board in October 2018 and expires Aug. 31.

Role: Commissioner vows to keep employees front-and-center

continued from Page A1

told commissioners after Davis asked for Rossart to be stricken from the volunteer ranks.

Without Rossart available to respond, the department would lose a volunteer who is typically the first on the scene of emergency calls, McGuffey said.

“That’s a pretty significant hit,” he said.

McGuffey recalled an emergency call from the week before when three people were on duty. The call prompted a transport to a hospital and took the driver out of service on other calls for nearly three hours.

“Raelene, in her role as a volunteer responder, responded and acted as the driver to the hospital on that transport,” McGuffey said.

“She effectively doubled our response capability by keeping two responders in the station for another call.”

“That’s the most recent example and you don’t have to go back six months. That was, what? Three days ago,” he added.

McGuffey also stressed Rossart was essential to emergency calls in Paradise Bay.

“Raelene is the only volunteer that responds in that community and out of that fire station. I don’t have any replacements lined up,” McGuffey said.

“It’s frequent that Raelene is the first on-duty person five minutes and more before the on-duty crews are getting there. She’s there rendering critical aid, and in some cases, we’re talking cardiac arrest calls.”

A five-minute response

“I’m not going to debate you guys. This is on me. It’s not on the board.”

Ed Davis

FIRE COMMISSIONER, PORT LUDLOW FIRE & RESCUE

time for a cardiac arrest call reduces the chance of death by 50 percent, he added.

“That’s life and death,” McGuffey said.

McGuffey didn’t mince words on why he was speaking out.

“If we are making decisions that negatively impact [response times] for the people that we are serving based on politics or personality I have an issue with that.”

“We might as well close that station if the board does this. Because there is nobody else,” he said.

Davis did not offer much of an explanation on why Rossart should not be a volunteer.

“I am objecting to any commissioner being a volunteer,” he told the board.

“We’re bringing on a new chief. And it’s really difficult for anybody to wear two hats,” Davis said.

He then told Rossart: “You need to turn in your stuff.”

When Rossart asked for an explanation, Davis then said, “I’m not going to debate you guys. This is on me. It’s not on the board. It’s just me.”

Rossart said it appeared Davis was reluctant to acknowledge the ongoing problems between the department’s leadership and its emergency responders.

“During our strategic plan it was brought up that there is a huge disconnect between our management and our line personnel,” Rossart said.

“So if you think for one second that me not being a volunteer is going to reduce me checking in with the guys to see how things are going — you are solely mistaken. That is my job,” she told Davis.

“That is what people elected me for, is to make sure this whole place has what it needs. And our greatest asset is our employees,” Rossart said.

She acknowledged that it took only one commissioner on the board to have a volunteer removed, and agreed to turn in her gear.

“But I will not stop checking in to see how our employees are doing — on a personal level, on a professional level — from time to time,” she added. “Because that’s what our strat plan says needs to happen across the board.”

McGuffey disputed Davis’ claim that his request was only a reflection on him.

“This reflects on the organization. When we have a delayed response, when we have delayed ability to deliver service — I’m the one that is on the call dealing with the repercussions of that,” McGuffey said.

“It does not just impact you,” he added. “It impacts the people who pay you to sit there and participate at this meeting.”

“And from where I sit, this decision absolutely does not benefit them,” McGuffey said.

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