

# Edmonds Beacon

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

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## COVID-TEST SCAMMERS BOOTED FROM EDMONDS



A woman offering free COVID tests by the ferry discards her waste in a public garbage can.

Photos courtesy of Charlette LaFevre

### Testing waste dumped into public garbage cans

BY BRIAN SOERTEL

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The message is clear: Don't get a COVID test from anyone offering them on the streets of Edmonds. Better yet, just get a COVID vaccine shot in your arm, which is as easy as making a phone call (425-339-5278) and setting up an appointment.

On April 23, a reader alerted The Beacon and the Snohomish Health District that a woman had set up a table by the ferry and was offering self-administered nasal swab COVID tests.

"This was the same company reported in the news on KIRO and KING 5 that the Washington Department of Health and attorney general have issued public warnings about," said Charlette LaFevre, who lives in Edmonds.

The tests were free, but the tester was asking for birth dates, insurance information, and email addresses. In addition, information at the site said there could later be a fee.

According to information the woman provided at the table, her name was Katherine M. Nelson from Yuba City, California.

Also, according to a flyer at the table, the woman was working with Community Wellness America, a San Diego-based business that says "our team of doctors, nurses, lab physicians, and volunteer testers have committed to being present in your community to take on stopping the spread of COVID-19."

Steve Sterling, Community Wellness CEO, says it works with California-based Crestview Laboratory,



The COVID "tester" talks to people about getting a free nasal swabs. She also asked for personal information.

which would provide results within 24 to 48 hours.

The Beacon attempted to contact Sterling with repeated phone calls, which weren't returned. However, Q13 News reported that Sterling told them Community Wellness is a nonprofit operating with licenses in several different states

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## Walkable Main Street: It's Saturday and Sunday

Despite objections, Mayor Nelson plans 'shorter, more focused time period'

BY BRIAN SOERTEL

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Saturdays will not be saved. Despite the pleas of numerous downtown Edmonds businesses owners who rallied to "Save Our Saturdays," Mayor Mike Nelson on Monday announced that Walkable Main Street will return this summer on both weekend days, similar to last year's inaugural event.

In a letter to business owners first, then announced in a news release, Nelson said he has decided to return Walkable Main Street to both Saturdays and Sundays. The event closes Main Street to vehicle traffic from Third to Sixth avenues during weekend business hours.

Numerous retail business owners had lobbied Nelson to allow the event to be held only on Sundays.

"The city of Edmonds missed a great opportunity to compromise and show support of its downtown retailers – truly a disappointment," said Jenny Murphy, a

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## A sign of spring

Farmers market season opens with more than 50 vendors

BY BRIAN SOERTEL

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The popular farmers market season kicked off in Edmonds Saturday, May 1, with Edmonds Historical Museum's Garden Market.

There were plenty of items for the garden and the home.

And a variety of food, all locally sourced. Like flowers. Veggies. Toffee and coffee. Mushrooms. Quilts. Fish. Crafts. Soup. Bread. Fruit. Cider. Salsa.

And now, salami.

No one was happier at the market than Bob Blade, proprietor of Salt Blade Hand Crafted Meats, which made its debut Saturday. His salami business started small, and has grown to 11 employees.

"We're at 20 different markets now, including here in Edmonds," said Blade,

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across the country doing COVID testing. Sterling told the station it contracts with a third-party company that does the testing.

After taking photos and a video, LeFevre said she called the Edmonds Police Department shortly before 5 p.m.

Five days later, on April 28, after citizens complained about more free COVID testing in the heart of town at Fifth Avenue and Main Street on April 27 – in front of Starbucks and Treasures and Teas – the police released a short statement on Facebook:

“We have worked with the WA Department of Health to determine that the two curbside COVID test sites that appeared in downtown Edmonds yesterday have been identified as scams. We encourage all community members to only provide personal and insurance information to your trusted health-care provider. EPD will continue assisting with the ongoing investigation.”

LeFevre said she noted that the woman by the ferry was not a medical professional and, according to her certificate – which The Beacon verified – had one hour of HIPAA training, which she completed April 20 by paying \$15 to take an online course from Course for HIPAA, which is part of the online training company North American Learning Institute. (Those who fail the test can keep paying the \$15 fee until they pass.)

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act is a federal statute created 25 years ago to, among other things, protect patient confidentiality.

LeFevre said the woman left after a TV news station arrived. “She packed up and left her biohazard trash bin behind,” she said, “and later dumped the trash in the public receptacle without gloves.

“Obviously, an uncovered table on a crowded public sidewalk is not a location to take a COVID swab test by a non-medical person. As a person who has worked in a biomedical research lab and is also HIPAA trained, this setup is wrong on many levels and puts the public in danger.”

Mayor Mike Nelson also released a state-

Photo courtesy of Charlette LaFevre

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ment on Facebook April 28.

“Yesterday, a curbside COVID testing operation appeared in downtown Edmonds. We dispatched an Edmonds police officer who spoke with the gentleman offering the tests, who soon thereafter packed up and left the site. We have since learned that this operation appears to be a scam, with follow-up contact to persons initially tested that requests more personal information.

Nelson said Edmonds police will monitor the situation and shut down any continued attempts to set up unauthorized informal

COVID testing sites.

Recently, he continued, the Snohomish Health Department issued a warning advising all people to “beware of unusual or concerning testing operations” like what was seen in Edmonds.

The Health District cautioned people from engaging with anyone offering testing who is not affiliated with a legitimate healthcare organization and who does not show proper identification.

In addition, the district said you should be skeptical about solicitations for free testing in public, at someone’s doorstep, by telephone or email. Unfortunately, risk of substandard practices, inaccurate results, or identity theft do exist. People should err on the side of not engaging if approached.

Those with concerns about the legitimacy of a testing operation can contact the Health District by email at [complaints@snohd.org](mailto:complaints@snohd.org) or share details through the call center at 425-339-5278.

There is also a portal for filing a complaint with the Washington State Department of Health at [bit.ly/3edAKDC](http://bit.ly/3edAKDC).

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The City will work with invited and interested parties to develop a town hall meeting that will address these types of acts, interested partner responses, and what community members can do to help.

**Outreach to Edmonds School District**

The Edmonds Police Department plans to reach out to the Edmonds School District to explore aiding or supporting additional Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB) and diversity and inclusion training and curricula within the school district.

Prevention and education are key to helping forestall the hurtful impacts of these types of behaviors, Nelson said.

**Working with community groups**

Edmonds City Departments (including the Edmonds Police Department) will work with community groups, the Diversity Commission, the Youth Council, Snohomish County Parks, the Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office, the Edmonds School District, and other interested public and private groups to “positively address the root causes of such hateful incidents and provide education related to diversity and inclusion,” Nelson said.

County Executive Dave Somers, along with Councilmembers Stephanie Wright, Megan Dunn, Nate Nehring, Sam Low, and Jared Mead, released the following statement:

“Once again, hate has struck our community. Once again, we must stand united against any people or groups that will use hate symbols, hate speech, or hate crimes to intimidate or harm members of our community.

“We know that neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and their accomplices continue to try and build more support across the Pacific Northwest and the country. We will continue to oppose them and their despicable acts.

“We also want to commend the community members who reported the incidents. These individuals recognized what they saw as tools of both anti-Semitism and hate, and a very real threat to people from historically marginalized communities.

“Because of their willingness to speak up, these acts of hate could be confronted. We encourage anyone who witnesses or encounters acts of racism, bigotry, and hate to immediately report it to their local police department or an elected official.

“Snohomish County stands in solidarity with everyone who was harmed by these actions, and all similar actions, and we will continue to work to build a community that is welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all who live, work, and play in Snohomish County.”



ADAM E. COBB - REAL ESTATE UPDATE

Q: Is now a good time to sell?

A: It's an incredible time, there is high demand in Snohomish County and homes listed are getting multiple offers! I would love to help you sell your property, please call me at: 206-854-9454!

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