

The Leader

July 7, 2021
Issue 27 / Vol. 132

IN DEPTH • IN TOUCH • INDEPENDENT • SINCE 1889

\$1.50

HISTORIC BOAT MAKES STOP IN PT A2 • PDA BOARD CALLS IT QUILTS A3 • KITCHEN TO KITCHEN A12

CUTTING LOOSE FROM COVID



Kim Sands, owner of the Port Townsend Brewing Company, cuts a rope that kept customers from sitting at the bar during the pandemic.
Leader photo by Nick Twietmeyer

JeffCo businesses welcome Washington's reopening from pandemic shutdown

NICK TWIETMEYER AND LUKE ANDERSON
NEWS@PTLEADER.COM

Since March of last year, Washington has been wracked by lockdowns, restrictions, mask mandates, and social distancing protocols — all created in an attempt to mitigate the reach of a virus that has claimed some 6,000 lives. But last week, in what will hopefully be the first of many to come, residents across the state took their first steps out from the cold shadow of COVID-19.

Some were cautious as they began to return to their favorite spots throughout Jefferson County on the day of statewide opening June 30, with some still wearing the masks that have become inextricably linked to these strange days. Many others were ready to celebrate a normal Wednesday, like those in pre-pandemic days.

A TOAST TO HEALTH

Kim Sands, owner of the Port Townsend Brewing Company, said the reopening was a welcome change. Sands said she relished taking a pair of gardening loppers to the rope that had been slung across the bar stools, preventing patrons from shouldering up at the bar for a cold one.

Surprisingly, despite having to social distance, Sands said she felt herself becoming closer to some of her brewery's patrons.

As customers weren't allowed to sit at the bar and chat with the bartenders, Sands found herself talking with her regular delivery customers more and more over the phone, eventually leading to a sort of dial-in bartender service.

"I had really great conversations with a lot of people over the phone," she said. "They were homebound and they wanted to talk and I think there's a lot of goodwill that comes from just talking to people."

Topics would range from how their families are doing during the pandemic to their pets, as was the case for one of Sands' homebound clients.

"We talked about his cat, Patches," Sands said. "Then one delivery day, he left my driver with a picture of Patches for me to have."

Sands added that the reopening



Piper Corbett and Robert Horner, co-owners of Propolis Brewing, pose for a photo on June 30, the first day of Washington's reopening from the COVID-19 pandemic. Leader photo by Nick Twietmeyer

has allowed for live music to return to her brewery once again — every Friday from 5 to 8 p.m. — something she said her customers have been anxiously awaiting.

"Everybody's just dying for it," Sands said.

Over at Pourhouse, bartender Mariah Vane said she felt a little weird not wearing her mask while at work, especially after having spent more than a year with one covering her face.

"I'm just like, 'Don't look at me!'" Vane said. "I'm checking my facial expressions, too. I got good at smiling with my eyes and then my lower face could just do whatever."

Vane said the general consensus among her fellow staff was relief at the prospect of no longer having to confront customers who refuse to put on a mask.

"[Sometimes] people want to fight you on that. It's so exhausting," she

"We've had to ask people to leave because they weren't willing to wear masks. It's stressful."

Mariah Vane
BARTENDER, POURHOUSE

said. "We've had to ask people to leave because they weren't willing to wear masks. It's stressful."

While the business has remained fairly busy throughout the pandemic, Vane said the absence of indoor seating was a noticeable hurdle. But when it came to providing a safe environment for their customers, the staff at Pourhouse had to stay firm.

"We've really stuck to our guns on following the guidelines and making sure that anyone can come in and feel safe," Vane said.

Things were starting to look a bit more like something resembling normal over at the Hilltop Tavern as the after-work crowd trickled in. One of the tavern's regulars walked in and pulled up a stool before he was reminded of the auspicious

see **SHUTDOWN**, Page A10

GUILTY

Jury reaches quick decision in murder trial

BRIAN KELLY
BKELLY@PTLEADER.COM

John Paul Beckmeyer wanted a speedy trial. He got a speedy verdict instead.

After a 12-day trial that had been postponed repeatedly last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons — and another delay last week when Jefferson County Superior Court was closed due to a record-breaking heatwave — Beckmeyer, 60, was found guilty of second-degree murder in the shooting death of a neighbor during a Marrowstone Island barbecue last August.

Closing arguments in the first-degree murder case were June 29. The jury — five women, seven men — returned with their verdicts in the case after a span of roughly four hours.

Beckmeyer was found guilty of second-degree murder while armed with a firearm, two counts of second-degree assault while armed with a firearm, and fourth-degree domestic violence assault.

The jury declined to convict Beckmeyer of first-degree murder.

Beckmeyer was arrested last August after he shot James McDonald, 24, during a barbecue on Griffith Point Road in Nordland.

The dispute began after Beckmeyer told his girlfriend to turn down a loud radio and she didn't, and Beckmeyer responded by hitting her on the side of the head.

McDonald and his girlfriend confronted Beckmeyer about the assault, and Beckmeyer announced he was going back into the nearby fifth-wheel trailer where he lived to get a .45-caliber pistol.

McDonald went to get a shotgun to protect himself and the two women at the barbecue, and when he returned, Beckmeyer pointed a .22-caliber handgun out the window of his fifth-wheel trailer, spraying the picnic area with bullets and shooting McDonald twice in the chest.

Beckmeyer had claimed self-defense, but the jury in his murder trial came back with guilty verdicts

see **GUILTY**, Page A9

Deer, homes and homeless dominate candidate forum

NICK TWIETMEYER
NTWIETMEYER@PTLEADER.COM

From troublesome deer to scant housing and crumbling streets, the candidates for Port Townsend City Council Position 5 traded opinions during a candidate forum hosted by the League of Women Voters of Jefferson County last week.

Candidates Tyler Myles Vega, Libby Urner Wennstrom and Sky Hardesty-Thompson each took turns addressing questions during the Zoom-hosted forum Thursday, July 1. The three will square off in the upcoming Aug. 3 Primary Election as they jockey for the seat of outgoing Councilmember Pamela Adams.

At the top of the forum, each candidate was given two minutes to offer up their opening statements.

Vega was born and raised in Seattle and in his opening statement noted that he'd previously run for political office in 2004 and formed a political party after an unsuccessful bid as a Green Party candidate.

"I was the cofounder of the Inter-dependence Party," Vega said. "That didn't last very long; I realized pretty early on that there wasn't the real people power to do anything."

After his initial foray into the political realm, Vega said he later gave away all of his possessions in order to become a "hardcore activist."

"I would go into direct action; I would be a tree-sitter, I wouldn't come back to politics until 2016 and this whole kind of so-called Bernie Sanders revolution," Vega said. "That's where the current era begins in politics for me."

see **FORUM**, Page A20

inside
this issue...

20
pages

FRONT

Port Townsend Police Log A5
JeffCo - East to West..... A6
Opinion Forum.....A7-A8
Jefferson County Sheriff's Log A10

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT/CLASSIFIEDS

Arts & EntertainmentA11-A13
Classifieds & Legal NoticesA14-A17
Puzzles A18
Community RecordA18-A19

ptleader.com



8 08805 93173 0



A view of the mobile home and picnic area across from John Paul Beckmeyer's fifth-wheel trailer. James McDonald was barbecuing with Beckmeyer and their girlfriends when he was fatally shot Aug. 26, 2020. Photo courtesy of the Jefferson County Prosecutor's Office



Beckmeyer's fifth-wheel trailer on Griffith Point Road in Nordland. Beckmeyer fired a .22-caliber pistol out of the window at the right of the trailer, striking McDonald twice in the chest and killing him. Photo courtesy of the Jefferson County Prosecutor's Office

Guilty: Jury reaches decision on first day of deliberations

continued from Page A1

on the four charges the same afternoon that deliberations began.

Several members of McDonald's family stood in the back of the courtroom as the jury returned to the third-floor courtroom of the Jefferson County Courthouse just before 4 p.m. June 29 to render judgment.

The jury foreman, Juror Number 11, handed the verdict forms to the bailiff and they were then handed to Superior Court Judge Keith Harper, who read the verdicts aloud to a courtroom that had eight people in attendance and three uniformed officers.

Harper quickly read and turned the pages over one at a time.

He held his right hand to his chin as he finished reviewing the final pages.

"I'm just trying to ensure everything is done here properly," he said after several minutes.

"OK," he said finally.

Harper then read aloud each count.

Beckmeyer stared at the judge as the verdicts were read and did not show any emotion.

When jurors were polled, and each one stood to affirm their decision and that of the jury, Beckmeyer continued to sit motionless, hands flat on the armrests of his chair, staring forward.

SELF-DEFENSE TO THE END

Richard Davies, Beckmeyer's attorney, told the jury that the accused had been acting in self-defense when he fired out the louvered window of his fifth-wheel trailer and killed McDonald the day of the barbecue last August on Marrowstone Island.

"At the beginning of this case, I told you that this case was about Mr. Beckmeyer having to defend himself against someone threatening him with a gun," Davies told the jury.

McDonald wasn't a stranger, Davies said, and recalled testimony during the trial that Beckmeyer had reasons to be afraid of the man who lived on the same property as he did.

"John knew the guy," Davies said, and "also knew that he was a volatile and often violent person."

Davies recalled an incident where McDonald allegedly assaulted Beckmeyer's girlfriend, sending her to the hospital with a potentially broken tailbone after being slammed to the ground, and a more recent incident where Davies said McDonald went into a fit of rage after he allegedly pointed a BB gun at Beckmeyer after the two argued about the death of Piggy, a dog that McDonald was supposed to be watching when the pair were loading scrap metal into Beckmeyer's truck. Beckmeyer accidentally backed his truck over the dog, Davies recalled, and Piggy had to be put down the next day.

The day of the barbecue, when an argument erupted between Beckmeyer and Danielle Boucher, his girlfriend, over loud music and Beckmeyer struck Boucher, McDonald and his girlfriend got into Beckmeyer's face about his hitting a woman.

Davies said McDonald took a roundhouse swing at Beckmeyer but missed, and Beckmeyer retreated to his fifth-wheel trailer opposite the barbecue grills "to escape getting beaten up by Mr. McDonald."

McDonald left the barbecue, too, Davies said — to get a gun.

Beckmeyer, meanwhile, had gone up to the sleeping-area loft of his fifth-wheel to lay down, Davies said.

Outside, in his hands, McDonald had a double-barrel shotgun.

"He loads it and he points it at Mr. Beckmeyer in his trailer, where he is laying down in his bed," Davies said.



The shotgun that James McDonald was holding when he was shot — broken open in the loading position and unable to be fired — lies on the ground next to a picnic table across from Beckmeyer's fifth-wheel trailer. Photo courtesy of the Jefferson County Prosecutor's Office



John Paul Beckmeyer leaves a courtroom in the Jefferson County Courthouse following a pre-trial hearing. Leader photo by Brian Kelly

Davies again stressed the peril that Beckmeyer was in; caught inside his fifth-wheel with the only door to escape the one that McDonald stood near.

He stressed the walls of the fifth-wheel trailer provided little protection from a shotgun blast — a point that had been dramatically made earlier in the trial by an expert witness who had cut out a section of the wall of the fifth-wheel trailer and shot it with McDonald's shotgun, and then brought the approximately 9-foot-by-4-foot section of wall, with its multiple shotgun holes, into the courtroom to display for the jury.

"It's not paper thin," Davies said of the trailer wall, "it's a beer-can thin wall."

Beckmeyer's response, he added, was reasonable and justified.

"It's not just what happened right then, right there," Davies said, again recalling the history between Beckmeyer and McDonald.

'SPLIT-SECOND DECISION'

He recalled Beckmeyer's own testimony, when he had taken the witness stand the week before.

"As you heard him testify, he made that split-second decision based on all he knew about Mr. McDonald, as well as the threat he thought was immediate. A fellow is pointing a gun at you, and he

responds by defending himself," Davies said.

"At that time he knew he was in great personal danger," he added.

Beckmeyer had a right "to stand his ground," Davies said.

Beckmeyer also has physical impairments, the attorney added, and was not fit to run away even if he wanted.

Davies noted that Beckmeyer repeatedly said he was defending himself, during the first 911 calls and through his later interviews with police.

Fifteen seconds into that first 911 call, Davies said, "Mr. Beckmeyer tells 911, 'I had a gun pulled on me; I had to shoot back.'"

"It's not something made up after the fact, on a review based on all of the evidence. It's from the very beginning," Davies said.

NOT THE END

The dispute should have stopped after the argument that started with the loud radio, the attorney said, and not with McDonald going to get a gun.

"That's where it should have ended," Davies said.

And when Beckmeyer fired his .22-caliber handgun out the window of his fifth-wheel, he wasn't trying to shoot McDonald, but scare him instead.

"He didn't intend to kill Mr.

McDonald," Davies said.

Deputy Prosecutor Anna Phillips, however, said the whole story given by Beckmeyer, of an unfortunate accident, was built on lies.

"Somehow it was like just another Wednesday on Marrowstone Island. And everybody was barbecuing and they were drinking, and there was crab and corn and it was just another Wednesday," Phillips said.

"When out of nowhere James McDonald went and got a shotgun from the house, for no reason," Phillips said, recalling Beckmeyer's version of events.

"At least, that's what he told the police," she said.

"How you can believe anything he said?" Phillips asked the jury. "He lied about big things. He lied about little things."

"He lied about things that are not corroborated by any physical evidence or any other witness. He doesn't tell you the truth when he testifies," she added. "And you know what? The oath to tell the truth doesn't turn people into a truth-telling machine."

Beckmeyer has given multiple versions of what happened that day. That's because he's refining a story that he hopes will keep him out of jail, Phillips said.

"It's changing. It's always changing. He's thinking. He's thinking."



John Beckmeyer's Colt .45-caliber handgun. Photo courtesy of the Jefferson County Prosecutor's Office

When a detective tells him that they just want to know what happened, Phillips recalled, Beckmeyer gives a non-answer.

"He said, 'It's kind of hard to explain,'" Phillips said. "That's because he knows he's in trouble. He knows he's the bad guy."

A LOAD OF LIES

Beckmeyer, she said, knows that he was "completely unreasonable and over the top."

"It's because he knows that, that he has to lie. He knows he's wrong. He knows he is absolutely unjustified in what he did."

"And from the moment he does it, he starts the lying. From the moment after he shoots James, it starts. And it doesn't stop and until he comes and tells you yet a different story here on the stand."

"You've heard the whole case. You are smart people," Phillips told the jury.

He wasn't telling the truth about laying in his bed and shooting out the window, she said, pointing to a photo of Beckmeyer during his interview with police that showed him reaching up over his shoulder to get the pistol, from a shelf that was too high to be reached by someone lying down on the bed in the fifth-wheel.

"He never laid down on the bed and shot. It never happened," Phillips said.

She displayed another photo of the location of the holster for the murder weapon, on the floor next to a plastic urinal that Beckmeyer had used after he went back inside his fifth-wheel after the argument.

Beckmeyer had said he relieved himself, then dumped his urine out the window of his fifth-wheel and saw McDonald holding a gun.

But Beckmeyer isn't afraid, Phillips said, when he looks out the window. He's still mad about the argument over hitting his girlfriend.

"He's furious because he gets called out on it," she said.

"He is fabricating his self-defense," Phillips said.

SENTENCING PLANNED

Beckmeyer is tentatively scheduled to be sentenced July 23 in Jefferson County Superior Court.

He faces a sentence of between 165 months to 265 months plus firearm enhancements, according to the prosecutor's office. The total sentencing range is 23 to 33 years.

After the trial, Jefferson County Prosecutor James Kennedy praised the work done by the deputy prosecutors and police.

"It took a huge amount of work by our office team, the deputy prosecutors involved, and law enforcement to get justice for the victims," Kennedy said in a press release.

"I truly appreciate the hard work that everyone puts in on a daily basis," he said.

Shane McDonald, James McDonald's father, declined to offer a statement after leaving the courtroom following the jury verdict.

According to the prosecutor's office, Shane McDonald "expressed his appreciation to the jury and for all of the efforts put forth on behalf of his son."

Deputy Prosecutor Chris Ashcraft said later the victim's family is not expected to return to Washington state for Beckmeyer's sentencing.