

L

YNNWOOD

T

S

Sheriff's youth mentor program "leads the way" to brighter futures
P.04

Rep. Lauren Davis: Lynnwood's Community Recovery Center
P.02

9/11: Revisiting Everett's role in paving American history
P.02

Real News ⚡
Real Impact

Rebuilding a Life: From homelessness and drug abuse to self-redemption

City of Snohomish Mayor John Kartak (left) with Billy McGarry. Source: Billy McGarry.

By KIENAN BRISCOE

SNOHOMISH, Wash. – Billy McGarry, 35, lost track of how many days he had been awake with no sleep. It was the middle of winter, and he had just been kicked out of the McDonald's bathroom where he passed out on the floor. He hadn't eaten in days but had no appetite, a symptom of the methamphetamines in his system. He had no idea where he was, watching the people he went to high school with pass by in their cars with their children in the backseat, as he picked up cigarette butts by the bus stop.

When he began flailing uncontrollably, he knew it was time to take heroin to

bring himself down. This was his average cocktail. He was his own pharmacist.

"I could have died. When you're up for days with no sleep, haven't eaten, dehydrated, on meth, and you put heroin in your system, your heart could stop," McGarry told the Lynnwood Times.

The next thing McGarry remembers was being awoken by Snohomish Mayor John Kartak beside the dumpster where he had passed out.

Living in active addiction

McGarry struggled with drugs and alcohol throughout his 20s. Although

he grew up in a loving home, raised by his Aunt Norma and Uncle Alan, he always felt like he didn't belong in normal society. He struggled in school, had a hard time focusing, never felt goal-oriented, and never had an urge to get involved in extracurricular activities.

"I was one of those kids that had so much potential but just didn't apply myself," McGarry told the Lynnwood Times. "I wasn't completely goal-oriented, wasn't in high school sports, I kind of went to the beat of my own drum."

Continued PAGE 08 >>

Parents talk COVID at Edmonds School Board meeting

By OLIVIA THIESSEN

EDMONDS, Wash. – On September 14, the first Edmonds school board meeting of the 2021-2022 school year took place over Zoom amidst rising Covid cases in the county. The meeting predominantly focused on the district's commitment to safe reopening measures. Meetings will continue to take place over Zoom for the duration of the year.

The meeting began with the Indigenous land acknowledgment, which was read aloud verbatim over Zoom by Superintendent Dr. George Balderas.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the superintendent issued the Oath of Office to the board's five student advisors. These students applied for the position and will be attending school board meetings regularly to represent the students of their respective schools and provide student insight. The student advisors sworn in this year are as follows:

- Daniel Kim, Edmonds-Woodway HS
- Isabel Vergara-Ramos, Edmonds-Woodway HS
- Roshni Gill, Edmonds-Woodway HS
- Lia Addisu, Lynnwood HS
- Ritika Khanal, Mountlake Terrace HS

The Superintendent's report

The bulk of the presentation revolved

Continued PAGE 07 >>



Christine

Frizzell

for Mayor of Lynnwood



Paid for by Frizzell for Mayor at PO Box 5487, Lynnwood, WA 98046

from page 1 **REBUILDING A LIFE**

McGarry and his younger sister began living with their aunt and uncle at a young age because of their mother’s increasing drug and alcohol problem. They attended church every Sunday at Central Christian and were very involved in their church community.

“My uncle and aunt did their best to raise me with proper values,” McGarry said.

Although his uncle and aunt set a loving environment free from the influences of drugs, McGarry’s mother’s addiction would soon catch up with him hereditarily. He began hanging out at the skate park where it was easy to find prescription pills like Percocet and Oxycontin and before he knew it, he advanced to heroin and meth. At this point, McGarry’s life began to spin out of control.

After driving McGarry to rehab for the fourth time, his uncle turned toward him and said, “You know what? I can’t deal with this anymore. I’m leaving this in God’s hands.”

“Nobody is equipped to deal with drug addiction. You can’t make someone get clean who doesn’t want to get clean,” McGarry said.

McGarry began living with his grandmother in Marysville but would soon be kicked out after getting loaded in her house and walking around in the middle of the night for nights on end. She gave him 20 minutes to pack his things. He continued to couch surf at friends’ houses until he had exhausted all of his options and fell into homelessness at the age of 27. It was then when he wondered if he struggled with addiction.

“Hitting rock bottom can be different for many people, but mine was hitting rock bottom for the 8th or 9th time,” McGarry told the Lynnwood Times.

Hitting rock bottom

McGarry began to increase his meth-amphetamine use as a survival tactic while living on the streets. The drug would raise his core temperature, suppress his appetite so he wouldn’t have to look for food, and kept him awake and busy so he didn’t have to worry about being attacked or killed.

“I’ve seen it many times. People get drunk and just take a bike frame to a person sleeping [on the street],” McGarry said. “You can get killed just by being in the wrong area when you’re homeless.”

McGarry’s weeklong meth and heroin binges, dehydration, malnutrition, and full weeks of no sleep led to psychosis, delusions, hallucinations, and lead to confusion about where he was at any given time. Despite these issues, he never got into thievery or home invasion to fuel his habit.

Although McGarry knew of many shelters around the Everett area where he found himself most of the time, many homeless would be denied entry if they were suspected of drug use. In the rare instances in which he was allowed entry, he was given week-old, unsold Starbucks pastries for food.

“It was like biting into a frosted crou-ton,” McGarry said.

He was allowed to shower at the shelters but would feel uncomfortable stripping down in front of strangers, and his clothes would sometimes get stolen when he laid them down.

McGarry’s drug binge lasted three years.

A chance encounter leads to a path of redemption

When City of Snohomish Mayor John Kartak awoke McGarry outside a Snohomish dumpster that day, McGarry

was taken aback by how kind and calm he was. Before Kartak approached him, all of McGarry’s interactions with people on the street were either dangerous people looking to rob him or aggressive police officers telling him not to loiter.

“He wasn’t belittling or mean. He was the only one concerned about my safety. He made me feel significant, I didn’t feel invisible anymore,” McGarry said.

Mayor Kartak expressed concerns that McGarry could get hit by a car and asked if he had a place to go.

“I told him, ‘I’m a father, and as far as I’m concerned, you could be one of my kids,’” Mayor Kartak told the Lynnwood Times. “I said, ‘You got your whole life ahead of you, and it’s heartbreaking to see someone throwing their life away.’”

Neither Mayor Kartak nor McGarry would know this at the time, but there was some similarity between Billy and Kartak’s own kids. The two would later learn that McGarry attended Snohomish High School at the same time as his own children.

Kartak walked McGarry to the nearest cold weather shelter, talking like friends and offering to connect him with resources such as the Salvation Army.

“He just wanted to help. . . . Who does that? I was just like, who is this guy? He still walked with me. He still treated me like a human being,” McGarry said.

After that night, McGarry decided to admit himself to rehab for the sixth and final time.

“I admitted to myself that I had a heroin problem and I needed help. It took a long time, but I finally did, and I went to treatment,” McGarry said.

Living in active recovery

When McGarry celebrated his 30th birthday in rehab, he realized he was running out of time and needed to turn his life around. He found a sponsor and began actively involved in twelve-step programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. He moved to Yakima, Washington to separate himself from his past and began working for American Rocks, laying asphalt for highways.

“The best advice I can give to someone struggling with this is to move away from your hometown and get linked up with a good support group,” McGarry told the Lynnwood Times.

To this day, McGarry is four years and five months sober, contributes to a 401k, and is working to buy his first house with his girlfriend.

“It might sound cheesy, but not all angels have wings. It really shows what the world is going through, and I really appreciate what John did,” McGarry told the Lynnwood Times. “The joys of being clean and sober, having a life I’ve never had before, is the greatest thing in the world.”

Mayor Kartak and McGarry remain friends, communicating regularly over Facebook and getting together for a burger whenever McGarry visits town.

“Billy is such a heartwarming success story for our community,” Mayor Kartak told the Lynnwood Times. “I think most people want to help, they just don’t know what they can do.”

Although Billy rekindled a relationship with his mother in his early 20s, their relationship revolved around their shared substance abuse. His mother passed away two years ago from complications within the methadone program while seeking help for her addiction.

from page 2 **9/11 FLAG**

The doorbell rang at the Everett Fire Department Station 1 on Rucker Ave and 36th Street shortly after Browne realized what was in his possession. Knowing unexpected announcements such as these typically include medical emergencies, Everett Fire Fighters responded to the call with urgency only to see a man, who appeared healthy and in no harm, standing outside the station. The man held up a plastic Joanne Fabric and Craft bag to the confused firefighters and told them he had a piece of American history. The man was Browne.

The firefighters withdrew the flag, noticing it had ropes and electrical tape around it, removed them to give the flag a better look and put it back in the bag to give to administration.

During a discussion about the history of flags between Deputy Chief Everett PD and Assistant Fire Marshall from the Everett Fire Department, the fire marshall revealed that a flag had been turned in the previous day by a citizen, claiming to be the famous flag featured in Franklin’s iconic photo. Astonished, the Deputy Chief asked to see the artifact, which was in the fire marshall’s office, and immediately turned it in to the evidence room, assigning Massingale the case of verifying whether this

mind-boggling claim held merit.

“Detective Massingale is a former Army ranger and an incredibly patriotic man. It was really fitting that he was assigned this case,” Atwood told the Lynnwood Times.

When Atwood and Massingale received the flag, they treated it as evidence from a crime scene and could not put the flag back together the way it was turned in. They took pictures of it, handled it with gloves, and began their investigation which would last the next two years. Atwood told the Lynnwood Times that visually it looked like a match, down to the number of wraps of electrical tape around the rope. The original flag from Franklin’s photo was taken from the yacht Star of America docked in the Hudson River and erected on a 20-foot pole found in the debris of the attacks with electrical tape and rope.

The two-year investigation was kept in high security with only a total of about four people ever knowing what was going on to avoid issues such as theft or tampering.

Detective Steve Paxton of the Washington State crime lab was brought in to conduct the forensics for authentication. When Atwood and Massingale approached Paxton’s supervisor about the case, a member of their office bumped

into a computer desk which activated the monitor displaying Franklin’s photo as the background image. It was then when the importance of this case sunk in.

Analyzed by Bill Schreck of the Spokane Washington State Patrol Crime Lab, the flag turned in by Browne was determined to be America’s missing flag. In his forensic report, the DNA of the FDNY firefighters that held it on September 11 along with the debris from the fallen World Trade Center towers were conclusive.

When the two Everett detectives held a meeting to discuss this finding, they invited in fellow Everett PD officer Edward Golden, who served with the NYPD during the September 11 attacks and was a first responder to the attacks. Golden walked to the flag, gripped it, and put it to his face, and said, “That’s the smell I remember; I will never forget that smell.”

“[Golden is] Probably the nicest person I’ve ever met. His name is Golden and he is pretty much that,” Atwood told the Lynnwood Times.

When the flag was folded for the last time in Everett, before the History Channel and Chub Insurance delivered it back to New York City, Golden was chosen to do the honors.



STEMTREE
Your Education Center

Register Now!
K - 12 After-school Enrichment
&
Summer Camps
Coding, Robotics, Science & EE

425-405-STEM(7836)
10100 Mukilteo Speedway www.stemtree.com/mukilteo

“Any American, and even non-Americans, have a belief and a feeling and a thought when they see an American flag. Everybody’s perception of that flag is different; everyone has had different experiences in this country . . . and that’s what I think every time I see an American flag,” Atwood told the Lynnwood Times.

To this day the flag is on display at the 9/11 museum in New York City.

“Flags are symbols – symbols of hope, symbols of strength, symbols of us. But on this journey, I’ve also realized that flags are mirrors, this flag especially. And when you look at it, you will see what you need, and you will see something about yourself,” Brad Melter, History Channel and host of the show Lost History, said.