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King County Fair prepares for four-day run at Expo Center

By KEVIN HANSON
Senior Writer

Promising four days of family-themed fun, the King County Fair is making its return to the Enumclaw Expo Center.

It's not as though the fair went anywhere else. It's just that the 2020 edition was wiped away by a worldwide pandemic, along with pretty much everything else.

The never-ending list of details that go into organizing the fair are music to the ears of Rene Popke, who is tasked with managing the Expo Center and everything that goes with it – including the fair, the single largest effort to grace the 72-acre grounds.

Popke said the Expo staff received the go-ahead to stage a 2021 fair in April. "That's when we knew we were definitely a go," she said. "We just didn't know what it was going to look like." Since then, she has been talking to food vendors, carnival promoters, entertainers, livestock aficionados and many, many more.

"It's been a challenge," Popke said of putting together a fair while society continues on the downhill side of a pandemic. In particular, she makes it clear that certain aspects of this year's King County Fair will look different. Specifically, the number of commercial booths will be reduced.

"There are a lot of vendors who didn't make it through the pandemic," she pointed out.

The work of Popke and her staff will come to fruition Thursday when the gates open and continue through Sunday when the last guest strolls out the gate.

Here are some of the key details as the King County Fair prepares for launch.

HOURS AND ADMISSION

The fair gates will open at 10 a.m. each day, Thursday through Sunday. Closing will be at 10 a.m. the first three days, with a 6 p.m. shut-down on Sunday.

General admission is \$10 for those 13 years and older; the entry fee is cut in half to \$5 for kids 5 to 12 years old and senior citizens 65 and older; and there's a military discount (\$8) for those with a valid ID. In addition, select Safeway stores are selling discounted tickets for \$8 and senior citizens can get

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PHOTOS BY KEVIN HANSON

Under sunny skies, Enumclaw enjoyed a much-anticipated Fourth of July parade that filled Cole Street. Like most major events, last year's parade was scrapped due to the pandemic, making this year's edition a welcome opportunity to gather as a community. Among the many entries were (pictured here) an Enumclaw Garden Club member on bicycle, a stars and stripes wingspan courtesy of NW Magical Events, a youngster on her decorated scooter and Sondra Lundquist, America's Elegant Miss Agribusiness.



PHOTOS BY KEVIN HANSON

Danny Vernon brought his "Illusion of Elvis" show to Buckley last Thursday, kicking off the city's summer concert series. His two sets covered early Elvis, the movie Elvis and The King in his later years.

Elvis brought to life during first of Buckley's summer concerts

By DAVID BECKSTROM
Special to the Courier-Herald

Buckley hosted the first of its free summer concerts last Thursday with Danny Vernon performing his "Illusions of Elvis" show at the Buckley Youth Activity Center lawn.

Vernon entertained with classic such as "Blue Swede Shoes," "Return to Sender" and "Devil in Disguise."

"I am celebrating America, by celebrating the all-American hero, Elvis Presley," Vernon said. "By helping his legacy live on, we continue to build our community. [Presley's] songs bring



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King County Council candidate responds to renewed criticism over 2010 school bus threats incident

By ALEX BRUELL
Reporter

It was an incident that would have ended many political aspirations.

The morning of Jan. 12, 2010, current King County Council candidate Ubax Gardheere boarded a Highline School District bus carrying middle school kids — and raised a scene.

She yelled at the students about the U.S. and Somalia, according to a King County Sheriff's deputy report, and said they should stay calm because she could have a bomb or gun on her. She called them cowards — at least one student said she called them "white cowards" — when they tried to escape.

Gardheere had no such weapons. She didn't even have her wallet that morning, she told the Courier-Herald recently. Sleep-deprived, struggling with postpartum depression and processing a traumatic trip overseas, Gardheere broke down that morning and did what she thought would put her in jail, where she thought she'd be safe. She held the bus up for about 13 minutes before

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Safe

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and don't try to navigate unsafe areas they may warn you of. The National Weather Service also broadcasts on marine band and standalone weather radios.

6. Respect cold water. A blazing sun doesn't magically make the water warm. Even during hot weather, many of the waterways in Washington remain below 60 degrees all year. That's a temperature range in which you're at risk of cold-water shock. Avoid cotton and wear synthetic materials if you can't get a wet or dry suit.

7. Keep the booze and weed at home. The water isn't a place to drop your guard, and you must stay alert and maintain situational awareness. State Boating Under the Influence laws prohibit operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, including even kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and inflatable fishing rafts.

8. Stay visible. Paddlecraft sit low on the water

and can be hard for other boaters to see. Wear bright neon and contrasting colors, put reflective tape on paddles, use a flagpole and carry a bright light.

9. File a plan in advance. Before you head out, share your intended route with someone else who isn't going, including the names of everyone going, what time you're leaving and returning, and what to do if you don't return when expected. This basic routine can save your life or others' in case emergency crews need to locate you and your friends.

10. Label your paddlecraft. When empty boats are found adrift, it's often assumed someone is in danger and a search is launched. Calling the owner of an adrift paddleboard or canoe can prevent unnecessary searches. It can also save precious time for rescuers when someone actually is in danger. You can request a free "If Found" sticker from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary at ifoundsticker@13cgaux.net.

Visit www.paddle-safewa.org for more information.

Ubax

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a deputy arrested her.

Local media reported on the incident at the time. But in deciding this year to run for Position 9 on the Metropolitan King County Council, which includes the Enumclaw Plateau, Gardheere considered it would come up again.

"Before I decided running, I knew something like this would happen," Gardheere said. "It's something that's out there, that happened in a public way."

She was right. On June 10, an article published in online Canadian news magazine The Post Millennial detailed the incident. Fox News published its own article the following day as the story caught national attention.

Critics raised more than a few concerns: Is someone who terrified and threatened kids with talk of a bomb or gun fit for public office? Did her statements belie racist bias or resentment for the U.S.? And what does she think of her actions now?

Gardheere is currently

the equitable development division director at the City of Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD). (The OPCD declined to comment on their perspective or knowledge of her 2010 incident and said they do not comment on personnel files.)

Gardheere said she's processed what happened that day in therapy. She pleaded guilty and served time in jail over it.

Her words that day don't represent her beliefs, Gardheere said — they were the ramblings of someone in crisis trying to say whatever they could to be taken to a jail.

In an interview with the Courier-Herald, Gardheere said she's only human and can't promise she won't ever have a breakdown again. But she said she's developed tools to stop things from boiling over like they did in 2010. And the revival of the controversy has only energized her campaign for office, she said.

"I have gone through so much healing and surrounded myself with people who have ... gone through that and come

out on the other side, too," Gardheere said. "I'm not going to say like any other politician, 'I'm going to make sure this never happens again.' Because I don't know. It's a health crisis. Are you going to tell folks that you're never, ever, going to have a heart attack?"

A terrifying ordeal

Police reports from the Jan. 12, 2010, incident paint a disturbing and chaotic scene. Surveillance footage of the incident shared by Seattle talk radio host and journalist Ari Hoffman, author of the June 10 article, corroborates much of the law enforcement account.

According to a probable cause document by the King County Sheriff's Office, Gardheere around 7:30 a.m. boarded a school bus, bound for Chinook Middle School, after it had stopped to allow students to board.

Gardheere told the driver to call his dispatcher and report a "national security incident" and said she wouldn't leave the bus

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Elvis

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people together and it has almost become an American tradition to share the experiences of his music."

Buckley's 2020 concert series had to be postponed due to COVID-19. However, as the world continues to rebound, communities are able to come together again.

"Bonney Lake has started their summer concert series on Wednesdays and Enumclaw is starting their concert series on Friday nights, so we all feel that it is the right time to get back out there and start living our lives again... especially since many in our community are getting fully vaccinated," Buckley Mayor Pat Johnson said.

About 200 people gathered in small groups around the concert area to listen to the show. The gathered audience spanned several generations; from people who watched Elvis Presley in person, to children that have only heard the "King" from recordings.

"Bringing the community together is what this world needs on the heels of the global pandemic that we just experienced and the best way that I know how to do that is through Elvis Presley's songs," Vernon said. "Elvis was never about himself, he always wanted to get into the crowd and interact with the community of people he was performing for through inclusion."

As Buckley and the surrounding communities continue to reopen after the shutdowns, there will be an uptick in activities available for residents of the area.

"Buckley will be closing off Main Street for a few Saturday events throughout the summer as we continue to build a feeling of community and togetherness that has waned over the past year," Johnson said.

For more information on the summer concert series or other city events go to www.cityofbuckley.com/calendar.

Fair

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in every day for \$1, provided they arrive between 10 a.m. and noon.

Those intending to attend all four days can get a pass for \$30 for adults or \$15 for kids.

Don't forget to plan for parking. In the Expo Center lots a one-day pass is \$5 or a season pass can be purchased for \$18.

RIDES AND ENTERTAINMENT

It's not a real fair unless there are rides for kids of all ages. Among the attractions

at this year's King County Fair will be the Americana Carousel, Bear Affair, Wacky Shack Funhouse and the Super Slide. Rides sounding a bit more ominous include the Scorpion Ride, Viper and Freak Out. There are more, including a fair staple, the Ferris wheel.

Ride tickets can be purchased on-site and there is an option for discount wristbands (visit www.kingcofair.com/rides).

There are concerts dotting the schedule all four days and all are free with a paid admission. The Food Court Stage is found adjacent to, well, the food court.

In keeping with the fair ambiance, many of

the entertainers offer a country flavor. There are exceptions, however: the always-popular Beatniks will take the stage from 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, offering pop and rock classics that span decades; from noon to 2 p.m. Sunday, fans will be treated to Danny Vernon's Illusion of Elvis, a tribute to the original king of rock 'n' roll; and, from 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday, the stage will host Cylas Rocks.

But that's certainly not all. The Western Heritage Stage, next to the covered arena on the eastern end of the grounds, will showcase live music each day; scattered throughout the lineup will be cowboy poetry and each day opens

with a jam session.

For a list of entertainers and performance times, visit www.kingcofair.com/music-schedule.

ROUGHSTOCK RODEO, BARREL RACING

The "roughstock" part of the equation means there are three events — bareback riding, saddle bronc riding and bull riding. As usual, a competitor's score is based both upon the individual and the animal.

The rodeo will begin at 6 p.m. Friday. Tickets are \$15 and also allow fair admission.

Barrel racing also is making a fair return,

sponsored by the King County Horse 4-H Program. Racing begins at 11 a.m. Saturday.

WHAT ELSE?

The Expo Center barns will be filled with youngsters from various 4-H and FFA chapters, along with all their animals. Also, there will be multiple buildings housing all that 4-H members do, which is everything from arts and food to photography and robotics.

Commercial vendors will be tempting fairgoers with their products and food vendors will be whipping up burgers, turkey legs, barbecue, scones and

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Ubax

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until police came, according to the footage. She raised her voice and began talking about the U.S. - Somalia relationship to the children on board, some of whom yelled back at her to leave. The detective wrote that "more than one student reported her saying that Americans were bad people."

Prosecutors wrote in a bail request at the time that Gardheere told fleeing students "they would be responsible if something happened to their classmates."

In audio recordings from the bus, Gardheere told the children: "You need to calm yourselves down 'cause I could have a bomb. Look how loose my clothes are," and that she could also have a gun. She told the children to call their parents, the detective said.

Some students at the back of the bus opened an emergency exit and jumped out of the bus. Gardheere then ordered the students to shut the door and called them "cowards," the detective wrote, with at least one student reporting they were called "white cowards."

The entire incident lasted around 13 minutes. Around 7:41 a.m., a deputy arrived and took her off the bus. Her last words in the recording — spoken to the students as she walks off the bus — aren't completely audible, but appear to be "Sorry. I apologize."

Gardheere initially faced felony charges, but ultimately pleaded guilty to two counts of misdemeanor harassment.

When she boarded the bus, Gardheere said, she was in the middle of a mental breakdown, having gone a week without getting any decent sleep prior to that

morning, and she said she can't recall much of what she said or did during the incident.

Gardheere knows her thought process at the time "(did) not make sense," and said she was not proud of herself after returning to her senses.

"I left the house that morning — my mind blank, or whatever it was — after not sleeping for a long time," Gardheere said. "And just walked to the bus stop ... in my mind trying to figure out a place where I could be safe, which is crazy."

That place, she figured at the time, was in a jail. It was an irrational and self-destructive plan, but it worked. Gardheere spent two or three days after the incident in jail, she said.

Gardheere told the Seattle Weekly in 2010 that she'd been hospitalized for mental illness, including postpartum depression, after giving birth to her oldest son three years prior.

Her mental state worsened after a traumatizing incident during a visit to Dubai in 2008, and while trying to report the incident, she said she was beaten up by police.

"I'm thinking in my head, 'what can I say or do that will get you taken to jail instead of a mental institute?'" Gardheere told Seattle Weekly in 2010.

Something that Monday finally snapped, she said, and she experienced a break from her own rational decision-making.

"Breakdown, crisis, whatever it was — normally how I describe it to folks is: It's like I'm watching myself, watching this person saying stuff," Gardheere told the Courier-Herald.

Renewed scrutiny

Gardheere has faced criticism in part over how she's characterized the incident.

She told the Seattle Weekly and the Courier-Herald that she'd sought jail out in the first place.

But Gardheere said in an interview with the South Seattle Emerald in June 2021 that she'd been "criminalized" for her breakdown and went on to criticize more generally the "failed strategies" used in policing and incarceration in the United States.

"When people have mental health breakdowns ... they should not go to jail," Gardheere said. "There should be other places where people are taken to and helped. That's what I meant by that. I think our criminal justice system disproportionately impacts people that look like me, and my kids. I'm not saying this to excuse what, knowingly or unknowingly, I did that day. But I pleaded guilty. I took responsibility for it. I did community service, paid the fines."

On the day the Fox News story ran, Gardheere woke up to a swarm of activity on her social media accounts. She had plans in Tacoma with her family that morning, so she removed Twitter from her phone, checked in with a campaign consultant and went on with her day.

Her campaign team was concerned for Gardheere's safety, but Gardheere initially felt the vitriol was simply a "distraction" from her campaign fueled by right-wing media.

Her attitude changed when one of those callers got through to her daughter, who was playing with Gardheere's phone, and started screaming at the girl. Gardheere met with her team afterward to set out a safety plan and took her children to stay with her mom for a weekend.

"Send that terrorist n—r back to her f—g country in a plastic bag," one caller said in a

voicemail she shared with the Courier-Herald.

Gardheere said at one point, she was "pissed off" by how she, a Black Muslim woman, was painted as racial and un-American.

"I've been here for 25 years," Gardheere said. "I went to high school here. ... You don't get to paint me as un-American. I'm as American as anyone in this country, anybody in this race, anybody in this city, this district."

But how does that square with her comments about "white cowards" and ranting about the U.S.? Gardheere said her statements that day don't reveal any internal bias or hatred.

"I said a lot of stuff," Gardheere said. "(I might tell) my husband 'You're an idiot.' Does that mean that I believe he was an idiot? ... You're having a breakdown, and you don't know where it came from. I do not have any bias toward any race, religion, group of people."

And she doesn't hate America, Gardheere said.

"America is one of the only places that has been my home," she said. "I've lived here 25 years. I got an amazing education. My children were born here ... and honestly, I believe I'm more American than I am Somali. When I go there ... they will tell me 'You're talking like an American.'"

Gardheere added that her family, friends, and the people she goes camping with are "white, Asian, every color."

More than a decade later, Gardheere, unsurprisingly, doesn't like revisiting that January 2010 day. But she said it's been necessary for her to heal, process her own trauma and better understand the mental health crises that others go through.

"I have to go there with my therapist," Gardheere said. "I had to go there with my lawyer. ... We're all a work in progress. You have to be better than the person you were yesterday."

Voters may still be concerned about whether, given her actions that day, Gardheere is a good fit for office. Along with working through the internal pain that caused her breakdown, Gardheere said she's also built personal strength and a system to prevent another crisis.

"For me, it's recognizing those signs," Gardheere said. "The first phone call I make when I don't sleep for 48 hours is my doctor ... and (I'm) surrounding myself with amazing, supportive



PHOTO BY ALEX BRUELL/SOUND PUBLISHING

Ubax Gardheere, 2021 candidate for the 9th District seat of the Metropolitan King County Council, poses for a photo at Cedar River Park in Renton.

folks. ... I became a single mom in August 2011. Ten years, I've not only been raising three kids by myself, but I've been really impacting systems in a huge way."

Her mom is one of those supportive folks — someone she can count on to take care of the kids for a day or two if Gardheere, stressed by work and pandemic isolation, needs time for herself. And she said she takes solace in meditation, her faith and therapy, which she said will be a continuous process.

Race for the 9th District

Rather than discourage her, the 2010 incident and Gardheere's journey in bolstering her mental health contributed to her decision to run for King County Council, she said.

Gardheere has seen close friends die by suicide after suffering isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. "As a country, and as a state, and as a county, we are collectively struggling" from a lack of housing, economic mobility and other struggles that are front-and-center in the council race, she said, and that puts pressure on each person's mental health.

Gardheere faces three other candidates in the race for the District 9 seat on the King County Metropolitan Council, which covers parts of Bellevue, Kent, Renton, and all of Newcastle, Maple Valley, Covington, Black Diamond and Enumclaw, as well as a large amount of unincorporated southeast King County. Gardheere is confident in her campaign and talks about "when I win," not "if I win."

But she faces an uphill battle in the race — and advancing past the primary will surely put more of a spotlight on her.

District 9 is one of the most conservative districts in the county, and four-term

Republican incumbent Reagan Dunn has won each of his elections by 15 or more percentage points. Gardheere has also raised the least campaign contributions of the candidates, according to state Public Disclosure Commission filings.

Dunn said that, serious as Gardheere's actions were that day, she deserves compassion.

"The children on the bus were terrified, but it was also a long time ago, and I think we need to have compassion for people that suffer from any kind of behavioral health challenge," Dunn said. "That is why I think it's important that it be taken in the context of something that happened 11 years ago. We should be looking at what's happened in the intervening years. I think she still has the opportunity to use her voice to advocate for those who suffer from postpartum depression."

Dunn said he sees a connection between Gardheere's breakdown and his own well-publicized 2014 DUI that landed him on the front page of the local section of The Seattle Times. Dunn, who had his last drink in 2017, has sought to use his public battle with alcoholism to educate and share resources with others, like in a conference on addiction disorders he organized last April.

"I've seen people make mistakes in their life ... and for me, a recovering alcoholic, with years of sobriety, I have developed an enormous compassion for those who have behavioral health challenges," Dunn said. "I just don't believe that you can judge somebody based on something that happened in the past and something that they're working on. I'm just not going to go down the road of attacking somebody for one of these one-off or two-off situations."

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