

The Leader

September 15, 2021
Issue 37 / Vol. 132

IN DEPTH • IN TOUCH • INDEPENDENT • SINCE 1889

\$1.50

TREES TO COME DOWN A5 • WORLD OF WHALES A24 • FARM TOUR B6-B7

AN UNIMAGINABLE LOSS

McDonald's 'mom' to a greater community dies of COVID



The three Hartzell siblings, Tim, Kyaira, and Matthew, met at East Beach recently to discuss arrangements for the mother. Daughter Kyaira holds the urn containing their mother's ashes. *Leader photo by Laura Jean Schneider*

Siblings plead with the public to help save lives

LAURA JEAN SCHNEIDER
LJSCHNEIDER@PTLEADER.COM

Tim Hartzell tried to talk his mother into getting vaccinated for COVID.

He'd done it, he argued, it was safe. But 59-year-old Cindi Anne Harper wasn't convinced. Neither were her two other children, Kyaira and Matthew Hartzell. With fear and rumors circulating, the siblings figured they'd take their chances.

Now, all three believe the vaccine would have saved their mother's life.

When two of Harper's co-workers tested positive for COVID, she tested, too, thinking she might be mildly symptomatic. After receiving a positive result on Thursday, Aug. 26, she sequestered herself at her

house in Port Hadlock, where she lived with 35-year-old Tim (who tested negative) and her three cats.

According to the Hartzell siblings, their mother said the first few days felt like a flu. By Sunday night, Harper was feeling fatigued enough to ask Tim to pick up a shower chair so she could bathe without having to stand. By the time he arrived home from work the evening of Monday, Aug. 30, she couldn't walk from her bedroom to the front door 30 feet away.

When her son asked if she wanted him to call an ambulance, she said yes.

At around 8 p.m., she was taken via wheelchair to the ambulance.

Her oxygen levels were so low that they immediately administered oxygen. With

COVID precautions in place, Tim wasn't able to ride with his mother during the transport to Jefferson Healthcare. That night was the last time he'd see his mother.

A RAPID PROGRESSION

The following morning, Tuesday, Aug. 31, his sister, 34-year-old Kyaira, called the hospital for an update at 11 a.m. only to be told that Harper's oxygen levels and heart rate were dropping so rapidly that she was being airlifted to Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle.

The situation seemed surreal to the siblings.

Kyaira's fiance' and 5-year-old son were recovering from contracting COVID two weeks previous, but it had seemed more like

a flu than anything to really worry about.

In Oregon, her brother Matthew, the baby of the Hartzell family, was just returning to the job after recovering from COVID himself. They'd all pulled through just fine.

And their mother was tough.

Two years previous, Harper had a heart attack on the job at the Port Townsend McDonald's, where she worked for 17 years. She took an aspirin and finished her shift, not about to leave anyone shorthanded. It wasn't until she'd had heart surgery in Seattle that her kids discovered that she'd been in jeopardy.

see **LIVES**, Page A22

A ferry-tale wedding: It's never too late to find true love

LAURA JEAN SCHNEIDER
AND JESSICA HERON
LJSCHNEIDER@PTLEADER.COM.

What do seedless watermelon and cottage cheese have in common?

Well, Alan Johanson and Carol Heimgartner, of course. It's one of the more nuanced connections in their relationship, but telling nonetheless.

With past relationships informing what they wanted in their futures, both had signed up on the matchmaking site Silver Singles last November, ready for love.

And they found it.

On Thursday, Sept. 9, nearly 10 months and over 60 ferry rides later, they walked on the ferry together, riding from Port Townsend to Coupeville as singles, and back to Port Townsend as a married couple.

A NAUTICAL TIE

For Heimgartner, who lives in Coupeville, it was just a single day after posting her profile that

Johanson, who lives on Middlepoint Road, sent her a message. Within the week, she made the bold step of deactivating her dating account, feeling confident about their connection. She loved how he'd inquired on where her profile photos were taken, not just how she appeared in them.

And Johanson was relieved to see a woman situated in multiple landscapes, from the desert of the Southwest to Rome to the Grand Canyon. Their common love of travel pulled them toward each other, first via text message and email, and then literally, via the Port Townsend-Coupeville ferry to meet each other face-to-face.

"The only single thing that allowed us to have a relationship was the ferry," Heimgartner said.

Eventually, they'd decide that there was no more appropriate place to tie the knot.

FALLING IN LOVE, AGAIN

When Johanson picked Heimgartner up at the ferry terminal for their first masked

see **LOVE**, Page A23



After spending so much time aboard the Port Townsend-Coupeville ferry during their courtship, Alan Johanson and Carol Heimgartner decided to get married on the boat last week. *Photo courtesy of Jessica Heron Images*

inside
this issue...

40
pages

A: FRONT
Opinion Forum.....A7-A8
Jefferson County Sheriff's Log A9
Port Townsend Police Log A12
SportsA15-A18
JeffCo - East to West..... A19

B: This WEEK & CLASSIFIEDS
Arts & Entertainment B1-B8
Community CalendarB3
Classifieds & Legal NoticesB12-B15

INSERTS: Michaels

ptleader.com



Lives: Family pleads with public to take COVID seriously

continued from Page A1

NO TIME FOR GOODBYES

It had been over two years since Matthew Hartzell had last spoken to his mother, not because of any rift, but because he wanted to spend time in Oregon with his father, who had separated from Harper when Matthew was 9. When he got off work Tuesday at 1:45 p.m., his father already had the news. He drove his son to the Medford Airport and sent him home.

Kyaira had spoken to Harper the night before her brother Tim picked up the shower chair, never guessing it would be the last time she'd hear her mother's voice.

"Take a bath," she'd told her mom. "I love you."

It was Tim who received a call after 1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 31 from Virginia Mason Hospital. His mother's organs were shutting down. Medics had performed an emergency intubation to try and intubate her, but her heart had stopped.

Ten minutes of CPR brought her back.

Her kidneys were failing, the doctor said. Would Tim give medics permission to start dialysis after they attempted to intubate Harper

Two more JeffCo residents die from COVID-19

BRIAN KELLY
BKELLY@PTLEADER.COM

Two more Jefferson County residents have died from COVID-19, public health officials announced Friday.

COVID-19 has taken its deadliest toll over the past week in the county, with nine deaths reported in the past eight days.

Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Allison Berry said the deceased were two men in their 70s who were fully vaccinated.

They died as a result of an outbreak in a long-term care facility.

"Unfortunately those in long-term care are just so vulnerable and cannot fully respond to their vaccine," Berry

said in an email to The Leader.

The disease has claimed the lives of 13 residents in Jefferson County since the start of the pandemic.

The five COVID deaths reported Thursday also involved fully vaccinated residents at long-term care facilities.

The count of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the county also rose, by 14, from 841 cases Thursday to 855 Friday.

Five positive COVID test results were reported in Port Townsend, and nine in the mid-county area.

Ten of the new infections involved females; the other four involved males.

Three residents under the age of 12 were infected, along with three

residents in their 20s, five residents in their 30s, one resident in their 50s, and two residents in their 60s.

A total of 102 test results are still pending, according to Jefferson County Public Health.

There have been 29,668 tests for COVID-19 in Jefferson County since the start of the pandemic, and 28,934 have resulted in negative results.

New test results from 94 residents were received Friday.

In Jefferson County, 606 people have recovered from COVID-19 and 55 people have been hospitalized for the disease. (People are considered "recovered" at 28 days from the onset of symptoms if they are alive and not hospitalized, according to the state Department of Health.)

for a second time?

He said yes.

After the second attempt, Harper's heart stopped. Medics were unable to resuscitate her.

In a matter of six days, the mother of three was gone.

ONE OF A KIND

"She touched everybody's heart," Kyaira said from the picnic shelter at East Beach where she and her brothers

had gathered.

"She was the only person I could talk to about anything."

She isn't the only one who feels that way. Kyaira has received more than 200 messages on social media from complete strangers whose lives were touched by Harper, a customer favorite at the local McDonald's. Her mom would sneak toys to children, give bacon to a favorite pup, and was dedicated to her job. While her kids often urged her to do something else — she had an associate's degree — Harper didn't want to risk sacrificing her hours.

The siblings said that Harper had grown up with

an alcoholic father, and was often uprooted when homes or vehicles were repossessed or threatened by his behavior. When Harper's mother died right after she graduated high school in California, she headed to Washington where she met the father of her children.

Harper single-parented the three kids while working and studying nursing. After being a caregiver for many years, she found a niche interacting with the community at McDonald's.

"She really loved people," said Tim.

"She was a mom to everyone," said Kyaira. "She

always knew exactly what to say."

Harper liked reading, jewelry, sparkly trinkets, polished white beach stones, and flowers. She kept the hummingbird feeder at her house full. Her three cats would sleep under the covers with her every night. Her red Mustang convertible provided just the right amount of sass and indulgence for someone who'd spent so much of her life helping others.

The siblings are considering memorial tattoos. Ideas materialized as they discussed options, but all agreed on two icons: a book with a yellow rose, her favorite

flower.

AN UNIMAGINABLE LOSS

The Hartzells think that a COVID shot could have saved their mother's life.

After her passing, both Kyaira and Matthew began the vaccination process.

While she was originally skeptical about the vaccine, Kyaira now feels that anti-vaxxers are "feeding into their fear."

"Even if you get the side effects," she said, "get it for everybody else."

It's not known how Harper contracted the virus, but Tim stated many drive-up customers at McDonald's were not masking up.

A manager for most of her career at McDonald's, their mother had worked the window.

"I'm incredibly angry about people who don't want to wear their masks," he said.

As the first one in his family to be fully vaccinated, in April of this year, Tim urges people to consider the shot.

"No one else should have to suffer like this. It literally feels like your heart has been ripped out," he said.

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Harper would have turned 60 on Sept. 12.

"I wanted to have a nice big family barbecue," Kyaira said.

Tim stated that he hadn't yet decided what he'd be

see **LIVES**, Page A23

Enjoy Our Contactless Car Wash Experience!

thecarwash

SAVE MONEY

EARN SPECIAL REWARDS

JOIN OUR WASH CLUB

Download Our Mobile App Today!
Text **THE CAR WASH** to
575-222-2201

Download on the App Store

Get it on Google play

LOTS OF WAYS TO EARN FREE CAR WASHES & SAVE MONEY!

\$1,000 GUARANTEED

scholarship for newly enrolled students in healthcare programs this fall

Enroll at pencol.edu/healthcare

PENINSULA COLLEGE

Loving care for your little one!

Lulu's B&B for Dogs

Still here to care for your pet in a clean and safe manner

Serving Port Townsend for 20 years!

360-379-5248 or 360-301-5151
www.lulusfordogs.com

Come Sew

CHANGE IS COMING TO

COME SEW

We are now operating as a Private Studio
Wednesday - Saturday 1pm - 5pm

- FREE OF CHARGE -

Beginning Lessons or Intermediate Coaching by volunteer staff

- FREE OF CHARGE -

Use the studio space to hold your own workshops or lessons

- FREE OF CHARGE -

We're making these changes for all the reasons why we opened this studio — to teach the young, get beginners started, provide the means for anyone to have access to sewing equipment, and promote a more ecologically friendly "Slow Fashion" lifestyle.

- Anita and Mike Edwards, Owners of Come Sew Studio

COME SEW 810 Water Street, Suite 2, Port Townsend
www.comesew.com • 360-344-2079

Love: Ferry to Whidbey Island becomes The Love Boat

continued from Page A1

face-to-masked-face moment, it immediately felt comfortable to both of them.

Johanson, whose personal motto is "Silliness is next to godliness," made a quirky joke about checking for COVID fever with a rectal thermometer, and it didn't phase her a bit.

She wrote in her notes to their wedding officiant, "We were probably a couple from that first meeting."

Both individuals have been married before, and each have children from past relationships.

This time around, they feel the peripheral issues that may have stopped them from getting closer in the past just aren't there anymore. Heimgartner credits their initial correspondence for helping them to see the similarities in each other before honing in on the differences.

So does he. "We slipped easily into sharing what were often intensely personal aspects of our histories, but I'd felt that gentle pull of her warm presence from the first," he penned in a questionnaire for the officiant.

"I fell in love with his

words," Heimgartner wrote in hers.

"The phrasing, the depth of sharing, the timeliness of his responses, his humor, his attachment to certain core beliefs that were similar to mine even though originating from a different religion and political stance."

ALL A-BOAT LOVE

In the past, Heimgartner felt that as a woman, she was supposed to "sit around and wait for the man to make the move."

"I want[ed] to be part of the process this time," she said.

Perhaps to her chagrin at times, she was very much included.

Not just in the fun stuff, like mountain biking with Johanson or enjoying the scenic beauty of the outdoors together, but in the nitty-gritty of life, too.

Her first personal challenge was facing a literal lifetime of accumulation at Johanson's house. During her first visit, she was "surrounded" by an homage to Don Quixote: A previous partner had collected Quixote art and ephemera to the tune of 500 to 600 items. Packed in alongside Johanson's possessions, art, photography, and treasures from his

international travels, were closets full of his late wife's clothes.

Heimgartner, who considers herself a minimalist, was "appalled" at first.

But as their relationship grew closer, and it became apparent that they would marry, she pitched in to help clear out the house to put it on the market.

In the meantime, Alan injured his shoulder, and she ended up sorting an entire house, directing donations, trips to the landfill, and cleanup. Both partners decided that living in Heimgartner's house makes the most sense for now, although they entertain the thought of building their own home someday. When asked how merging their lives together might look, she said, with love, "He tends toward collecting stuff."

"I did," he said, emphasizing the past tense.

SMOOTH SAILING, MOSTLY

After driving, walking on, and taking bicycles back and forth across the water, the couple decided after getting engaged that they would get married right on the ferry. Everything fell into place within the week leading up to Sept. 9.

While their dream officiant, a ferry captain, wasn't permitted to marry them, they found a justice of the peace and a few witnesses.

After an atmospheric morning, with fog settled thickly in the bay, it burned off and the sun shone bright as they pulled up at the dock at 10:15 a.m.— only to realize they'd forgotten their rings and the marriage license.

But they made their boat, and the ceremony began after all.

The engine was cut just before the "I dos," but the captain waited for that first kiss to blast the horn as the engine roared back to life.

Twenty or so people who had gathered naturally, cheered.

After returning to Port Townsend, the couple signed their marriage license and walked to the top deck of the ferry to enjoy the view and pose for photographs. They sealed the deal with lunch at Sea J's Cafe, a local favorite.

"We felt early on that we wanted to be married," Heimgartner had conveyed in an earlier conversation.

For the first time, she'd said, it had occurred to her "how precious" it would be to be married to this man.



Local couple Alan Johanson and Carol Heimgartner found each other through a dating website for seniors. Ten months later, they were married. Photo courtesy of Jessica Heron Images

"Me, too," Johanson had replied. "Life is full of surprises," Heimgartner said. He refers to their new life as "an ongoing celebration of a life together."

Lives: Family members had all contracted coronavirus



Cindi Harper was beloved by the Port Townsend community. Many knew her from her job at McDonald's, where she worked for nearly 17 years. Photo courtesy of the Hartzell family

continued from Page A22

getting for her. Matthew was quiet.

Tim said a layer of numbness had settled on the trio. The siblings agreed.

The death certificate arrived Wednesday, the same day the siblings met at the beach to share memories.

"The last time I saw her she was happy," Matthew said softly.

"I have every single card she's ever gotten me," said his sister, who estimated

they'd stack up to a 10-inch thick pile.

Tim said that his mother's three cats will continue to live with him at the house in Port Hadlock that he'd shared with his mother.

The siblings wished aloud that folks would start taking COVID seriously.

"It took me losing my mom to realize that my fear is less important than the bigger picture," Kyaira said.

When she recently got the first job, she conquered her own fear of the unknown.

"I did it for mom," she said.

CALL THE EXPERTS ■ ■ **Under Budget & Ahead of Schedule**

KROH 91.1 FM
www.radioofhope.org
The Good News You've Been Looking For!

New Styles to FALL in love with

BLUNDSTONE
BIRKENSTOCK
BORN
DANSKO
SMARTWOOL
PJ SALVAGE
NYDJ
HABITAT
& MORE!

830 Water St.
Port Townsend
360.385.4795
AboutTimeClothing.com