

PAYING TRIBUTE

COVID claims beloved driver

By Gordon Weeks
gordon@masoncounty.com

Among Mason County school bus drivers, James L. McCallister was known as a joker and prankster who was great with kids and took new drivers under his wing.



McCallister

COVID claimed the life of the 58-year-old Elma resident Dec. 4, leaving a sense of profound loss at the Mason County Transportation Cooperative bus barn across the street from Shelton High School.

On Friday, the bus drivers paid

see **DRIVER**, page A-2



Karl Kangas, the bookkeeper for Mason County Transportation Cooperative, shares his feelings for James McCallister on Friday as buses pass Olympic Middle School and Mountain View Elementary. *Journal photo by Gordon Weeks*

Coroner steps down

By Matt Baide
matt@masoncounty.com

After a 16-year career as Mason County coroner, Wes Stockwell resigned from his position Nov. 29.

Stockwell, 63, worked for the Washington State Patrol for 27 years before being appointed the coroner in 2005 after Coroner Martha Reed died of leukemia. Stockwell ran for office in

2006 unopposed and has run four times unopposed for the position.

He has a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in public policy. His experience at WSP prepared him for what he would see on the job.

"I really had no thoughts of doing it, it just seemed like a natural transition to be an

see **CORONER**, page A-11



Mason County Coroner Wes Stockwell sits at his desk. Stockwell resigned Nov. 29 after 16 years with the county. *Journal photo by Matt Baide*

North Mason school thwarts threat, two students arrested

By Matt Baide
matt@masoncounty.com

Two students at Hawkins Middle School have been arrested after being overheard talking about plans to bring guns to school and kill people.

According to the Mason County Sheriff's Office, Hawkins Middle School staff investigated, and the two students involved were placed under emergency expulsion and released to their parents or guardians. Deputies and detectives were notified and interviewed witnesses to the conversation and established probable cause to arrest the two students for suspicion of felony harassment.

Detectives and deputies went to the students' residences. The students were taken into custody without incident and booked into Mason County Juvenile Detention Center in Shelton.

"MCSO commends the quick action by the alert students who contacted adults and notified them of what they had overheard, possibly averting a tragic incident," Chief Deputy of Patrol Operations Ryan Spurling wrote to the *Journal* in an email.

North Mason School District Super-

intendent Dana Rosenbach said students overheard a discussion and reported it immediately. She said staff and administrators took the appropriate actions and imposed the appropriate discipline.

"They did really good work to ensure the safety of students in our school," Rosenbach told the *Journal*. "I'm really glad that everybody did what they did and really proud of our students and staff in how they handled the situation. Everyone did exactly what we'd like to do to ensure the safety of our staff."

According to a news release, students and staff didn't face any immediate danger. The release states procedures are in place to handle such events with little disruption to other students in the building.

"We take all threats seriously and feel it is important to take a moment to speak to your children about the consequences of their actions and words," reads the email. "Please discuss this incident with your children and emphasize the importance of telling school staff or parents if they feel something they heard or read seems threatening to a student or the school. In this way, we are all working together to keep our schools safe."

INSIDE TODAY



8 53263 00111 2

Shelton High robotics team finding success
Page A-10

City plans to replace old water meters
Page A-14

Belfair's HUB recovers following burglary
Page A-45



Above, school bus drivers, from left, Jodene Garrick, D'Lea Elkins and Trish Bennett, wearing bandanas in tribute to James McCallister, prepare to leave the bus barn across the street from Shelton High School on Friday to parade past the district's schools. Below, bus drivers travel past Mountain View Elementary and other Shelton School District schools in honor of McCallister, who died from COVID on Dec. 4. Journal photos by Gordon Weeks

Driver: McCallister was known for his jokes and pranks

continued from page A-1

tribute to their fallen co-worker with a parade of buses that filed past the schools in the Shelton School District. McCallister was known for wearing bandanas on his head, and his colleagues wore them in his honor.

Lori Pantoja, the router and dispatcher for Mason County Transportation Cooperative, said McCallister was "sort of like a father figure at times." He helped teach new drivers and rode along on their first trips.

"He had a heart of gold, a big old teddy bear," Pantoja said. "He had everyone in an uproar, constantly. We had to close the windows because we were all laughing so hard."

The Army veteran drove students in the Pioneer School District before transporting Shelton students beginning in 2012.

"He loved his kids," Pantoja said. "He cared for the kids as if they were his own. He was big on trips,



because his daughters were involved in dance."

McCallister also liked to transport the wrestling team to away games so he could root for them, she said.

McCallister's route started at 4:20

a.m. at Hama Hama Oysters, then he drove up to Lake Cushman, and then picked students up at the Lucky Dog Casino.

The pandemic has created bus driver shortages in school districts.

When he wasn't driving, McCallister slept in his Volt in the parking lot so he could be available to fill in on other routes, Pantoja said.

Jess Mosley, a bus driver since 2017, said McCallister's death casts "a long shadow."

"He became that positive role model every day," he said. "He was optimistic, pleasant to be around."

McCallister was skilled de-escalating conflicts on his bus, and on the buses of others, Mosley said.

"He was really good working with kids," he said.

At the bus barn, McCallister was known for his jokes, and for shaking up pop cans and bottles and laughing at the ensuing spray, said driver Patty Laserinko.

"You never left your soda bottle unattended," she said.

McCallister leaves behind four children, including daughters who attend CHOICE High School and Pioneer Middle School.



Dr. Brett Will



Dr. Katherine Seibert



Dr. Stephen Edwards



Come see why everyone is smiling!

We provide implants, oral surgery, root canals, veneers, crowns, bridges and more. Have your dental work done right here in Shelton and save the driving for the weekend.

360-426-8401 • www.sheltondentalcenter.com • 1829 Jefferson St, Shelton

NOW HIRING EXPERIENCED ROOFERS!!

FREE Estimates

The ROOF DOCTOR

ZERO DOWN, FINANCING AVAILABLE (o.a.c.)

(360) 427-8611

Licensed and Bonded

ROOFDI*168N8

SD SENIOR DISCOUNT

BBB

Your Full Service Roofer Since 1959!
The One Doctor That Still Makes House Calls!
1131 W. Kamille Lane
Just off Highway 101

Also Serving: Olympia • Lacey • Tumwater • Tenino • Yelm • Tacoma • Montesano
Aberdeen • McKenna • Gig Harbor • Centralia • Chehalis • Longview • Vancouver • Roy