



Merry Christmas

ANACORTES AMERICAN

QUALITY NEWS, LOCALLY SOURCED

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WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2021

\$1.50

FESTIVE FROSTING



PHOTOS BY BRIANA ALZOLA

Using milk cartons as a base, frosting and graham crackers as the main building materials and a variety of other snacks as decorations, fifth-graders at Fidalgo Elementary School built and decorated houses as part of a school holiday tradition Friday, Dec. 17. The fun, which led to kids coming up with creative and delicious additions to their homes, coincided with the school's pajama day and the last day before winter break. Pictured are Liberty Guffey (above), Lyam Chamberlain (below left) and Norma Black.



This Anacortesian is on 'Jeopardy!'

Who is Josette Curtis?

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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Josette Curtis recently saw one of her lifelong dreams come true.

For her, that meant standing on a stage in Los Angeles, holding a buzzer and participating in "Jeopardy!," a show she has watched since she was a child.

She had watched it every night after dinner with her family. She married Jack Curtis, and they started watching it frequently. They made it a part of their family, watching it each night with son Caleb.

Now, Josette Curtis is going to go from an audience member to a contestant.

"I think the best part is that the staff genuinely wanted everyone there



CONTRIBUTED / JEOPARDY PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Josette Curtis stands with current "Jeopardy!" host Ken Jennings during her recent taping of the show. Does Curtis make it to the next round?

See Jeopardy, page A4

Hospital bracing for spike in virus

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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Even as COVID-19 cases with the new omicron variant are popping up in Skagit County, total virus cases continued dropping this past week.

Skagit County Public Health reported 161 new cases of COVID-19 for the seven-day period running Dec. 12 to Dec. 18.

It marked the fewest new cases for a seven-day, Sunday-through-Saturday period since Aug. 1-7, when 114 new cases were reported.

It was also the fourth consecutive week with fewer than 300 new cases, following a streak of 15 consecutive weeks with 300 or more.

Island Hospital, staff saw 30 new cases between Monday, Dec. 13, and Monday, Dec. 20.

As of Monday, Dec. 20, there were two positive COVID-19 patients admitted at Island Hos-

pital, but the hospital saw no new deaths last week.

Also as of Monday, Skagit County has had 148 COVID-19 deaths and 785 hospitalizations throughout the pandemic.

The hospital is preparing for a predicted spike in the next week or two, related to omicron, hospital spokesperson Laura Moroney said.

The highly contagious omicron variant has been identified in three county residents, and it will continue to spread through the community, according to a news release from county Health Officer Howard Leibrand.

The three cases are not connected and represent only the tip of the iceberg, Leibrand said.

He estimates it already could represent 10% to 20% of the county's active cases.

"Until we know more about omicron, every

See Virus, page A4

City moving forward with \$19M sewer outfall project

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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The City of Anacortes is moving forward with its sewer outfall relocation project, which will provide a new route for the outfall, repair damaged equipment and mean a new park area for Anacortes.

The City Council approved the shoreline substantial development permit and shoreline conditional-use permit at its Dec. 20 meeting.

The meeting contained the second half of a closed record hearing started Dec. 13. The council asked staff to go back and clarify some parts of the permits surrounding a green space pocket park being put in at U Avenue as part of the outfall project.

The park must be completed within 12 months of the outfall relocation completion, according to the approved version of the permits.

The outfall project is expected to cost roughly \$19.5 million and improve stormwater flow from major storm events and keep untreated wastewater from being discharged into the

Guemes Channel. The money is expected to come from grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The city's stormwater and wastewater systems are largely separate. Stormwater is discharged directly into surrounding water without treatment.

The new outfall pipe will travel from the Wastewater Treatment Plant down T Avenue, one block east on Third Street, down U Avenue and out into the Guemes Channel, according to Planning Manager Libby Grage.

The total length is more than 2,660 feet, she said.

The pipe will extend 1,631 feet out into the Guemes Channel and end with an 86-foot diffuser, Grage said.

She went over the diameter and type of pipes during the hearing, as well as taking questions from the council.

The old outfall will be decommissioned after the

See Outfall, page A4





See more Christmas photos inside

YourFidalgo B1



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READY! SET! HO HO HO!



PHOTOS BY BRIANA ALZOLA / ANACORTES AMERICAN

The inaugural Anacortes Santa Run sent 200 Santas racing into the streets of Anacortes on Saturday, Dec. 11. The event also featured two Anacortes High School cross country team elves who took off five minutes after the racing Santas. Anyone finishing faster than the elves was entered to win a prize.



Mayor's salary going up in 2022

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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The City of Anacortes is raising the mayor's salary and changing the pay schedule as of 2022.

The new mayor of Anacortes will get a base wage of \$124,000. That number will go up each year with a cost-of-living increase based on the consumer price index.

The new wage is about \$8,000 more than Mayor Laurie Gere currently makes in the last year of her second term. The cost of living increase this year would have been about \$6,000, meaning next year's salary would have been about \$122,000 even if the pay schedule had not been restructured, according to city Director of Administrative Services Emily Schuh.

Since 2005, the mayor has been paid on an eight-step salary schedule. Anacortes is the only city in Washington to have that sort of pay scale, Schuh said.

So when Matt Miller takes over as mayor in January, he would have started back at step one, which is a little more than \$100,000.

Gere said she and Schuh and a committee have been talking about

the salary, which they did not feel was right for the job here. When looking at other area mayors, Gere makes more, but she makes less than many city administrators, Schuh said. The City of Anacortes does not have an administrator, so much of that day-to-day work falls to the mayor.

The new pay rate reflects that workload and brings the position to be comparable with other CEO positions in this region, Gere said.

A rate too low could also dissuade some candidates from applying, Schuh said.

Many council members spoke in favor of abolishing the step-system, which they said doesn't really work.

After discussing the cost-of-living increases, they also agreed to the new number set forth by the city ordinance.

Because it is based on the cost of living and not a random number, Moulton said she can support it more. The spending needs to be justified, especially as the city looks for funding for other city positions, she said.

All council members voted for the increase, except for Miller, who abstained from the vote.

Celebrate the Season gala, holiday fair bring cheer

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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Two weekends full of holiday cheer mean plenty of candy-coated gingerbread houses and letters addressed to Santa. They also mean more than \$100,000 in funding for the mental health of children in Anacortes.

The ninth annual Celebrate the Season, hosted by the Anacortes Schools Foundation, took on a slightly different format this year.

Normally all in one weekend, organizers split up its events this year to help spread the cheer and potentially reduce crowds.

First, a gala and auction included 150 people in person and many more attending virtually. It's the foundation's biggest fundraiser of the year and helps provide the money for many programs dedicated to Anacortes students.



BRIANA ALZOLA / ANACORTES AMERICAN

A group of children and their families take part in making crafts as part of the Celebrate the Season Holiday Fair on Dec. 12.

City passes final budget for new year

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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After weeks of discussion, the Anacortes City Council on Monday approved its yearly budget and Capital Facilities Plan, which looks at its major projects for the next five years.

The \$108.6 million budget is roughly \$35 million more than the 2021 budget, mostly due to \$22.5 million more in the sewer fund to replace a damaged sewer outfall system, \$10 million more in the general fund for other projects and \$1 million more for street maintenance.

The budget includes funding for a new ladder truck for the Fire Department and more than \$100,000 to cover wages and benefits for an additional police officer.

As the council passed the budget, several members also asked for budget configuration going into the next year.

The council sees each piece as it comes, and while some expenses seem small, they add

See Budget, page A6



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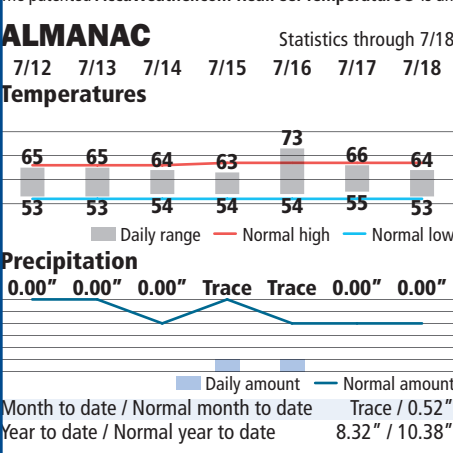
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ANACORTES WEATHER

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WEDNESDAY	WED. NIGHT	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
70 Mostly sunny	52 Clear to partly cloudy	69 Mostly sunny	70 Mostly sunny and pleasant	71 Partly sunny and pleasant	77 Sunny	76 Partly sunny	77 Sunshine
RealFeel: 75	RealFeel: 50	RealFeel: 74/51	RealFeel: 75/50	RealFeel: 79/50	RealFeel: 78/50	RealFeel: 78/48	RealFeel: 77/52

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DAILY CONDITIONS

Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.
8	8	8	8	8	8	8

The higher the AccuWeather UV Index number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection. 0-2: Low, 3-5: Moderate, 6-7: High, 8-10: Very high, 11+: Extreme

Comfort Index™

10	10	10	10	10	10	10
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A rating of 10 feels very comfortable while a rating of 0 feels very uncomfortable.

Boating forecast

9	9	9	9	8	8	9
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0-2: Poor; 3-4: Fair; 5-6: Good; 7-8: Very Good; 9-10: Excellent.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: 1 inch of rain on 1 square mile would fill how many bath tubs?
A: Over half a million.

SOLUNAR TABLE

	Major	Minor	Major	Minor
Wed.	7:47 a.m.	1:33 a.m.	8:15 p.m.	2:01 p.m.
Thu.	8:38 a.m.	2:23 a.m.	9:08 p.m.	2:53 p.m.
Fri.	9:32 a.m.	3:17 a.m.	10:03 p.m.	3:48 p.m.
Sat.	10:29 a.m.	4:13 a.m.	11:01 p.m.	4:45 p.m.
Sun.	11:28 a.m.	5:13 a.m.	11:59 p.m.	5:44 p.m.
Mon.	12:28 p.m.	6:13 a.m.	---	6:42 p.m.
Tue.	12:59 a.m.	7:13 a.m.	1:26 p.m.	7:40 p.m.

The solunar period indicates peak feeding times for fish and game.

SUN AND MOON

	Sunrise	Sunset	Moonrise	Moonsset
Wed.	5:32 a.m.	9:02 p.m.	7:30 p.m.	2:34 a.m.
Thu.	5:33 a.m.	9:01 p.m.	8:34 p.m.	3:28 a.m.
Fri.	5:34 a.m.	9:00 p.m.	9:24 p.m.	4:35 a.m.
Sat.	5:35 a.m.	8:58 p.m.	10:01 p.m.	5:51 a.m.
Sun.	5:36 a.m.	8:57 p.m.	10:29 p.m.	7:11 a.m.
Mon.	5:38 a.m.	8:56 p.m.	10:52 p.m.	8:29 a.m.
Tue.	5:39 a.m.	8:55 p.m.	11:11 p.m.	9:43 a.m.

Full	Last	New	First
Jul 23	Jul 31	Aug 8	Aug 15

Forecasts and graphics provided by AccuWeather, Inc. ©2021

Officials: Area deer need to social distance, too

BY QUESTEN INGHAM qingham@goanacortes.com

A disease afflicting deer that was confirmed to be spreading in the San Juan Islands last month may now be infecting deer on Whidbey Island, leading the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to advise residents against feeding deer in the hopes of preventing spread to the mainland.

The adenovirus hemorrhagic disease (AHD) is highly contagious among deer and can be fatal, according to Fish and Wildlife. Deer with AHD present symptoms such as open mouth breathing, drooling, weakness and diarrhea. Fawns are most susceptible to the illness. Much like the social distancing measures in humans to combat the spread of COVID-19 and the advisory against

feeding birds earlier this year to prevent the spread of salmonellosis, this advisory to stop feeding deer was put in place to prevent congregation of deer and ultimately the transmission of AHD. There are no known cures or treatments for the disease, which spreads through close contact. "For that reason we ask people not to concentrate deer by providing

feed or water for them," Dr. Kristin Mansfield, Fish and Wildlife veterinarian said in a news release. "That is the best way we can help minimize the spread of this disease." The state's first confirmed cases were announced in early June, with Fish and Wildlife reporting that it had caused deaths on San Juan and Orcas islands. Since then, the department has received reports

of "hundreds of cases, including on Blakely, Henry, Lopez, Orcas, San Juan, Shaw, and Stuart islands." It has found "cases consistent with the disease" on Whidbey Island, including deer found dead near Oak Harbor, though Sam Montgomery, a Fish and Wildlife spokesperson, told the Anacortes American that the test results for the deer found on Whidbey Island are still pending.

Before this year, the last known cases in the state were in 2017, during an outbreak near Goldendale. In the fall of 2020, the disease was confirmed on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Visibly sick, injured or dead deer as well as other wildlife can be reported to Fish and Wildlife at survey123.arcgis.com/share/a384e90f-69744f2e846135a-9ce80027f.

Baseball

Continued from page B1

Tor Stratton said he saw a lot of improvement this year. Skylar Dahlin attributed a lot of that to the communication on the team.

He said he loves playing baseball because it's an "opportunity to make friends" and to get better at the sport.

After the team's victories at the district tournament, Skylar said he was looking forward to battling tougher teams at state.

Tyler Olson said it's all about the nicknames. Each player has his own nickname, which the team uses while encouraging each other on the field.

Majors

The majors team battled through its district tournament to make it to state this year. The team played five days in a row, Coleman said.

First, it fell to Burlington-Edison in the double-elimination bracket.

Then, it won its next two games to make it to the final round, again facing Burlington-Edi-

son. Anacortes won, but that meant only one loss for the Burlington-Edison team. In a double-elimination bracket, that meant playing again, Coleman said.

So Burlington-Edison and Anacortes players faced off again the next day, with Anacortes coming out victorious and earning the place at state.

The team that competed was the all-star team, Coleman said. The managers from the different majors teams got together after the regular season and nominated players for the all-stars team to compete at districts and now at state.

Normally, the Little League team is run concurrently with Cal Ripken, another baseball league for the same age range. This year, the Anacortes teams all did Little League because it announced first it would be returning to play this spring, Olson said.

Greyson Coleman, 12, is one of the players on the team.

"We think we can make it," he said of his team's chances at state.

Being back on the field this year is really exciting after last year was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he said.

Gavin Byer, 12, has

been hitting really well this season, continually improving.

Getting to state "felt really good," he said.

"I've learned a lot," he said. "This is a fun game to play as a team."

Lucas Cooper, 11, said this season has gone well.

"I like how we've been playing," he said.

As an extra challenge this year, Lucas's dad has been on military deployment for the entire of the season. He got home last week, in time for state, Lucas said.

Minors

The minors team is heading to Woodinville to start state play Saturday.

The all-star team was made up of players nominated by coaches from the various teams on the minor level, Volkman said.

This year, because some leagues did not field all-star teams, the minors team went straight to state without playing at the district level.

The kids are excited to compete, because they have just been practicing for weeks now, apart from one scrimmage game in June, Volkman said.

Because of the pandemic, kids who should

be building upon skills already established are just learning, he said.

Other kids are revisiting skills they learned two years ago.

"It's been really interesting coaching these kids," Volkman said. "A big thing is how much fun they had out on the diamond."

Playing a competitive sport adds structure to the day of these students who have seen a lot of changes over the last year, he said.

"My favorite thing about it is seeing the faces of each player when they succeed in a good play, like getting a hit or an out," Volkman

said. "They realize that they are able to do that."

Jakob Volkman, 10, said he likes playing sports a lot and this year he is getting better and better at hitting.

"I've never gotten to do state," he said. "We got so close two years ago but we didn't make it."

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