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# LA CONNER WEEKLY NEWS

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## Town seeks planning grant for south end redevelopment

By Ken Stern

Last week the Town of La Conner applied for a \$30,000 grant to the state of Washington for creating a “Subarea Plan” for redevelopment of the South Downtown Industrial Area, the area bordered roughly by Town Hall on Commercial Street to Pioneer Park and from the Swinomish Channel to South Third Street.

In its application, the Town’s “vision” recognizes the significance of this area for “reasons of heritage, environment, economics, employment, and the preservation, protection and enhancement of natural and cultural resources.”

In its May 20 public hearing notice, the Town stated, “a subarea plan would lead to appropriate redevelopment of the area, resulting in

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## Youth ballfield may slide into new home at La Conner schools

By Bill Reynolds

Efforts to find an alternative to historic Hedlin’s Ballfield as a local youth sports venue have apparently made it to first base.

The La Conner School District will provide a secondary diamond between Whittaker Field and the high school varsity softball field for youth sports next year, several sources have told the Weekly News.

“The field is fenced along the foul lines and there are dugouts,” said outgoing La Conner Schools Superintendent Rich Stewart, who discussed relocation plans with youth sports spokesperson Reb Broker recently.

“What we have indicated to Reb,” Stewart added, “is there is the diamond between the softball field and track that is available. We will need to work around the track season as the discus throw is located in that area as well.”

Town officials have also participated in talks concerning both short-term and long-range plans for a new youth sports site.

The relocation is necessary due to pending conversion of the nearly two-acre Hedlin’s Ballfield property on Maple Avenue to a 10-home housing subdivision and 24,000 square-foot public park area. Some residents have taken to social media to lament the project, sharing fond childhood memories of having played baseball, softball and soccer there and citing its defining role as an integral part of La Conner.

The Town of La Conner had for decades leased the ballfield on an annual basis for youth sports and as a community greenbelt. After the property was put up for sale and the lease expired at the

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BLUE, BLUE, BLUE SKIES, MOUNTAINS, WATER – The weather was picture perfect last Wednesday when this photo of Mt. Baker, the Cascades, Skagit Flats, La Conner and Swinomish Channel were all in view from Rainbow Bridge, and everywhere else. The skies may be blue today, or some day this week. A plea for more rain, page 2.

– Photo by Ken Stern

## Pioneer Picnic set for August

By Bill Reynolds

Good news abounded at the Skagit County Historical Museum in La Conner on Friday.

During its monthly meeting that afternoon, Skagit County Pioneer Association board members confirmed the annual Pioneer Picnic will resume here this August after a one-year hiatus forced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2021 picnic will be held Aug. 5 in Pioneer Park.

“We will have a picnic this year,” said Association President John Kamb, Jr., who noted that the traditional summer gathering will honor the Good family as the 2021 Skagit County Pioneer Family of the Year.

The Goods would have received that recognition last August had the picnic not been put on hold.

Eddy and Thomas Good, the latter of whom is profiled in the “Illustrated History of Skagit and Snohomish Counties,” were homesteaders from Newfoundland, Canada, said Kim Rubenstein, a great-great-granddaughter of Eddy Good.

Rubenstein, Virginia Good-Vlahovich and Patsy Good – all of whom are La Conner High grads – have for several years prepared salmon for the

event’s luncheon. That task was previously performed by their father, the late Pat Good.

The meal is served by the La Conner Civic Garden Club, of which Rubenstein – a past president of the Pioneer Association – is a member.

This year’s menu will again feature barbecued salmon, Rubenstein assured the board.

“We discussed several options based on (Skagit County) Health Department input,” she said. “We can have a hot lunch. So, there’s no way we won’t serve salmon. It will be the standard menu. This won’t be a hot dog luncheon.”

Kamb said the 2021 Pioneer Picnic will adhere to county, state and federal Centers for Disease Control guidelines in place the first week of August.

Gov. Jay Inslee is expected to announce on June 30 reopening the state to most social and economic activities, ending Phase III restrictions of his Roadmap to Recovery Plan.

If, however, Skagit County were to be in Phase II, with public health restrictions, in early August, the Pioneer Picnic would still be able to accommodate up to 200 people because it is an outdoor event with a venue that provides

ample space for social distancing.

Attendance at the past five Pioneer Picnics has ranged between about 160 to over 300 persons, said Pioneer Association treasurer Bud Moore. The attendance fluctuation has been attributed to several factors, including weather conditions and heavy smoke from summer wildland fires.

If the state is fully reopened in August, as many as 400 people could attend.

Kamb said the Sedro-Woolley Loggerodeo and Anacortes Fourth of July parade will take place this summer as well.

“It looks like other events are opening up,” he said.

The Pioneer Picnic has been part of the La Conner summer scene for more than a century, enjoyed by generations of Skagit County residents. It has been an opportunity to reminisce with both new and lifelong friends, enjoy period music and purchase copies of the Skagit River Journal and related publications. Attendance has also included free weekend admission to the historical museum.

Mayor Ramon Hayes said official

(Continued on Page 4)

## Teen uses QR codes to shed light on town’s past

By Bill Reynolds

Local history will be shared well into the future thanks to a La Conner student’s research.

Rachel Cram, a La Conner high junior, is scripting audio recordings that with the press of a finger on a smartphone will provide anecdotal details about some of the town’s more historic downtown buildings.

Cram will present her project, which places optical sign labels on buildings, at the June 15 Town Planning Commission meeting. Each QR code contains building specific historical information.

Town Planner Michael Davolio has said the QR codes would be considered commemorative plaque signs and not require formal approval if they are smaller than three square feet in size.

Even so, Cram has agreed to apprise commissioners of her work, in part because it includes information not always found in prior histories of La Conner.

Much of her source material has been gleaned from stories written decades ago by Cram’s great-grandfather, Pat O’Leary,

longtime publisher of the Puget Sound Mail, a historic La Conner weekly newspaper.

Sifting through those articles, Cram has been able to connect past owners and uses with the present status of historic buildings.

“I’m always getting more connections,” she told the Weekly News. “And now that I have more connections, I know I need to do even more research.”

One of Cram’s key supporters is Mayor Ramon Hayes.

“He told me this will probably be an ongoing project,” she said, “because I’ll find myself always doing more updating and editing.”

Her work is the brainchild of family friend Lori Gould, who since moving here from Chicago has fully embraced local history and has often expressed interest in the backstories of buildings that grace the town’s historic preservation district.

Cram knew she could shed light on the topic, mindful that her grandmother, Sally O’Leary Cram, has maintained an extensive file of back issues of the

Puget Sound Mail.

“I thought the perfect person for this would be my grandma Sally,” Cram said. “She has tons of stuff. She has definitely helped me a lot.”

So, too, has her mom, Lynette Cram, a La Conner school board member who has offered recollections of her own youth growing up here. Among her favorite memories are visits to the former La Conner Drug Store building on First Street, now home to La Conner Sips.

“I remember we’d go there to shop for Mother’s Day,” Lynette Cram recalled, “and we’d ask Fred Martin, the pharmacist, how much something cost. He was so nice. We’d hold out the change we had in our hands and he’d ask how much we had. When we told him, he’d say: ‘that’s just enough.’”

Daughter Rachel has shown an uncanny knack for boiling similar oral accounts and lengthy articles into brief audio descriptions – just long enough to tell an interesting story without delaying a pedestrian audience making its way up and down First Street.

She has also made use of period maps and photographs of old La Conner in crafting her fast-paced scripts.

Through her research, Cram has been able to track changes

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CRAMMING FOR A HISTORY PROJECT – La Conner High junior Rachel Cram has been reviewing multiple sources to develop an anecdotal history of downtown buildings since January. Among those sources are articles written by her great-grandfather, Puget Sound Mail publisher Pat O’Leary. Cram is scheduled to present her project to the Town Planning Commission on June 15.

– Photo by Bill Reynolds



**PLAY A SONG FOR ME** – La Conner resident Joe Johnson sang for tourists and locals alike as they waited for a table, perhaps, outside the La Conner Pub and Eatery. It was June's First on First Saturday promoting La Conner. Food, sun and song; there was more than a bit of a breeze, but forces were aligned for a good time.  
– Photo by Ken Stern

## Ashley Sweeney's 'Answer Creek' wins gold medal

By Ken Stern

Shelter Bay author Ashley Sweeney was awarded a gold medal for "Answer Creek" by the 2021 Next Generation Indie Book Awards for best second novel June 1. It is her third gold medal for this historical fiction, published last year, which has also won the 2021 Independent Publishers Association award for best regional fiction and the 2020 Arizona Authors Association Literary Award.

"Answer Creek" re-imagines the 1848 Donner Party's trek from Missouri west on the Oregon-California Trail. Her 19-year-old heroine, Ada Weeks, survives the journey, best known for some real-life members resorting to cannibalism while trapped in the Sierra Nevada over the winter.

Sweeney offers minute details of the day-to-day travel across desert and mountain while also capturing the beauty of the varied natural habitats.

She Writes Press is the publisher. They published Sweeney's first novel, "Eliza Waite," also an award winner.

The Next Generation Indie Book Awards is the largest international awards program for independent authors and independent publishers. In its fifteenth year, the Next Generation Indie Book Awards annually recognize and honor the most exceptional independently published books in over 70 different categories.

Sweeney gained a \$100 prize. She tied with Meera Ekkanath Klein for "Seeing Ceremony: A Novel With Recipes." There were five finalists.

The winners and finalists will be honored June 25 in an online event which will stream live on Facebook.

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Book review —

## Summer books for kids

By Terri Schlichenmeyer, *The Bookworm*

You've waited all year for this.

You sat inside, looking out a window, thinking about all you were going to do when summer came. Well, it is here, and now's the time to grab these great books for your children and head outside.

If a beach is in your summertime plans, then "Ocean Soup" by Meeg Pincus, illustrated by Lucy Semple (Sleeping Bear Press) is the book you want before you go. Here, you will learn what you can do to keep the ocean clean and why it is important. This is a great read-aloud for little kids and for ecology-minded 5-to-7-year-old doors.

Young bird-watchers will love owning "Birds" by Miranda Krestovnikoff and Angela Harding (Bloomsbury). Loaded with artwork, this book teaches kids unique things about birds, their food and their habitat, "extremes," dangerous birds, exotics and more. Meant for birders ages 6-11, it might challenge those on the lower end of that scale.

Another unusual book on wildlife is "Do You Know Where

the Animals Live" by Peter Wohlleben (Greystone Kids). It is full of questions that kids might ask and answers that will fill them in on animals, birds, wildlife habitat, biology, animal language and even some make-a-kid-think entries. Six-to-9-year-olds will absolutely enjoy it.

Happy campers will want to take "Wild Outside: Around the World with Survivorman" by Les Stroud, illustrations by Andrew P. Barr (Annick Press) on walk-about. It is a true-life adventure book about the wilderness, including "four steps to every great adventure," ways to be prepared before you go and while you are outdoors, lessons on how to stay safe and lots of gorgeous pictures. It is perfect for the outdoorsy-type kid ages 8-12.

For the quieter kid, or perhaps for an Earth-minded child who may need to stay indoors for part of the summer, check out "The Wild World Handbook" by Andrea Debbink, illustrated by Asia Orlando (Quirk Books). With more facts, less adventure, this book offers ecology-based biographies, activities to do indoors, fun-facts, places to visit and in-

formation about our world. Out May 25, this is a great book for kids ages 7-to-12.

For kids who are fascinated with Big Cats, there are two books to find: "Cougar Crossing" by Meeg Pincus, illustrated by Alexander Vidal (Beach Lane Books) is the story of P-22, a cougar that was born in a national park near Los Angeles. When he needed more room to roam, he headed into the city, but that was dangerous; by then, though, people had spotted the cat and decided to help. This is a good book for kids ages 7-9, but beware of the not-entirely-happy ending.

And finally, for readers ages 13-and-up, "The Black Leopard" by Will Burrard-Lucas (Chronicle Books) offers the story of a hunt that never included much more than a camera, supreme patience and one man's wildest dreams. Give the book to your wildlife-loving teen and borrow it back.

If these books do not quite fit your child's interest or activity level, check with your bookseller or librarian for more. Let your child go a little wild; they have been waiting for this all year.

## Teen . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

over time in the local economy.

"There were so many different kinds of businesses here," she said.

Buildings that now house upscale boutiques and restaurants were once home to thrift stores, machine shops, dry goods and grocery outlets, shoemaking and repairing and a multi-use barber shop.

"The barber did everything," Cram said. "It seemed like everything always happened at the barber shop."

For instance, the late Thurman "Smitty" Schmittou, who had been stationed with the U.S. Army at Fort Whitman on nearby Goat Island, used part of his building as a barber shop. Remaining space was devoted to storage and mending of commercial fish nets.

Cram discovered there was a time when Wiggin-Felton grocery customers could go downtown to buy a 16-ounce container of peanut butter for 37 cents. She read reports of the Puget Sound Mail building having sustained damage from a rockslide. She learned that Ruth Pennington operated the Fidalgo School of Allied Arts, drawing students each summer from the University of Washington to the large red building where the Ginger Grater is now located.

A key theme of downtown La Conner has been its resilience, Cram noted. For a century and a half, it has survived both the fickle nature of the business cycle and potentially devastating structure fires.

"A lot of the original buildings were damaged by fire at one time

or another," Cram said.

A top student and three-sport athlete at La Conner High, Cram manages to devote a couple hours each week to her history project. Having begun in January, she had hoped to complete work in time for the Tulip Festival. But the research has had a way of mushrooming, each lead branching in several new directions.

Target date for completion is now sometime this summer.

She is not in a big hurry to finish what has become a true labor of love.

"It's been a lot of fun," said Cram, who hopes her work will earn academic credit in video production from La Conner High teacher Ryan Hiller. "It's something I'm pretty passionate about."

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Learn more at: [monamuseum.org/2021-art-auction](http://monamuseum.org/2021-art-auction)

*Kevin Paul, Wolf, 2021, Western Red Cedar, acrylic paints, lemon oil, 33" x 11" x 1," courtesy of the Artist*

La Conner Weekly News

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