

Climb every mountain

Bainbridge Island guide helps Poulsbo man propose on Everest

BY STEVEN POWELL
Bainbridge Island Review

Andrew Hughes, who was born and raised in Poulsbo, is so high on love he climbed Mount Everest to show it.

Hughes reached the summit of Mount Everest on May 23 at 10:10 a.m. Standing atop the highest mountain in the world at 29,032 feet he reached into a pocket, pulled out a small orange flag, and dropped to his knees as he unfurled the flag that read, “Lauren will you marry me?” It was only the second-known marriage proposal from the summit, and a record for the highest-known proposal by an American ever.

Hughes had to wait for an answer until he returned home to Seattle weeks later. So the proposal remained a secret to his team, led by Garrett Madison, who was born and raised on Bainbridge Island. On July 3, while boating across Lake Washington, Hughes presented Lauren Beard, who grew up in Gig Harbor, with a small box. Inside was the flag he had taken to the summit. As Beard unfurled the flag, Hughes received the loving answer he longed for — “yes”.

At points during the two-month expedition, Hughes overcame a lung infection, cold injuries and over 20 pounds of muscle loss. He endured extreme conditions from cyclone weather systems to ice fall collapses while continually navigating the risks of climbing during a time of COVID-19. He did all of that to not only realize his dream of climbing the Seven Summits but also his much bigger dream of declaring to Beard that her love was his world while atop the world.

“When you arrive in such summit moments in life, you also arrive at a realization that no summit is arrived at absent the love and support of all of those in one’s life,” Hughes said. “And that while sum-



Courtesy photo

Andrew Hughes with Lauren Beard on the boat when he proposed to her in person.

mits are meaningful, it is those you love in your life which truly matter.” Making Beard and their shared love forever part of his summit moment is the beginning of “the two’s happily EVERest after,” he said.

Early life

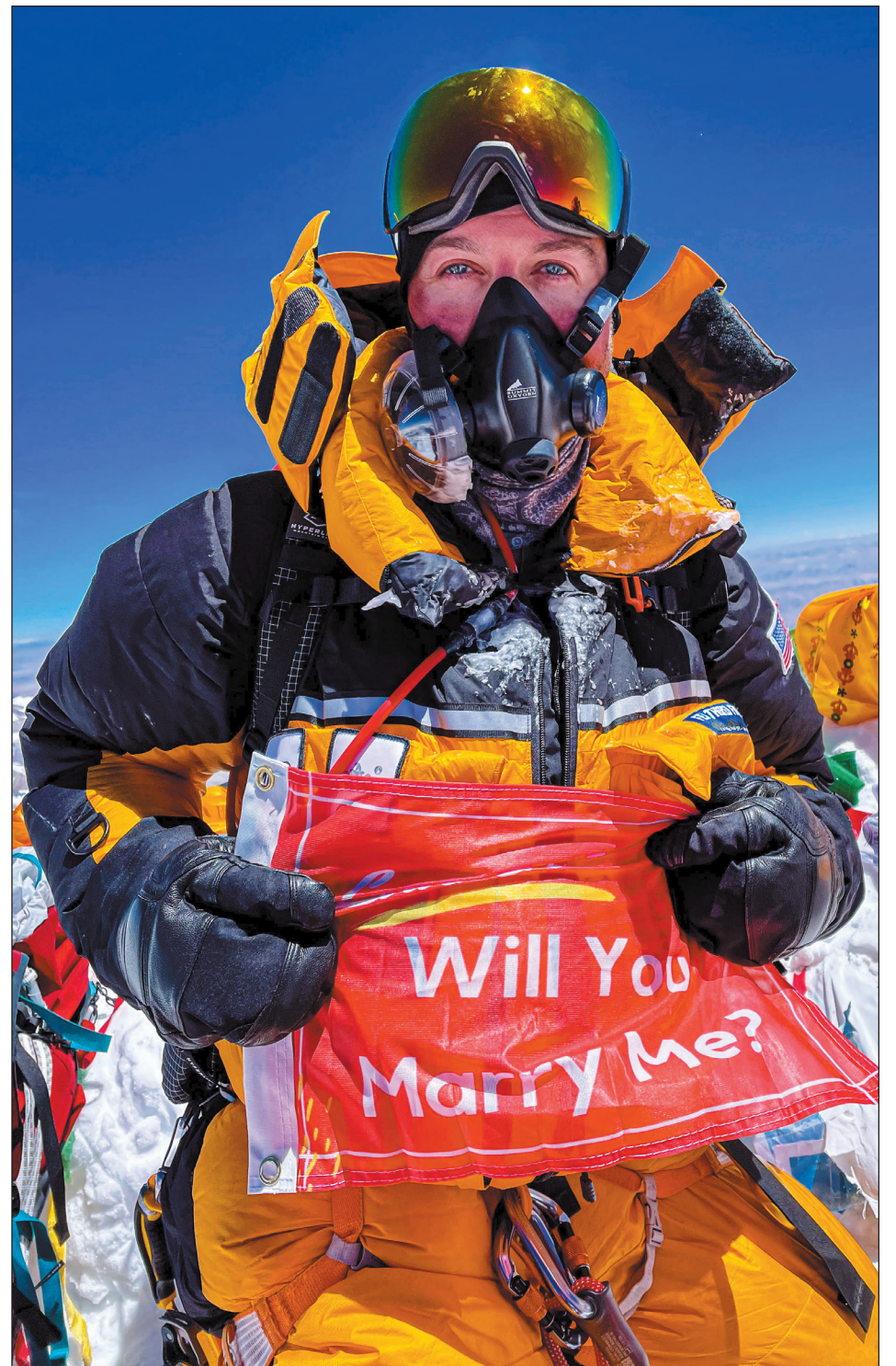
Hughes grew up on a farm near Big Valley Road and was class president at North Kitsap High School in 2000. He went to law school, became a lawyer and ran for U.S. Congress. But he wasn’t satisfied. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest, Hughes has always loved the outdoors. On a whim he decided to climb Mount Rainier in 2014.

“That was the gateway for which there was no going back,” he said. “I restructured my life, career and finances to find a way to pursue my dream of Seven Summits and the Explorers Grand Slam,” which includes going to the north and south poles. He hasn’t gotten to the South Pole yet, but plans to do that next April.

Now he has climbed the tallest mountain on every continent, something only about 400 people have ever done. He’s also climbed six of the seven tallest volcanoes on each continent. He also founded Beyond the Summit, an e-sports production company focused on creating unique and authentic events, shows and content.

The couple

Beard, 31, is a real estate appraiser, while Hughes, 39, is a real estate investor



Courtesy photo

Andrew Hughes with his ‘Will You Marry Me’ sign atop Mount Everest.

and sponsored mountaineer/adventurer. They met on a blind date in 2018 for dinner in Ballard and then to The Tractor for live music with country artist Logan Mize. They both love the outdoors. Even though she doesn’t mountain climb they enjoy running, hiking, paddleboarding, kayaking, skiing and snowshoeing together. “No matter the season we always can find something to share in the outdoors,” he said.

As for what she thought of his proposal, Beard said: “I was completely blown away and overwhelmed with joy and love. But it didn’t surprise me that he put so much thought and love into making the moment one we will never forget.” She said Hughes has always been a romantic, “even from the first texts and before I ever met him.”

When mountain climbing, Hughes said it’s just as important to train mentally and emotionally as it is to train physically. “In the end the biggest mountains are climbed not by the body but by the mind,” he said.

As to why he decided to propose on Everest, Hughes said he tried the climb twice before but once came down with pneumonia, and the second trip was canceled due to COVID. But Beard supported him the entire way. So he decided if he made it this time it would be because of her love. “I wanted her to know that as much as Everest was my dream, it was a dream eclipsed by my dream of spending a life with her,” he said. Since he’s already been to the summit, they plan for a wedding date next summer, “somewhere closer to sea level.”

BPA gets \$1.6 million from state for remodel

BY STEVEN POWELL
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The Buxton Center for Bainbridge Performing Arts has been selected to receive a \$1.6 million grant from the state for its renovation project.

That brings BPA to within 90% of the \$16.5 million needed for the remodel.

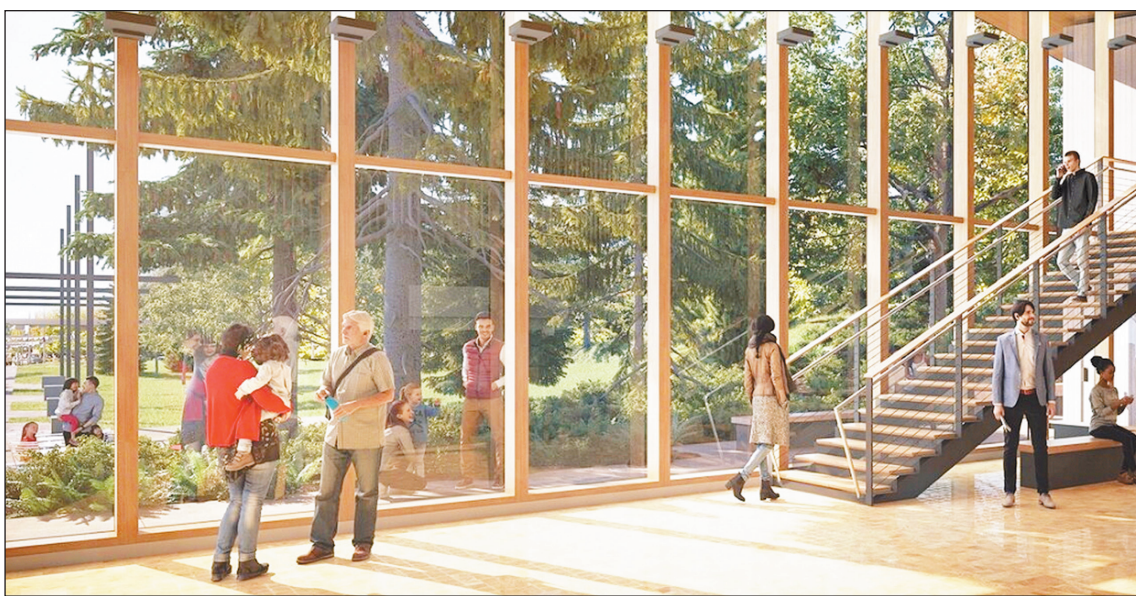
That “milestone gave the BPA board the confidence to green light the construction process,” said Debbie MacLeod, Campaign Steering Committee co-chair.

BPA is applying for a city building permit with the intention of breaking ground this fall, when it will begin a community-wide fundraising effort.

“We still have over \$1.5 million left to raise, which, by the way, is more than the current theater cost to build back in 1993,” MacLeod said, adding the campaign is still pursuing major gifts and corporate grants.

The state legislature approved the 2021-23 biennial capital budget bill, which includes funding for 21 projects approved by ArtsFund, which administers the program for the Department of Commerce. Building for the Arts was created by the legislature in 1991 to award grants to performing arts, art museums and cultural organizations for as much as 33% state match of project costs for acquisition, construction and/or major renovation of capital facilities.

The \$16 million for this biennial



Courtesy image

The front lobby is a major attraction of the new Bainbridge Performing Arts Buxton Center.

num includes 21 projects that span eight counties and 14 legislative districts statewide. The state’s investment in these local projects provides construction jobs, permanent arts-related jobs and improved quality of life for those communities.

BPA said the grant will help accelerate the proposed construction timeline, with an anticipated reopening in spring 2023. For details go to www.buxtoncenter.com.

BPA started a capital campaign to raise funds to remodel the building. Roof, siding and backstage interior work has been done during

closures due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Improvements include new studio theater space, installing comfortable and more accessible multi-aisle seating, expanding the lobby and restrooms, adding a new roof with solar array, upgrading the box office and administrative offices, improving dressing rooms and HVAC systems, and even installing an elevator and upstairs landing, plus maintenance improvements - all designed to create the greenest, safest and best experience for performers, audiences and staff, the BPA website says.

The standalone studio will be

used as a multipurpose space for classes, rehearsals, short-run performances and extended lobby space for large events. It will be available for rent. In the past BPA spaces have been used for medical trainings, corporate retreats, municipal hearings, religious celebrations, non-BPA classes, funerals, weddings, wine tastings, birthday parties and more.

MacLeod gave a number of reasons why BPA received the grant. “Need for the project: The building is bursting at the seams, since it was constructed in a very different world 25 years ago. The stage floor needs a major facelift,

the roof is in sad shape, and the heating, cooling and lighting systems are all on their last legs. The space squeeze and outdated equipment limit the ability of BPA teachers, conductors, and artistic and administrative staff to connect with audiences in new and innovative ways.

*Economic benefit: A study found that four counties surveyed, including Kitsap, generated \$2.4 billion for the state’s economy and employed more than 35,000 people. While BPA represents only a part of that picture, the results verify that there are significant economic benefits from arts and theater groups.

*Benefit to stakeholders: One of the primary goals of the design changes is to better serve senior citizens and people with disabilities. Bainbridge has an aging population and that demographic is reflected in the type of individuals who attend BPA performances. The changes also will improve accessibility for those with disabilities, including some actors and musicians.

*Community partnerships: BPA has a long history of collaborating with other BI cultural and nonprofit organizations to broaden access to the arts and humanities.

BPA also showed financial and organizational stability, listed the sources of funding to date and explained the plan for the successful operation after completion of the project.