

CAMAS-WASHOUGAL POST-RECORD

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Hunt begins for Camas superintendent

School district to host 'listening posts' for community next week

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record staff writer

Camas community members will soon have a chance to weigh in on the local school district's hunt for a new superintendent. The Camas School District will host two "listening posts" with staff, students, families

and other interested community members later this month: at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 21, at Discovery High School, and at 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 25, at Lacamas Lake Elementary School. Doreen McKercher, the district's communications director, said the September events are "opportunities for community members to provide feedback and listen to other voices." "Listening posts are embedded in our culture and have served us well in the past," McKercher said. "The goal is to gather as many voices, and in multiple for-

as possible." Camas' longtime superintendent Jeff Snell announced his resignation in March 2021, and took over as the superintendent of the Vancouver Public Schools district in July. In April, the Camas School Board appointed Doug Hood, then the district's director of elementary education, to be interim superintendent for the 2021-22 school year. The school board also voted in April to hire the Omaha, Nebraska-based search firm McPherson & Jacobson, which recently led

the search for Vancouver's new schools head, to help find Camas' next superintendent. A representative from McPherson & Jacobson updated school board members on the superintendent search process during the board's workshop on Monday, Sept. 13. Although the board livestreams its workshops and meetings on YouTube, a technical glitch prevented the public from hearing the first half of the Sept. 13 workshop, including the entire portion of the superintendent search update. McKercher told The Post-Re-

If You Go

What: In-person "listening posts" to discuss Camas School District's search for a new superintendent
When: 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 21, and 9:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 25
Where: Discovery High School (Sept. 21) and Lacamas Lake Elementary School (Sept. 25)

cord on Tuesday, Sept. 14, the board "had a conversation with the consultant, who indicated

See Search, page A2

Back to Nature

Washougal couple leave jobs, commit to full-time farm life



Andra and John Spencer's Get To-Gather Farm part of Harvest Celebration tour on Sept. 18

By **DOUG FLANAGAN**
Post-Record staff writer

John Spencer had an epiphany during a lunch meeting in the summer of 2019 when he suddenly realized that he wasn't content with what he was doing for a living and that something had to change. It all started with some wise counsel from a client and trusted friend. "I told (him), 'My project for you isn't done yet. I just haven't been able to focus on it. I'm sorry.' He turns to me and says, 'Well, that's because you don't love what you do,'" Spencer said. "It was one of those classic light-bulb-over-the-head, launch-the-midlife-crisis (moments). Over the next few months I said, 'He's right. What do I love?' And what I came back to is (my farmland). The reason I wasn't getting that project done, the reason I wasn't focusing, was that I was out on the land all the time taking care of it." So later that year, Spencer and his wife, Andra, decided to become full-fledged farmers, a radical departure from their careers as a business analyst/consultant and educator, respectively.



Andra Spencer (left) and John Spencer, show a recent harvest of fruit from their Washougal Get To-Gather retail farm stand on Sept. 2, 2021. Top: Flowers are in bloom at the Get To-Gather farm on Sept. 2, 2021.

Get To-Gather Farm employee Kimberly Spencer (left) and volunteer Carie Maniscalco work in the Washougal farm's retail stand on Sept. 2, 2021.

the farm. "I absolutely adore the two of them and their whole family, and how hard they are working to build and operate an amazing vegetable and flower farm and host special events."

Couple takes advantage of 'COVID opportunity'

In order to turn his dream into reality, John first had to convince his wife that they (probably) wouldn't go bankrupt. "I'm definitely the risk-averse one in the family, (but I knew) we had to lean into it," said Andra, who is continuing to work as a human development professor at Clark College. "We (told ourselves) that

we weren't going to starve because we could eat what we grow. When we do our taxes this first year, I'm sure I'll be (shocked). But you make choices. John gave up his plane. That's when I knew things were real."

John and Andra are leasing about seven acres of John's family's 150-acre property for the farm, located at 1913 SE 303rd Avenue in Washougal. "When (the family) bought it, we were young, having families and working," Andra said. "Now we are into the next phase of life. This is what I call a COVID opportunity. Things shifted. (The pandemic) made the decision for us, let's just put it that way."

See Farms, page A3

Camas seeks input on COVID relief funds

City to receive \$6.8M from American Rescue Plan for pandemic aid

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record staff writer

City of Camas officials will soon reach out to the public for ideas on how best to spend the nearly \$7 million in COVID-19 relief funds the city will receive from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act.

"We're working ... to make sure we get as much information from the community as possible," Camas Finance Director Cathy Huber Nickerson told the Camas City Council on Sept. 7.

The city will gather ideas from the public through its online Engage Camas and Balancing Act tools, Huber Nickerson said, and likely place information in citizens' utility bills.

"We'll try to reach as many people as possible," Huber Nickerson told Camas Interim Mayor Ellen Burton, after Burton asked how residents who didn't have access to the online Engage Camas platform might contribute their ideas for the city's COVID-19 relief funds.

The city is set to receive a total of \$6.8 million from the American Rescue Plan, which President Joe Biden signed into law in March 2021. The city received its first installment of \$3.4 million in June, and will receive an additional \$3.4 million next year, in June 2022.

The city will have four years to spend the American Rescue Plan money. Eligible uses for the funds include COVID expenditures or negative economic impacts of COVID-19, including money to help small businesses and households hit hardest by the pandemic; premium pay for essential workers; city revenue losses related to the pandemic; and investments in water, sewer and broadband infrastructure.

See Funds, page A2

As COVID cases climb, vaccine and masking mandates expand

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record staff writer

With COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths continuing to climb across the country, state and county, elected officials are using masks and vaccine mandates to try to stem the spread of the virus and keep health systems from becoming completely overwhelmed. "Hospitalization rates are at the highest level ever during this pandem-

ic," Washington Gov. Jay Inslee said during a press conference held Thursday, Sept. 9. "In most places in the state of Washington today, hospitals have already had to curtail some of their normal procedures because they're jammed with COVID patients. It's unacceptable."

More than 90 percent of those patients are unvaccinated, Inslee added.

COVID-19 related deaths also are beginning

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Camas girls soccer has 'unfinished business' **Sports, Page A6**

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Building Community

Discovery High students have unique back-to-school experience

Schoolwide project helps Camas teens bond after year of remote learning

By **KELLY MOYER**
Post-Record staff writer

Following an 18-month stretch of shuttered school buildings, remote learning, hybrid classes, mask mandates and canceled sports seasons, the start of the 2021-22 school year was never



KELLY MOYER/POST-RECORD

Discovery High School Principal Aaron Smith (right) speaks to a group of teens during a student club presentation at the Camas high school on Friday, Sept. 10, 2021.

See Project, page A7

Farms:

From page A1

"I stopped (consulting) cold turkey. COVID kind of stopped it for me," John added. "I had the idea for the farm pre-COVID, but COVID just happened to be a really, really convenient (reason to get started). Part of the advantage we had was that we already had the land. It's not just that (a lot of the infrastructure) was already there. It's that we didn't have to pay for it. And I truly did not intend to earn any money this year, so we've got that advantage of being able to figure it out as we go."

The farm offers a large variety of fresh produce grown by the Spencers; partner farms such as Shady Grove (Camas), Windy Ridge (Washougal), Finca (LaCenter) and Dilish (Vancouver); and friendly neighbors. "We're looking for partnerships and working with people and coming together to create a community that's developing here," John said. "Part of it is (having) volunteers and helping each other out, and part of it is partnering with other local farmers, giving them an outlet and getting their assistance and spare produce."

The Spencers envision their farm as a true community hub, capable of hosting a variety of classes, social events and even business meetings. They've already hosted several classes, including a salsa-making workshop that was so well-received that they had to schedule a second session later that day.

"(The instructor) sat there and chatted with the people for three hours because it was a beautiful spot, a beautiful day, and I was just thrilled to see that people were gathering," John said. "(I thought), 'This is what this is about.' I'd like to have cider press nights and 'come-roast-chestnuts-over-the-open fire' nights ... and get people out for parties. We want to make it (about) the experience."

"People are so excited to be here," Andra added. "There's a positive vibe. People say, 'Oh my gosh, I love this.'"

John's orchards are planted on about two-and-a-half acres of the property and produce a wide selection of fruits, including staples such as apples, pears, cherries and plums, but also exotic varieties such as paw-paws, goumis, gojis, thimbleberries, elderberries, pomegranates, figs, seaberries, mulberries, aronia berries, yuzus and mayhaws.

He also planted kiwi berry vines and nut trees containing filberts, hazelnuts, almonds, chestnuts and walnuts.

"I try to do stuff that's different," he said. "I spent many, many hours in front

of the internet (researching these varieties). I also discovered One Green World, a nursery in Gresham (Oregon) that specializes in all of this weird stuff."

Andra focuses her time on the other end of the farm, a three-quarter-of-an-acre plot that holds large vegetable and flower gardens.

"This (farm) is just upping the level," she said. "I've always had a garden and I've always enjoyed the land."

The vegetable garden includes pumpkins, squash, sweet corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, jalapeño peppers, eggplants, zucchinis, onions, beans, stevias and rhubarbs, along with ground-growing fruits such as watermelons.

"Joe's Place Farms (in Vancouver) closed last January, and we purchased a lot of things from (the owner)," Andra said. "He's kind of become a bit of a mentor to us. He checks in on us and offers things to us. We're really fortunate."

Andra's flower garden includes dahlias, zinnias, sunflowers, cosmos and carnations.

"It's a fiesta of color," she said. "My new love is zinnias, but my first love is dahlias when it comes to plants. Dahlias are forgiving, and zinnias aren't. Our kids started the sunflowers and we took it to the next level this year. We added lots of layers to the garden."

They've both learned a lot about farming and the agricultural economy. They've endured some challenges, such as a February storm that destroyed their recently-built greenhouse. They acknowledge that the first year "has been tough" as they work to grow the farm as well as a viable business model for the future.

But now that they're doing it, they couldn't imagine doing anything else.

"It feels good to make use of the farm," Andra said. "For a long time, it's just been (here). We've enjoyed it, but we realized that we were (missing out) on some of the potential."

And as for John? So far, his "midlife crisis" is going just fine.

"I love being outside. And it's as I predicted in the beginning — I love tending to the plants. It feels good," John said. "The work isn't going to ever end, but that's kind of cool. I look forward to being the grizzled, 80-year-old farmer who finally keels over from a heart attack in the middle of his field. That's what I want."

Lacamas Lake drawdown begins, cleanup set for Sept. 25

The Camas Public Works Department started its annual drawdown of Lacamas Lake this week, on Monday, Sept. 13.

The city will reduce the total level of Lacamas Lake by approximately six feet, in order to achieve the level needed to facilitate dam inspections and repairs.

The drawdown should take a few days, with the minimum level being reached by the approximate date of Friday, Sept. 27.

Once inspections and repairs have taken place, the process to refill the lake to normal levels is scheduled to begin Oct. 25.

Officials expect this process to take several weeks, depending on rainfall volumes.

The annual lake cleanup, hosted by neighbors of Lacamas Lake, is set for 9 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 25. All ages are welcome and participants are asked to bring waterproof boots and gloves. Sponsors will provide garbage bags, maps, information about the lake, snacks and a lunch, bottled water, coffee and tea. For more information about the cleanup, contact Deanna Culley at 877-854-3577, ext.55630.

League of Women Voters to host candidate forums

Candidates for local offices across Clark County competing in the Nov. 2 general election will participate in forums sponsored by the nonpartisan League of Women Voters of Clark County, beginning Sept. 22.

The League will showcase different candidates at each of the forums:

- * Wednesday, Sept. 22, 6:30 p.m.: Clark Regional Wastewater District, Position 2; Fire Protection District 6, Position 3; Washougal mayor, Vancouver mayor
- * Friday, Sept. 24, 6:30 p.m.: La Center City Council, Positions

1, 2 and 3

- * Wednesday, Sept. 29, 6:30 p.m.: Vancouver City Council, Positions 1, 2 and 3; Port of Vancouver Commissioner, District 2

- * Wednesday, Sept. 29, 7:30 p.m.: Vancouver School District, Positions 2 and 3; Evergreen School District, Position 1

- * Thursday, Sept. 30, 6:30 p.m.: Battle Ground City Council, Positions 1, 4, 5 and 6; Ridgefield City Council, Position 6

- * Friday, Oct. 1, 6:30 p.m.: Camas mayor, Camas City Council, Ward 1, Position 2; Ward 2, Position 2; Ward 3, Position 2

- * Friday, Oct. 1, 7:30 p.m.: Camas School District, Position 1; Washougal School District, Positions 3 and 5; Port of Camas/Washougal, Position 3

The forums will be broadcast live on Clark/Vancouver Television and stream live at cvtv.org. The events also will be available afterward on CTVV's website at cvtv.org/program/election-2020.

The League of Women Voters of Clark County is a nonpartisan, grass-

roots civic organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to people of all ages and gender identities.

Danger advisories issues at Lacamas, Round lakes

Clark County Public Health has elevated blue-green algae advisories at Lacamas and Round lakes in Camas from warning to danger.

Water samples collected the first week of September showed both lakes continue to have elevated levels of cyanotoxins. Additionally, blue-green algae are now accumulating in many areas of both lakes, including at boat launches and other public access points.

Danger signs are being posted at the public access points at both lakes.

Public Health is advising against all recreating in Lacamas and Round

lakes, including swimming, kayaking, paddle boarding, canoeing, using motorized boats, water skiing and fishing. Pets should not have any contact with the water.

Blue-green algae can pose a significant health risk if the cyanobacteria or toxins are ingested, inhaled or contact skin. Inhaled bacteria or toxins can cause wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath. Skin contact can lead to rash, itching, blisters and eye irritation.

If water with cyanotoxins is swallowed, symptoms can include abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, numbness of the lips, tingling in fingers and toes, and dizziness. The toxins can be fatal to pets.

Public Health will collect water samples for testing every two weeks. Signs will be updated as conditions change.

For more information, visit clark.wa.gov/public-health/public-beaches. To report algae blooms, visit clark.wa.gov/public-health/report-health-concern.

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