



STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

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SCNEWS.COM

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2021 | \$1.50

Local COVID cases remain high

Worries of new variant grow

By SC NEWS STAFF

The World Health Organization warned Monday that the global risk from the omicron variant is "very high" based on early evidence, saying the mutated coronavirus could lead to surges with "severe consequences."

The U.N. health agency, in a technical paper issued to member states, said "considerable uncertainties" remain about the variant that was first detected days ago in southern Africa. But it said it is possible the variant has mutations that could enable it to escape an immune-system response and boost its ability to spread from one person to another.

"Depending on these characteristics, there could be future surges of COVID-19, which could have severe consequences, depending on a number of factors, including where surges may take place," it added. "The overall global risk ... is assessed as very high."

Despite the global worry, scientists cautioned that it is still unclear whether omicron is more alarming than other versions of the virus that has killed more than 5 million people.

No cases of the omicron variant have been detected in Washington state — or anywhere in the U.S. — but world health officials warned that it seems only a matter of time.

Locally, Snohomish Health District Health Officer Dr. Chris Spitters said the good news is a gradual decline in COVID cases and hospitalizations in Snohomish County.

■ SEE COVID, A10

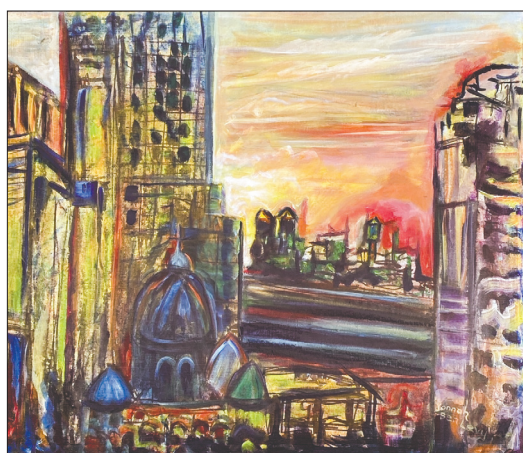
Return for redemption

Traveling Stanwood duo share the story of their lives through art



PEGGY WENDEL / STANWOOD CAMANO NEWS

Chaim Bezael and Yonah Ben Levy show their individual work and collaborations in a show called, "NYC — Return for Redemption" at Cassera Gallery in Stanwood. Show runs Dec. 3-31.



YONAH BEN LEVY

"View From My Window IV," painted with acrylics is one of the pieces of art on display this month at Cassera Gallery in Stanwood that's part of the show by Stanwood artists Chaim Bezael and Yonah Ben Levy.

By PEGGY WENDEL
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Stanwood artist duo is using deeply personal photos to tell a story of life and redemption.

Chaim Bezael and Yonah Ben Levy used photos from 1975 to the present in New York City to create "NYC — Return for Redemption," a collection that will be on display at Cassera Gallery in Stanwood. The opening gala is 5-8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 3.

Their paintings and sculptures reflect the city's history through the lens of the artists during their frequent pilgrimages to New York. Bezael returns to absolve himself of his past and regain his family. Levy returns to redeem the family she didn't know she had.

Bezael grew up in New York City; Levy grew up on Mercer Island. They met in Israel.

This international couple splits their time between their homes in Stanwood and Israel, while stopping in New York to reconnect with art, culture and family.

"The show is a time capsule," said Bezael. "Every time I go back, I take photographs that reflect my present experience and New York as it changes. New York is not just a city, it's a civilizational center."

The work in the show includes street scenes, buildings, news trucks and diners.

Levy recently painted large colorful works from sketches of skyscrapers she'd done in 1982 as a young artist in New York.

The artistic couple often collaborates on art as Bezael-Levy. One collaboration depicts a somber St. Patrick's Day Parade in 2002, shortly after the 9/11 attack, with the New York Fire Department Emerald Society Pipes and Drums marching along 5th Avenue in a snow flurry.

■ SEE ART, A5

Stanwood City Council race heading to machine recount

Schmitt leads Williams by just 5 votes

By PEGGY WENDEL and EVAN CALDWELL
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It's official: One ultra-close Stanwood City Council race will move to an automatic machine recount on Dec. 7.

The results from the Nov. 2 general election were certified on Nov. 23. One Stanwood City Council contest was five votes apart while another finished 14 votes

Position 7



Tim Schmitt
826 votes



Judy Williams
821 votes

apart — just outside the threshold for an automatic recount.

In the race for the Position 7 seat, challenger Tim Schmitt currently holds a five-vote lead over incumbent Judy Williams 826 to 821 — or 47.15%-46.86%, a 0.29

percentage-point difference.

"I want to thank everyone who voted, I want to emphasize that every vote does indeed matter," said Tim Schmitt, 55, a local small business owner. "No matter who wins, we will both serve Stanwood."

In Position 1, challenger Dani Gaumond edged incumbent Rob Johnson 880 to 866 — or 50.09%-49.29%, a 0.8 percentage-point difference. Johnson conceded the race to Gaumond.

"It was definitely a roller-coaster ride; it was very close," said Gaumond, 49. "I have a lot of respect for Councilman Johnson."

■ SEE ELECTION, A9

INSIDE



Sid Roberts sworn in as Stanwood's 11th mayor

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Stanwood City Council OKs capital improvements

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SC Give is Tuesday; donate all week

By SC NEWS STAFF

If you want to take time to give back to the local community, circle Nov. 30 on your calendar.

Then go to SCgive.org for the 24-hour donation marathon to support a variety of projects that provide basic needs and enhance the quality of life in the community.

Natalie Hagglund, project manager for Stanwood-Camano Area Foundation, said SC Give is key this year because COVID has limited many local groups' ability

The 23 local organizations and their plans for the donations

Read about how each organization will spend the donations at SCgive.org or with this article at SCnews.com

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> American Association of University Women American Legion Frank Hancock Post 92 Arrowhead Ranch Foundation Camano Animal Shelter Association Camano Arts Association Camano Center Camano Law Enforcement Support Foundation Camano Schoolhouse Foundation Community Resource Center of Stanwood Camano Foundation for Academic Endeavors Freedom Park Association | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hope Unlimited Lincoln Hill Retirement Community Safe Harbor Free Clinic Sherwood Community Services Stanwood Area Historical Society Stanwood Camano Community Fair Stanwood Camano Food Bank Services Stanwood High School AAAA Booster Club Stanwood-Camano Island Rotary Foundation Stanwood High School Band Boosters Village Community Services YMCA, Stanwood-Camano Branch |
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to raise money.

"Organizations have

not had the ability to rent

out their spaces to outside

groups or hold their own

fundraising events," Hag-

glund said. "We have also seen a lot of staffing changes as some organizations have seen their purpose essentially paralyzed by the pandemic, while others have been tasked with meeting the basic needs of the community, causing them to be busier than ever."

The seventh annual SC Give features 23 local organizations seeking donations for a number of local projects.

The fundraising goal this year is \$95,000. A goal-measuring bar at SCgive.org shows a running tally of

donations.

SC Give began Dec. 1, 2015, when a small pilot program was conducted on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. It raised \$30,000 in a 24-hour period for 13 community projects. Last year, a record \$88,890 was donated to support 21 projects.

The day of giving moved to a mostly online format in 2019, a step that's proving extra helpful as many initiatives have transitioned online during the pandemic.

Learn more at SCgive.org

Art

► FROM A1

Another image is from January 2011, with a blinding sun cutting through the window in Grand Central Station illuminating people hustling to work as Bezael once did.

"Every picture tells a story, that's why it's such a personal exhibit," Bezael said. "My work is narrative and documentary. Her work is imaginative and free — a good offset to my studied approach, even though she's the more studied artist and I'm an autodidact (self-taught). Everything is paradoxical."

Hidden relations

Growing up, Levy didn't know anything about her mother's side of the family. Her mother died at age 22, and her father remarried an Irish woman who raised Levy from age 2 on Mercer Island.

When she was 16, her father told her that her birth mother was Jewish. After World War II, many Jews hid their heritage, Levy said.

Levy went to the 1964 World's Fair in New York with her first husband.

In later visits, she got to know the museums and Jewish culture. She fell in love with the spirit of it all.

"I fit right in, but I didn't understand why," she said.

She studied, earned art and teaching degrees and started her professional career in 1976.

In the 1980s, she went to Israel with two other teachers from the Northwest, not knowing a thing about her roots. She discovered that since her mother was Jewish, she was, too. Someone told her to look up her family names. She discovered that she had deep Jewish roots in New York. Her grand uncles, Max and Lewis Dreyfus, were big names in the Broadway musical scene.

Now it made sense that she felt so at home in New York.

"Redemption for me was the reclamation of a whole new tribe," Levy said.

Exile and return

"This is the most personal and historical series I've done," Bezael said. "The part of personal redemption goes through New York because that's where I return for my redemption through my family."

Bezael went to film school. There he met his first wife, an older woman. He gave up his artistic ambitions and became a



CHAIM BEZALEL

"Gorman's" painted in oil is one of the pieces of art on display this month at Cassara Gallery in Stanwood that's part of the show by Stanwood artists Chaim Bezael and Yonah Ben Levy.

stockbroker when they married. He helped raise her children and fathered his own three boys.

In this shaky relationship, he made a lot of money, which she quickly spent. He skipped paying federal income taxes. After 10 years, he went on the lam, leaving his wife and sons behind.

"I left America with two suitcases, \$1,100 and a one-way ticket to a place I'd never been before — Israel," he said.

There, he lived in a run-

down room and worked as an artist. In 1988, he was hired as a photographer at Levy's wedding to her second husband, which didn't work out.

Bezael divorced his first wife and married Levy. The two headstrong artists sought to learn from past marriages to make this one work — through artistic collaboration.

In 1998, they returned to NYC to market their art. Bezael, seeking redemption, notified the authorities and was arrested at the

airport. He was sentenced to four months, but released after 106 days for good behavior.

Levy and Bezael continued to build on their marriage and careers.

One of Bezael's sons retrieved a box of slides from 1975. Bezael started with these images for his redemption series.

"The first piece of art I ever did that used the idea, 'return for redemption,' used those redeemed slides. I transferred images onto tiles and put them in an old Coca Cola crate and it said, 'Return for Redemption,'" Bezael said.

He considers the many ways redemption explains his life.

"The two eternal in life are exile and return. Each time you return, you're a little different," he said.

Redemption also means return on an initial investment. Both Bezael and Levy invested in their art, their families and each other.

In the end, Bezael regained his sons and family and art career. Levy discovered her Jewish family

heritage with deep artistic roots in New York. They both found each other and learned to thrive together as strong personalities.

"There's a returning for redemption, there's the children and there's facing the music of our new identities," Levy said. "It was a whole reality that we had to be accountable for with our families. With redemption, our cornucopia got refilled."

The show runs 5-8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 3 through Dec. 31 at Cassara Gallery, 26915 102nd Drive NW, Stanwood.

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