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Construction to close SR 164 at amphitheater for 90 days

By RAY MILLER-STILL
Editor

Local state Route 164 commuters will have to deal with a 90-day closure on their route starting this summer.

The reason? The Washington State Department of Transportation plans to replace an 11-foot diameter culvert that allows the Pussyfoot Creek to flow underneath the road with a 170-foot bridge.

"The culvert is too small and sections inside the existing culvert create conditions that make it very difficult or impossible for fish to travel upstream," WSDOT's webpage on the project reads. "The work will open about 9.3 miles of additional upstream habitat for resident and migratory fish, including Coho salmon, steelhead and coastal cutthroat trout."

Construction on the nearly \$10 million project, which is located between SE 400th Street and SE

See **CLOSE**, Page 14

Starbucks coming to Buckley, taking over former bank building

By KEVIN HANSON
Senior Writer

Buckley has no shortage of vehicles rolling through town and, by all accounts, the drivers behind the wheel need to stay caffeinated.

State Route 410 already is dotted with coffee shops within the confines of Buckley's city limits and, now, the java scene is about to get more crowded.

For customers, that means more options. But for the owners and operators of the coffeehouses, that means added competition.

The latest on the scene is the behemoth of the coffee world, Seattle-based Starbucks. The worldwide chain that appears on every corner (it seems) of crowded cities is making a foray onto the quieter Buckley landscape.

Things are still in the early stages, but plans are in the works for Starbucks to take over the freestanding building formerly occupied by Columbia Bank. The formal request has gone through city channels and received municipal support.

Starbucks would add to the list of willing coffee providers that includes a double-sided Bigfoot Java currently under construction on one corner of the Main Street/410 intersection. Not too many blocks away, Gravity Coffee purchased an existing drive-through and invested in notable building improvements. And there are a pair of coffee stands - Café Elite and Plateau Espresso - sitting on the highway not far to the west.

The Starbucks application with

See **COFFEE**, Page 14



PHOTOS BY RAY MILLER-STILL AND ALEX BRUELL

Students, parents and teachers celebrated the graduation of nearly 300 White River High School students Saturday.

A 'mind-boggling' achievement: White River students graduate in style

277 seniors graduated Saturday, spread out over four ceremonies at the high school

By ALEX BRUELL
Reporter

In a year of upheaval and confusion, there's something to be said for tradition.

Seniors at White River High School's four-part graduation, which staggered the 277 graduating seniors through four separate ceremonies over the course of Saturday, celebrated with their parents, tossed their caps and

See **GRADS**, Page 14



At 105, Elma is full of memories, laughs

The resident of Enumclaw's Living Court community is known for her positive attitude, sense of humor

By ALEX BRUELL
Reporter

Born just two years before the outbreak of the 1918 influenza, one could forgive Elma Gust for being reticent to rejoin society amid another pandemic.

But that person wouldn't know Elma very well.

She celebrated her 105th birthday on May 26 with friends by her side and a margarita in hand at the Living Court Assisted Living Community in Enumclaw, where she's lived since 2017.

About a week before, Elma had regaled staff of her other birthday plans, said Living Court executive director Toni Blaettler: Spending the weekend with family at Ocean Shores, where she'd "have cocktails, find a surfer boyfriend, and eat clams for breakfast."

"When you interact with her, you can't help but smile," Blaettler said. "How can you not have a good time with somebody like that? ... She's happy, friendly, and loving. That's why it's easy to take care of her."

Elma, along with her daughter Ann Baker (a former Enumclaw High School vice principal), joined the Courier-Herald to talk about her love of music, musings on faith and the many adventures she's had over the last century.

Elma was born in Tacoma and has lived around there, DuPont and University Place for most of her life, engendering a lifelong love of swimming, clam digging and boating.

Her father Murrill Foreman was an electrician with a knack for identifying trees and predicting

the weather, and her mother Sarah Foreman was a mild and generous woman with great skill in cooking.

The couple moved from New Jersey to DuPont in the early 1910s, where Murrill took a job as a supervisor at the city's eponymous DuPont explosives manufacturing plant. They had Elma and two boys, Byron and Burton. 95-year-old Burton, the "baby" of the siblings, is still alive, too.

Elma herself has two children, six grandchildren and around 18 great-grandchildren. "and they're all loving," she said.

"Or really good fakers," Baker joked back.

THE MUSICIAN

Elma started playing the piano at 5, practicing half an hour every day before school. She loved songs like Bing Crosby's "I Love You Truly." By 12, she was playing full time at church, where she liked to play the hymns "jazzy."

But disagreements broke out between Elma, who loved jazz, and her brother Byron, who also played the piano but preferred classical music. They "never compromised" over music and would tussle over the knobs on the radio, Elma said.

She can remember one day in particular, when they were around 5 and 7 years old, and Byron tuned the radio back to his station: "He was bent over. So I picked up a big dictionary and whacked him on the back. He dropped to the floor. I thought I'd killed him. (Then) he chased me all over the village."

As a teenager, Elma took long trips to practice at Seattle's Paramount Theater. An instructor there had heard her play and offered her lessons for free as long as Elma could get there.

So every Saturday, Murrill drove Elma from DuPont to Tacoma, where she took a boat to Seattle on a Mosquito Fleet boat, part of a private aquatic transportation system that predated today's

state-run ferry network. Then, Elma took a streetcar downtown to her lessons in the basement of the theater.

"You'd be afraid these days to send a teenager (on that trip)," Elma said.

In 1931 and '32, Elma studied music at the University of Washington, and eventually developed a career in music that included playing funerals (earning 50 cents for each one), events, and musicals like "The King and I."

THE ECUMENIST

Perhaps Elma's most important job was the 30 years she spent as an organ player for the Lakewood VA hospital.

Every Sunday, she played and sang for both Catholic and Protestant church services. Elma, who is herself Protestant, became a sort of diplomat between the two groups.

See **ELMA**, Page 14

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Elma

From Page 1

The Catholic priests, unlike the Protestants, tended not to marry. So Elma would occasionally bring them home to visit with her and her husband.

That meant Baker, off at college at the time, would occasionally come home to the sight of three or four Catholic priests, some in their undershirts or with their clergy collars removed, lounging, drinking and watching football with Baker's dad.

After a while, the clergy went home, leaving a wad of cash on the floor in payment.

It was something "ecumenical" about Elma that put people at ease and brought them together, Baker said, referring to the principle of cooperation and unity among Christian denominations.

The hospital served many soldiers who suffered from severe war-induced PTSD. Those veterans, mostly men, had suffered severe mental and physical trauma and were often dangerous or difficult to manage, but Elma made friends with them easily.

Elma's music was therapeutic for those patients, Baker said, who Elma stuck with for years.

"They were good to me," Elma said. "They would come up and tell me some outrageous story, but they ended

up being nice to me. I liked them all, because I felt so sorry for them."

THE EXPLORER

If there was a place to discover, Elma would take you there. Or she'd just go herself, like when she climbed trees to collect the pussy willow growing atop.

One of those times, her skirt caught on the branches, leaving Elma aloft and semi-nude, she said. She thought there was no one around until, Elma said, she looked up and saw a worker high up in a telephone pole who saw the whole thing.

"Life with mother was not boring," Baker said.

During family outings, Elma would find huge pieces of wood - trees, if she could carry them - and drag them down the beach, singing songs from her days as a "girl guide," similar to the Girl Scouts organization.

"Burn, fire burn, flicker flicker flame," she'd sing. It was one of many songs Elma made her family sing constantly, Baker said.

Around 1960, the family took a three-week trip in three 15-foot long boats up the Inland Passage, a series of waterways that winds from the Puget Sound all the way to the coast of Alaska.

They witnessed bears, dolphins and mink, and orcas that came right up next to their boats as they forded the waters with little besides paper charts and a thirst for adventure.

THE COMEDIAN

Elma, herself an avid dancer, was impressed by her first husband Dave Johnston's skill on the dance floor and his beautiful, black wavy hair.

Joking about Johnston, who passed away in 1971, Elma said: "He's not the dancer he used to be."

Afterward, she married a firefighter named Pete Gust, who she's since outlived too.

"I killed him, or something," Elma laughed.

"And everybody else, too," Baker added.

Baker said that between Elma's love of walking, gardening, swimming, dancing and exploring, she's lived a very active life. She's "perennially cheerful" and loves to laugh, Baker added.

"I think about it now that I'm older," Elma said. "I'm about half dead. How lucky all these years have been. I've been happy and content."

Naturally, one might wonder to what Elma attributes her longevity.

Her answer: Parents who loved their children and encouraged them to play outside. They were "wonderful," Elma says.

"And your children are wonderful," Baker interjects, earning a laugh from her mom. "You weren't supposed to laugh at that," Baker adds.

"Now there's a joke," Elma responds, earning an even bigger laugh back.

Close

From Page 1

416th Street — more-or-less just south of the White River Amphitheater — is expected to begin July 5.

DETOURS

WSDOT is recommending different detours for passenger vehicles and trucks, meaning other local roads might see some additional traffic over the summer months.

Going north to Auburn, the agency recommends passenger vehicles leave SR

164 at 196th Avenue SE, go north until turning west on SE 400th Street, and then return to the highway.

Trucks and other large vehicles are advised to leave Enumclaw via SR 169 until reaching SE 400th Street, which will take you to SR 164.

"It's always a challenge to close a main highway for an extended period. We understand detours can be an inconvenience. We appreciate your patience as we undertake this important work that will expand habitat for coho salmon, steelhead and coastal cutthroat trout," WSDOT's Tom Pearce wrote in a blog post about the project.

Coffee

From Page 1

the city is rather generic, stating a corporate desire "for the change of use from a bank to a restaurant with drive-thru and a variance to the minimum number of parking stalls." The applicant is Avalon Development and the individual in charge has an address in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Any Starbucks draws a crowd and the Buckley site has a built-in challenge. Buckley City Administrator Paul Weed said the ingress/egress issue is already the

subject of talks between the city and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

Specifically, accessing the old bank site isn't a problem for those headed east on SR 410; likewise, it's not much trouble exiting eastbound. The problem lies with traffic coming from the west or wishing to leave the site and travel west. Crossing lanes of traffic on the busy state highway can be a dicey proposal.

While nothing has been decided, Weed points out that the large parcel of land has two entrance/exit points. The second is onto 112th at the rear of the lot. Final details are percolating.

Grads

From Page 1

took plenty of photos.

Between the masked students and pre-recorded music by the school's musical programs, the graduation wasn't typical. But in many ways, neither was the class.

The 2021 seniors, who are the 116th class to graduate from WRHS, earned \$3,021,074 in scholarships for next year, a record amount.

"What you all have achieved, given the uncertainty of this time, is mind-boggling," said graduation speaker and science teacher Megan Schodron to the assembled seniors.

Graduate Carson Kohler said the last year has been

"Not only did they have to survive the four years of high school, but they survived a pandemic... this group was so resilient and joyful along the way that it's exciting that we get to celebrate them in person."

Ashley Sweitzer,
WRHS teacher

up-and-down but it feels good to be graduating. He already has a welding job in Orting.

"I've waited a long time for this," Kohler said.

"The last year has probably been one of the most stressful years I've ever gone through," said graduate Bryson Cassity. "It's just been weird, man. There was no way to really know what was coming for us."

But the last year hasn't been all bad either, he said. And now he's looking

forward to the "freedom" of making his own moves in life.

Plus, "at least I'm here walking at graduation for my family and my friends," Cassity said. "I think it's very important that the ceremony is still being held, even though it's with COVID restrictions."

Audrey Nichols was "really excited" to be graduating Saturday and moving on to the next step of her life. She plans to become a dental hygienist.

The school year got off to a weird start, and keeping up with the switching between online, hybrid and in-person lessons could be hard, "but we got through it," she said.

Brooke Stretz only attended White River for her senior year, and with the changes brought by COVID, she didn't get many chances to meet her fellow graduates.

Ordinarily a solid student, Stretz had trouble adjusting to online classes like many students. But she and her GPA bounced back with

the shift back into in-person learning.

"When you have your phone and TV with your computer, it's like, why would I pay attention to this," Stretz said.

Now, Stretz plans to study at Pierce College. She hasn't fully committed to a field of study but she's interested in biology and science in general.

"I don't know how they did it," Schodron said after the ceremony. "I got my teaching [certification] on an online program, and it was hard as

an adult. But to have them do it six classes a day — it's just so impressive. And I'm so proud of them, because it was hard."

Teacher Ashley Sweitzer was impressed, too.

"Not only did they have to survive the four years of high school, but they survived a pandemic," she said. "And we've never had to persevere on that level, ever. And this group was so resilient and joyful along the way that it's exciting that we get to celebrate them in person."

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