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Veteran captures memories of war, returning home

By KIRA ERICKSON
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For the past 20 years, Fred McCarthy wanted to write a memoir about his experiences as a U.S. Army officer and combat helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War.

"It was probably the most exciting part of my life," said McCarthy, who enlisted when he was 21.

The former Langley mayor, who now resides in Bellingham, took the initiative about three years ago and contacted an independent publisher that specializes in nonfiction.

His book, titled "Coming All the Way Home," is slated to be released this spring by McFarland & Company Inc.

Besides stories and reflections, the memoir contains photographs, poems written by McCarthy during his tour and letters he sent home to his mother.

Both of McCarthy's parents served in the Army during World War II. His mother was a nurse and his father was the commander of a company.

"I always heard about their adventures in the war," McCarthy said, "and I enlisted because it was patriotic at the time to help a country determine its own destiny, it was an adventure because I was going to get to go to flight school and learn how to fly helicopters and it was just an exciting thing to do."

Before enlisting, McCarthy was a student at St. Edward Seminary near Lake Washington. Life became a lot different when he started attending school to become an Army warrant officer, where he learned to fly aircraft.

During the war, he flew

SEE WAR STORIES, A3



Photo by Kira Erickson/South Whidbey Record

Deer Lagoon Grange Master Chuck Prochaska looks through a book of historic documents on the grange.

Deer Lagoon Grange at center of contention in community

By KIRA ERICKSON
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A social organization and historic South Whidbey location wrapped in one recently caught the attention of community members increasingly concerned about its purported association with a group known for its support of the Second Amendment and a disdain for COVID-19 restrictions.

Deer Lagoon Grange, a charter of the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, saw a decline in membership numbers in previous years.

That is, until a spike in new members last fall.

Some of these new members, it was reported in a *Seattle Times* article, are also part of Washington Three Percent, a group labeled "far-right" and "paramilitary" by community members and militia-tracking experts, despite the group's efforts to distance itself from national Three Percent organizations.

But since the article's publication in December, the rift in the

community has grown wider.

Community-wide efforts to encourage a new wave of members not part of Washington Three Percent to join the Deer Lagoon Grange were stymied, however, by current members who have not yet made a decision about the majority of the new applicants.

The controversy

Deer Lagoon Grange became embroiled in controversy last October when it became a meeting place for organizers of a maskless "Freedom to Worship" protest, though the event was later moved to a different location in Freeland.

The grange hall is located about halfway between downtown Langley and the Bayview area of South Whidbey.

Members of Washington Three Percent were present at the rally, which flouted COVID-19 regulations about limiting group sizes and wearing masks, and offered a platform for Republican political candidates to speak.

Some members of the group were encouraged by Clinton resident Erik Rohde, a Washington Three Percenter, to join the Grange.

"Telling people to actively get involved in your community, I don't know how this suddenly makes you a pariah," Rohde said.

He declined to answer if he was a member of the Deer Lagoon Grange and did not specify how many fellow Washington Three Percents successfully joined the Grange as a result of his efforts.

Though Deer Lagoon Grange membership meetings are only open to members, the grange hall is available for both members and non-members to rent.

A video on one of Rohde's social media accounts posted around Thanksgiving 2020 shows him inside the Deer Lagoon Grange around several other people, all sans masks. In the video's background, a Washington Three Percent flag hangs on the far wall.

In response to the events at the end of last year, a group of people

from across South Whidbey formed a steering committee called Reclaim the Grange, which encourages people unaffiliated with Washington Three Percent to join the Grange.

The movement, which spawned a petition with 651 signatures, calls for a meeting environment free from the threat of an armed militia and people who don't abide by masking and social distancing protocols in place against COVID-19. The petition is available to view on the website, reclaimthegrange.org.

Craig Cyr, a member of Reclaim the Grange's steering committee and Langley council member, recalled driving by the mask-free rally last fall and seeing people standing shoulder-to-shoulder in violation of social distancing protocols.

"We're trying to stop people from dying. Wearing masks is really important," Cyr said. "And no, it's not an imposition."

Rhonda Salerno, a Langley farm owner, recalled seeing a

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Clinton man pleads guilty to child porn charges

By JESSIE STENSLAND
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A 28-year-old Clinton man is facing prison time for having child pornography on an online file storage service, according to court records.

Christopher A. Knowles pleaded guilty in Island County Superior Court March 29 to two counts of possession of depictions of a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct in the first degree.

Under the terms of the plea bargain, the prosecution and defense will recommend that the judge sentence him to two years

in prison, which is the standard sentencing range, in exchange for Knowles completing a sexual deviancy evaluation and being amenable to treatment.

The sentencing hearing is scheduled for April 26.

According to the police report, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children received a report last year from Dropbox Inc., which runs an online file storage service, that an account holder uploaded child pornography.

The company compares uploaded files to known algorithms of child porn. An ex-

aminer at the center was able to geo-locate the IP address to Clinton and therefore the Island County Sheriff's Office was alerted.

A detective reviewed the videos and found that 180 met the criteria as child pornography. The children in the videos were between the ages of 2 and 13 and were being raped by adult men in most of the videos.

A search warrant for Dropbox yielded hundreds more videos of child porn, as well as images of Knowles co-mingled with the illegal pornographic files, the report states.



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GRANGE, CONTINUED FROM A1

flyer about the rally. She said she called the manager of the Deer Lagoon Grange and told him it didn't seem like a good idea to have so many people gathered. In the months since the rally, she and others have observed many cars in the Grange's parking lot on a regular basis.

Salerno said she was interested in joining the Grange but was wary of large gatherings where people weren't wearing masks. Her husband is currently undergoing treatment for cancer, and Salerno said she doesn't want to expose him to the coronavirus.

"I just wanted a safe and inclusive space in the community," she said. "I don't care if they have different beliefs in there."

Salerno is one of at least 60 applicants who is still waiting to hear back about her pending membership to the Grange.

According to Tom Gwin, Washington State Grange president, current members of the Grange vote to accept or reject each applicant during a monthly members meeting. Deer Lagoon Grange's last monthly meeting was March 2, but a pool of applicants who applied as far back as January still haven't been notified whether they've been accepted.

"I don't know why the community is being shut out now," Salerno said. "The community has been keeping it alive for a while."

Keeping with tradition

Chuck Prochaska walks from room to room of the Grange pointing out awards on the wall won by members. He recalls details about renovations

to the structure, many of which he helped complete.

Local granges serve as the agricultural center of their communities. The National Grange was founded in 1867, shortly after the Civil War. Deer Lagoon Grange was founded in 1927.

Granges work to support farmers and families through "grassroots action, service, education, advocacy and agriculture awareness," according to the mission of the National Grange. Archived stories from *The Record* about the Deer Lagoon Grange include topics such as Whidbey Island Fair events, fundraising campaigns to update the hall and classes on various subjects.

Serving as the current management — or master — of the Deer Lagoon Grange, Prochaska possesses extensive knowledge of its history. He has a passion for not only the organization but the building itself.

"I've dedicated myself to the Grange," he said.

Membership ebbed over the last few years.

"A lot of it was people dying, people getting too old," he said.

According to Prochaska, about half of the new members who joined last fall are in their teens and 20s, which he finds exciting. He said he conducted research and is not concerned about some of the newer Grange members being part of Washington Three Percent, but he did agree they seemed "conservative-minded."

"We're political, but non-partisan," he said of the Grange.

A batch of 60-plus applicants within the past few months is unprecedented in the history of the local grange. Prochaska said he expects decisions to accept or reject the applicants will be made at the Deer Lagoon Grange's next meeting April 6.

Applicants who signed the Reclaim the Grange petition may have it weighed against them. A copy was provided to Prochaska.

"If a person signed the petition and got into the Grange, they have some explaining to do," he said.

He referred to the petition as a "hate letter" that

seeks to oust certain members of the Grange.

"They think the Grange has been taken by outsiders and they want to take it back," he said. "From who? Grange members?"

Salerno, who has been trying to become a Grange member, said the intent is not to "take down" the organization nor the hall.

"We're not trying to hurt him," she said, referring to Prochaska. "We would honor him for all he's done for the Grange. He saved the Grange several years ago from being this dilapidated building."

Prochaska said the people behind Reclaim the Grange have no clue how the Grange works and refers to them as "a liberal organization" trying to take over what the liberals perceive as a "radical right-wing institution." He said he and his wife are afraid to go out in public, where they might be attacked by those associated with Reclaim the Grange.

"These guys are worse than the Three Percent, in my mind," Prochaska said.

Rohde said the backers of Reclaim the Grange are uncomfortable about conservatives getting together. He said their website is filled with "hyperbolic fears" and "vitriolic hatred."

"Whidbey Island is a narrow island and it has a narrow bandwidth for inclusivity," he said.

Christy Korrow, a steering committee member for Reclaim the Grange and a Langley council member, said the issue was cast by some as a political left-versus-right issue. She does not believe it should be.

"I think that there's a really positive impulse behind our community at large who really want to build a community that feels safe and inclusive, especially for community members who are people of color who often feel like their voices are hidden or marginalized," she said.

A better word, rather than "reclaim," might be "revitalize," Cyr said. Returning the Deer Lagoon Grange to its roots of agricultural practices is a priority for Reclaim the Grange.

Yet Preston Ossman, also a steering committee member, said he is concerned that members of a "far-right

militia" have taken a foothold at a community space.

"Nobody should be afraid of joining an organization because people are carrying guns and not wearing masks," he said.

He said there should be a shift in direction for the Grange to become more inclusive and focus on families, farming and social change.

"We're really trying to be community oriented, and we're interested in coming together with the people who are there if they meet us where we are at, at a basic safety level," he said.

Community members wanting to join the Grange have voiced uneasiness about the transparency of the organization's membership process.

As the president of the Washington State Grange, Gwin said he has no authority over local Grange Masters and cannot overrule membership decisions.

Prochaska has been master of the Deer Lagoon Grange off and on over the years. It is an elected office with a one-year term. He also holds a deputy position with the state Grange. He said new applicants would not be approved if they were known to be "an enemy" of the Grange, or "someone looking to start a fight."

"We have an obligation that we ask every new member to take, and part of that has to do with believing in God and treating people fairly," he said.

Prochaska and Gwin suggest that, if enough people get together, they could start their own Grange. According to the State Grange website, 13 people are needed for a charter.

In response to concerns about large gatherings on the premises, Prochaska said he cannot monitor every single group that rents the hall. Renters are asked to follow COVID safety guidelines.

Deer Lagoon Grange may be one of the few Granges in the state to be holding in-person monthly membership meetings. Gwin said many Granges have opted for online Zoom meetings.

"We tell the granges to follow the governor's and the CDC's recommendations,"

he said.

"There are some areas of the state where that is strictly adhered to, other areas it is not."

He declined to say how many people are members of the Deer Lagoon Grange. He said that information is not "pertinent."

Local threats

Lindsay Schubiner is the director for the Momentum program at Western States Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to tracking movements of militia groups in the Pacific Northwest. The Momentum program works to defend democracy by supporting communities and civil society to effectively respond to social movements that exploit bigotry and intolerance. Washington Three Percent, according to her, falls under that category.

"The Deer Lagoon Grange may have been intended as a local democratic institution that serves the entire community," Schubiner said. "However, it no longer serves that role when it's taken over by a sliver of the community that holds extremist far-right views."

Schubiner said the Capitol insurrection on Jan. 6 was an energizing moment for far-right movements. Some of the groups that were allegedly involved in the storming include the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys and the national Three Percent group, according to an NPR article.

Members of the national Three Percent group have been referred to as "anti-government extremists who are part of the militia movement" by the Anti-Defamation League. The name comes from the notion that only 3 percent of colonists fought the British in the Revolutionary War, a number that historians say significantly underestimates the truth.

"Paramilitary groups pose a real threat to the safety of both communities and democratic institutions," Schubiner said.

Members of the Washington Three Percent say they are not affiliated with the national organization. Matt Marshall, the founder of Washington Three Percent, has actively worked to distance his group from the other Three Percent movements. As an example, he referred to Chris Hill, the leader of the Georgia Security Force III Percent, as a "hillbilly idiot" whom he doesn't associate with.

Besides having a different logo, Washington Three Percent is also registered as a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization. The group participates in an outreach program called "Boots on the Home Ground" that provides shoes and meals to homeless veterans.

Marshall acknowledged that the majority of

Washington Three Percent members carry firearms. According to him, there have never been any violent events his group was part of.

"We don't claim to be a militia and we don't focus on firearms," he said.

An occupied protest was planned at the state capitol on Jan. 6, the same day as the national insurrection, but Marshall ultimately called it off for Washington Three Percent as things were heating up. Armed protestors made it as far as the front lawn of the governor's mansion.

"There were people with Three Percent flags," Marshall said. "We had no members there."

Worries about threats of violence in the South Whidbey community have escalated since the insurrection.

During a city council meeting earlier this year, Councilmember Cyr announced that he has become the target of a threatening Proud Boy website. *The Record* was able to confirm that the name of the elected official does indeed appear on such a site.

Prochaska, on the other hand, said he does not understand the recent "fear mongering" around guns in the community. He said the Deer Lagoon Grange could write a rule that doesn't allow firearms to be carried within the building, but it's never been done because there has never been a need for it.

"I'm certainly not going to run the rules of the Grange according to the fears of the people in the city of Langley," he said, adding that the citizens tend to be "left-leaning" and the Grange is not associated with the city.

While Prochaska found nothing objectionable about the Washington Three Percent, alarmed community members have pointed to what they perceive as troubling ties between the group and others, such as Oath Keepers and Patriot Prayer.

"Obviously we can't see into their hearts, but we can look at their actions," Schubiner said.

She said Marshall was photographed with the founder of the Oath Keepers and another Three Percent group in late 2019. Marshall has participated in events with Patriot Prayer Founder Joey Gibson, including one in late December 2020.


"We have tracked members of the Washington Three Percent and Patriot Prayer collaborating and appearing at many of the same events over the years," she said.

"These groups, along with the Oath Keepers, occupy a similar paramilitary-oriented space in the broader far-right movement."

Most recently, the groups have been present

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GRANGE

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as counter protestors at Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Marshall said Washington Three Percent was there to show support for law enforcement and denied any formal affiliations among the other groups.

He said everyone has a right to protest peacefully.

Rohde said members of Washington Three Percent are of all races, sexual orientations and religious beliefs.

Schubiner said Washington Three Percenters also participate in anti-democratic activities by promoting “inflammatory anti-government conspiracy theories” and by using “threats and intimidation to achieve their political goals.”

Marshall and Rohde are not shy about the “Freedom to Worship” rally they took part in last fall. Marshall has a medical degree and has questioned the governor’s COVID-19 restrictions and its effect on personal liberties.

Rohde himself, who is Jewish, has been a target of an anti-semitic attack. Marshall explained that last fall, swastikas were spray-painted on a

Trump campaign sign in front of Rohde’s home. Marshall said he witnessed the hurt and pain firsthand that this caused Rohde’s family.

“This is the kind of stuff that is happening to conservatives out on Whidbey that hasn’t been reported before,” Marshall said.

Chance for unity

When community members speak about the Deer Lagoon Grange, they often recall it as a site where dances, musical performances and birthday parties have happened.

These days, with the exception of a few drive-thru events, there haven’t been many celebrations — as far as the general public is aware of. Prochaska said he is hopeful that the Grange might be able to host an open house this spring so the public can learn more about the organization.

Emily Melcher, a faith leader in the South Whidbey community who has watched the controversy, is hopeful about the future.

“The Grange can be a really inclusive place that helps people grow and strengthen democracy and our connection towards one another,” she said.

National program ranks Island County among healthiest in Washington state

By **JESSIE STENSLAND**
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A national program has once again ranked Island County as among the healthiest counties in the state.

The County Health Rankings & Roadmap, a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, released the latest survey this week.

Island County is rated No. 4, behind San Juan, King and Whitman counties. Neighboring Snohomish County isn’t far behind at No. 6 and Skagit County is ranked No. 14.

Theresa Sanders, Assessment and Healthy Communities director in Island County Public Health, noted that the statistics used in the rankings do not take the pandemic into account since public health data tends to lag by a year or more.

Still, the survey is one of the valuable indicators the department looks at when considering

the overall health of the community and identifying areas that should be focused on.

Sanders pointed out that this survey looks beyond traditional behavioral health factors like smoking and obesity to a “social determinant model” that considers a much broader range of things that affect people’s health, such as education, poverty, violent crime and the environment.

“There are many social and economic factors that determine health,” she said, adding that the county’s natural environment and good air quality “gives us a lot of points.”

The county has a high rate of high school completions at 95 percent, a comparatively low rate of children in poverty at 9 percent and a rate of violent crime at 107 per 100,000, which is just a third of the state average.

On the other hand, the percentages of people in the county who smoke or are obese are slightly above the state average.

Sanders said she is especially concerned with the statistics related to alcohol, especially with recent news about the amount of alcohol consumption increasing during the pandemic.

She said the problem has been especially prevalent with women, who have been the focus of recent alcohol-related advertising campaigns.

The report states that 21 percent of adults in the county reported binge or heavy drinking, which is above the state average of 17 percent.

Driving deaths with alcohol involvement is 41 percent in the county, well above the state average of 33 percent.

Sanders said a perennial concern for Public Health officials in Island County is a stark lack of primary care physicians and mental health providers.

Island County has one primary care doctor for 2,720 people. The state average is one doctor for 1,180 people.

WAR STORIES

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gunships for seven months for the 121st Assault Helicopter Company, also known as the “Soc Trang Tigers.” The gunship platoon for the company was called the Vikings. He was stationed in the southern part of Vietnam, near the region of the Mekong River Delta and just outside the city of Soc Trang.

McCarthy flew 1,300 hours of combat missions. He had some close calls — two of which involved engine failures.

In one instance, the emergency occurred during the nighttime. After successfully auto-rotating the aircraft down to the ground, a medical evacuation helicopter was able to

pick up McCarthy and his crew. As they were flying away, the Viet Cong overran the downed aircraft and blew it up.

He encountered engine failure another time while flying with a load of explosive devices on board. He and the other pilot were able to auto-rotate the helicopter down to the ground, although it did get smashed up in the process.

Bullets from the enemy hitting the bottom of the aircraft, he said, “sounded like someone pounding on the side of the helicopter with a hammer.”

McCarthy was also responsible for overseeing a hospital, a prisoner of

war camp and an orphanage. When he wasn’t flying missions, McCarthy helped out the people running these facilities. He would write letters to his former classmates, asking them to send clothes and medicine that would go to these places.

In addition, he wrote the newsletter for his company.

“It’s one of the most productive times of your life,” McCarthy said. “Even though you’re young, you’re given enormous responsibility.”

McCarthy was in Vietnam 1967-68, which included one of the deadliest days of the war for Americans, shortly after the Tet Offensive was launched. At one point in the war, for about a two-month period, he lived in a helicopter, sleeping under it at night and flying it by

day.

Some of his decision-making and leadership experiences during the war would go on to inform positions of authority in other areas of his life. Besides serving as the mayor of Langley for three years, McCarthy was also the superintendent for the South Whidbey School District for five years and the director for the Whidbey Veterans Resource Center for two years. He is currently an adjunct professor at Western Washington University.

McCarthy acknowledged that he has been blessed to have such a successful career. He said it is common to hear about veterans who have a hard time adjusting to civilian life after fighting in the war, but for whatever rea-

son he did not have that difficulty.

Since the Vietnam War ultimately did not result in a victory for the U.S., many people may want to leave it behind completely.

“I chose to write about it in my book so people would know what it was like to be there, how you dealt with it, and how it affected you for the rest of your life,” McCarthy said.

He is hopeful “Coming All the Way Home” will appeal to a wide range of people.

He is grateful for the support he received from a writing group he was part of when he lived on Whidbey, as well as an author from Langley who was his mentor during the book-writing process.

McCarthy encourages people to watch for the

book’s release this spring. He plans to do a book-signing at Moonraker Books in Langley.

• *For information on McCarthy’s memoir, visit mcfarlandbooks.com/product/Coming-All-the-Way-Home*




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IN OUR OPINION

Deer Lagoon Grange’s membership should be open to all

The Deer Lagoon Grange has become an unlikely focal point in the culture war on South Whidbey. The foofaraw began last fall when some members of the Washington Three Percent, a conservative group with a predilection for guns and disdain for masks, joined the Grange, causing concerns about a takeover. An effort by hundreds of residents seeking to “Reclaim the Grange” followed. A petition warns that there’s “no place for anti-government extremism and violence on South Whidbey” and yearns for a return to the Grange’s mission “to strengthen individuals, families and communities through grassroots action, service, education, advocacy and agriculture awareness.” Reclaim the Grange people and others concerned about the direction of the Grange applied to join the organization. They have been frozen out. While the Grange is supposed to make decisions about applicants at each monthly meeting, mysteriously, nothing has hap-

pened for months. Chuck Prochaska, the Grange master, has been the heart and soul of the Grange for years, leading a successful fundraising effort a decade ago to renovate the historic structure not far from Bayview. The Grange has been an important part of the Whidbey Island Fair for many years and Prochaska and his wife were grand marshals of the parade two years ago. He defends the new members of the Grange and feels under attack by the Reclaim the Grange folks. He indicated that people who signed the petition should probably not be allowed to be members if their desire is to “destroy” or “take over” the Grange. It’s understandable that his feelings are hurt after all he’s done for the community. The petition is unnecessarily hyperbolic in spots, but it represents the will of community members who don’t want to see a long-standing and important community organization co-opted by a

small number of people with a political agenda anathema to them. People remember the Grange for free dictionaries given to school children, classes on organic food growing and beer brewing, arts and crafts events, creative writing contests, Zydeco dances and homespun cookbook fundraisers. These are the good parts of small-town values. A demand for inclusiveness should not be confused with “cancel culture.” New members should clearly be welcome to the Grange. It would be the height of irresponsibility and unfairness to create a litmus test for membership based on what people think about one conservative group. Inviting new members might lead to contentious situations, but it will ultimately be energizing and will only be good for the Grange and the community. People learn to work together by working together.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Whidbey Island

Treatment of addicts, homeless is embarrassing

Editor, The treatment of the homeless and addicts of Whidbey Island is embarrassing and shows just how incompetent our local leaders are. It’s dysfunctional to use an overly general term “homeless” to solve a complex problem that involves many different types of people in many different types of situations. Drug addiction, mental health, unsupportive parents, sudden lost job, no viable job skills, job skills don’t match the area, priced out of housing, came to Whidbey Island due to reputation of being soft on drugs and homelessness, etc. Each aspect requires a different solution. This is an important part of the problem. It’s hard to make progress on a problem if people paint it with an overly broad brush or don’t have the basic terminology to clearly communicate what aspect of the problem they’re discussing. This is a real lack of leadership. A competent leader would at least be able to appropriately define the problems so as to invite constructive dialog on how to solve them but for some reason the councils all across this Island seem to be run by people who I don’t really believe have ever personally struggled with addiction or homelessness? Helping these people isn’t giving them a bed and some “words-of-encouragement” from a social worker. If you’ve ever been addicted or known anyone who’s been prison to their mind then you would know that there are those who would chose death over being clean. It’s hard to get clean and stay that way. This just seems like a passion project by someone who wants to pat themselves on the back for being a “morally good person”. You can’t force people to change their life and I just find it laughable that a bunch of upper-middle class/wealthy people living in their little bubble think



that Whidbey Island is a place that can give the homeless the resources needed for a true, long-lasting recovery. I work for the hospital and we have negative cash on hand; our hospital can’t give these people the help they need. There are barely any job opportunities for the working class families who’ve been here generations. Where do you expect these people to work once they reach sobriety? Recovery is a process that can take a lifetime and relapses are bound to happen, especially if life starts working against you and you can’t find a job, home, etc ... It’s near impossible for anyone to “get back up on their feet” in an area that can’t provide the amenities a city like Seattle can. Honestly Seattle can’t even handle its own homeless popu-

lation, what makes you think Whidbey would do better? Unfortunately, this won’t matter until they start moving into the backyards of our local leaders or until someone they care about is negatively impacted by it. Caring about the homeless? Don’t make me laugh. These are the same people that quickly lock their car doors when stopped next to the people begging outside the grocery store parking lot. There are bigger problems on the island, such as rapid Navy expansion, the destruction of our forests and beaches to build more million dollar or “affordable” homes, recent transplants who have no respect for the history and culture of the island and entitled residents who believe that the beaches should be private. The character of the island is

not the same. The people who move up here to “get away from the city” are the first to complain about the deer population and beg for a super Walmart, Target or another Starbucks to be built. This place is slowly becoming Lynnwood, but for some reason that seems to be what the new influx of people here want. Annie Hasanbi Oak Harbor

Collective thanks WhidbeyHealth professionals deserve accolades Editor, This letter is not about Rush Limbaugh — give thanks to

God for that — it is not about the folks who lost their way and fell through Capitol windows and doors during a horrific windstorm, and it is not about Rogaine. This letter is about WhidbeyHealth in Coupeville. It deserves several sentences with glowing accolades, but one will suffice for today. The staff, volunteers and management team at WhidbeyHealth have distinguished themselves in every way possible in coordinating and safely administering thousands of COVID-19 vaccinations at a time when much of the country is floundering. Please join me in expressing our collective thanks for their professionalism, courage and perseverance during the challenge of the century. G. M. Richardson Clinton

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SOUTH WHIDBEY RECORD

SATURDAY, APRIL 17, 2021

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Grange membership denials widen political divide

By KIRA ERICKSON
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The majority of applicants who recently applied to a fraternal community organization have been denied membership, apparently on the grounds that they signed a petition.

At least 60 South Whidbey community members — including business owners, farmers and Whidbey Island Fair

vegetable judges — applied to join the Deer Lagoon Grange in the wake of a local controversy involving members of Washington Three Percent who are also current members of Whidbey's grange.

A steering committee, formerly by the name of "Reclaim the Grange," was created to oppose the presence of Washington Three Percent,

which community members expressed concerns about for the group's purported extremist views, and to encourage new people with an interest in agricultural activities to join the Deer Lagoon Grange.

The movement was also accompanied by a petition, which called for a meeting environment free from the threat of an armed militia and people who

don't abide by masking and social distancing protocols in place against COVID-19.

Last week, current members of Deer Lagoon Grange voted about whether or not to accept the new crop of applicants, some of whom applied as long ago as January and many who had signed the petition.

The decision, it appears for most, was a swift rejection.

Rhonda Salerno, a Langley farm owner, said she was shocked to receive the letter from the Washington State Grange last Friday.

"I've never been rejected from something," she said. "It was quite daunting to get a letter of rejection like that in a group that I would really be a perfect candidate for, because

SEE GRANGE, A5

Witness, shell casing tie murder to Central Whidbey

By JESSIE STENSLAND
jstensland@whidbeynewsgroup.com

A law enforcement report on the murder of a 67-year-old Whidbey Island man whose body was found in Blaine suggests that he may have been shot near the Coupeville Ferry.

Lynda C. Mercy, a 62-year-old Bellingham resident, made her first appearance in Whatcom County Superior Court Wednesday after being arrested on suspicion of murder in the second degree. The judge set her bail at \$1 million.

Thomas Flood's body was found covered in blankets on a trail inside a Whatcom County park on Semiahmoo Parkway in the afternoon of April 7. Flood was shot

SEE MURDER, A2



Photo by Kira Erickson/South Whidbey Record

Master Gardener Don Krafft gathers some broccoli in his garden plot at South Whidbey Tilth. He grows several things that are available for purchase at the Island County Master Gardener online plant sale.

Master Gardeners kick off plant sale, continue clinics

By KIRA ERICKSON
kerickson@whidbeynewsgroup.com

Green thumbs who have had a taste of spring sunshine and want to begin planting can do so with the help of the Island County Master Gardeners.

The foundation, which consists of seasoned gardeners, is holding the perennially popular plant sale online through May 4. Shoppers can visit the website icmgf-store.org and select from over 200 plant varieties, including flowers, shrubs, veggie starts and native plants as well as garden art.

Plants can be picked up curbside on May 8 at the Greenbank Farm.

Proceeds from the sale benefit the community educational mission of the Washington State University Extension Island County Master Gardener Program.

The fundraiser is one of two big annual events

that the foundation hosts.

Holly Grason, a newly minted master gardener and co-chair for the plant sale, said the sale will also have ornamental grasses, herbs and trees for sale.

While the annual plant sale is always welcome, the point of the Master Gardener program is for trained volunteers to share their plant-related knowledge with the public and that hasn't changed during the pandemic.

The twice-a-month "Ask a Master Gardener" plant clinics have transitioned to an online webinar format, but the idea is still the same: Experienced horticulturists offer sage advice about any type of plant known to humanity, as well as often-maddening plant diseases and pests.

The clinics currently run 2-3 p.m. the first and third Saturdays of the month. The Zoom link is available at icmgf.org/events.

Grason is hopeful the gardening clinics may

SEE CLINICS, A2

Community remembers longtime officer from S. Whidbey

By KIRA ERICKSON
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South Whidbey resident Mark Brinkman is being remembered not only a trusted Lynnwood police officer, but also as a beloved community member.

Brinkman, who died unexpectedly Sunday night after collapsing in his home, held many roles.

Brinkman was vice president of the Washington Council of Police and Sheriffs and president of the Lynnwood Police Guild.

"Mark was a very dedicated law enforcement professional, friend, father and husband," Lynnwood Chief of Police Jim Nelson said in a statement. "Mark was taken from his family and from all of us too soon and we will miss him."

Brinkman gained national recognition as a leader in DUI enforcement. In fact, NBC News once referred to him as "the nation's biggest buzz-kill."

He was also very involved in the South Whidbey community.

Former Langley Police Chief Bob Herzberg remembered a 21-year-old Brinkman who applied to become a reserve officer with his department 35 years ago.

"This wasn't just someone who was out there for the action of arresting people," Herzberg said. "This was someone who cared and wanted to make a difference."

Brinkman was with the

SEE BRINKMAN, A3



Brinkman



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Hospital to sell Bayview property with odd history

By JESSIE STENSLAND
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Officials at the cash-strapped WhidbeyHealth Public Hospital District are planning to sell a piece of property in Bayview with a strange and controversial history.

The 4.56 acres of undeveloped land that the hospital purchased 13 years ago for nearly \$2 million currently has an assessed

value of just \$150,000, though officials aim to get much more.

The hope is that funds from the sale will offset the cost of the hospital district's recent purchase of a \$750,000 property adjacent to the hospital in Coupeville, according to Conor O'Brien, community relations director for the district.

"It's one of the things we are looking at as part of our financial strategy as we try to

recover," O'Brien said, adding that officials are looking at a range of options for cutting property-related costs.

On Wednesday, the hospital district board of commissioners voted to make surplus the Bayview parcel, which is zoned as "rural center." Designating the property, located on Highway 525, as surplus is the first step in selling the property.

SEE PROPERTY, A2



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GRANGE

CONTINUED FROM A1

I'm a farmer.”

The National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry was founded in 1867, shortly after the Civil War, as a way to unify farmers across the nation.

“After the Civil War, the Grange was actually made up to bring people of all kinds together. And that’s what people are asking for here,” she said, indicating the petition many signed that calls for inclusivity in the Grange.

Three reasons for rejection are listed in the letter: “failure to secure a current Grange member to recommend you for membership, a lack of transparency in not using your legal name and or/address and your signature on a petition, which members may believe wrongs others in the Grange, something that goes against the obligation of membership.”

Community members who received the rejection have been baffled by the first two reasons.

Langley resident Dean Enell said he was not aware that a current member is needed to endorse potential candidates for membership.

Although he is not a farmer, Enell has several acres of trees and possesses an interest in the activities the Deer Lagoon Grange has focused on in the past.

“It seems to me we’re missing a wonderful opportunity to bring people together within this community to promote things that would be in our common interest, which in this case would be agriculture,” Enell said.

Pam Schell, one of the owners of the Inn at Langley, agreed. She, too, was also barred from joining the Deer Lagoon Grange.

“A grange to me is an opportunity to have a lot of events that promote farming and our local rural community,” she said.

Gary Ingram, the president of South Whidbey Tilth, has worked alongside Deer Lagoon Grange Master Chuck Prochaska at the Whidbey Island Fair as a fellow vegetable judge for years.

Receiving a rejection letter might complicate this relationship.

“We thought it would be a good idea to bring Tilth people into the Grange,” Ingram said.

As Enell also suggested, the rejection has only widened the political divide in the South Whidbey community.

“I’m left-wing, I’m very progressive, but I’m not a terrorist,” Ingram said.

Salerno, Enell, Schell and Ingram all signed the Reclaim the Grange petition.

Neither Prochaska nor Washington State Grange President Tom Gwin returned a request for comment by press time about the most recent decision regarding Deer Lagoon Grange membership.

In previous interviews, Prochaska has been vocal about his distrust of Reclaim the Grange. He has criticized the petition for its denunciation of current Deer Lagoon Grange members who also belong to Washington Three Percent.

“We’re not going to accept people who are trying to destroy us,” he had said.

Gwin, in a past interview, said private fraternal organizations such as the Grange don’t operate with petitions.

“If they’re joining the Grange for political reasons, really they’re joining the Grange for the wrong reason,” he had said.

At the request of trademark attorneys from the National Grange, “Reclaim the Grange” has changed its website name to “Solidarity over Supremacy.”

The new website URL is *soswhidbey.org*.

Larry Behrendt, who is part of the steering committee, said the original name simply wasn’t worth fighting for.

“Our group has an intentionally broader focus than just this action around the Grange,” he said, adding that a name change was going to happen anyway.

“We considered a number of different names,” he said. “We wanted a name that reflected our broader concern for community well-being, inclusion, equity and safety.”

Grange holding fishermen’s breakfast

From 7-11 a.m. Saturday, April 24, Deer Lagoon Grange will be holding a drive-through “fishermen’s breakfast.”

For a suggested donation, people are invited to enjoy a hearty breakfast burrito with eggs, potatoes, cheese and sausage, a side of salsa and their choice of coffee or juice drink.

Deer Lagoon Grange is located at 5142 Bayview Road, Langley.

Working families tax credit heads to bipartisan approval

Washington families may qualify for rebate

By SYDNEY BROWN
WNPA News Service

A tax credit for working families in Washington passed the Senate in a bipartisan vote April 11, with lawmakers on both sides saying the exemption for low-income earners was a long time coming.

“Expanding and fully funding the Working Families Tax Credit will make a difference for hundreds of thousands of Washingtonians who may face an unexpected cost – an auto repair, a sick child, a loss of hours at a job – that can lead to a downward economic spiral,” Sen. David Frockt, D-Seattle, said in a statement.

The Working Families Tax Credit would for the first time increase credit amounts and expand eligibility.

Budgets from both Democrats and Republicans included hundreds of millions for funding the tax credit, which, after being signed by Gov. Jay Inslee, will pay \$250 million to about 450,000 taxpayers in 2023 after it goes into effect. In the next budget cycle that will be about \$536 million across the state.

For 2023 and after, the working families credit for the prior year will be:

- \$300 for eligible persons with no eligible children;
- \$600 for eligible persons with one child;
- \$900 for eligible persons with two children; or
- \$1,250 for eligible persons with three or more children.

Sen. Lynda Wilson, R-Vancouver, said the legislation will help lower-income earners and single working parents.

“Many years ago, I was a working single mom ... and even though I had a full-time job, I still had substantial costs for daycare,” Wilson said. “\$200 would have made a great difference for both my financial situation and also to help ease the worry.”

The law also expands access to the rebate by including those who file taxes with an Individual Tax Identification Number instead of a Social Security Number, often used by undocumented taxpayers and students.

The original bill had 46 sponsors attached, with Rep. My-Linh Thai, D-Bellevue, as the bill’s primary sponsor. In a March 9 statement after the bill won the overwhelming majority in the House, Thai said the credit would address existing inequities and a regressive tax structure.

“Black and Indigenous Washingtonians, as well as other people of color, are experiencing this at particularly high rates,” Thai said. “I sponsored this bill to put money back in the pockets of Washingtonians who need it most, hopefully granting them some measure of financial security.”

• *WNPA News Service is a nonprofit service managed by the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation.*



Planning for Bayview’s Future

The Bayview Vision Steering Group is working to identify workforce housing opportunities in Bayview. You are invited to hear about our initial thinking, ask questions, and give input before we develop a master plan.

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