

From the editor —

# Welcome to your community newspaper

The La Conner Weekly News is being delivered to every home in the La Conner school district for its annual subscription drive. Dear subscribers, the newspaper you need and trust is being shared this month with your neighbors and friends. The Weekly News will be improved as more people read it, serving its function of informing and knitting the community together.

That has been the functions of newspapers in La Conner since the Puget Sound Mail started publishing here in 1879. The Weekly News is not a direct descendant of that paper but it maintains the legacy of this town having the oldest continuously weekly published newspaper in the state of Washington. That is as much a tribute to area residents as it is to the long line of publishers over the past 142 years.

The world we live in is substantially different from 1879 or 1921. In 1879 Skagit County did not exist, this region being southern Whatcom County until 1883. In 1921 the Roaring 20s had just begun. But through it all good times and bad, drought years and flood years, times of plenty and times of want, residents of greater La Conner have been able to open their local newspaper weekly to keep abreast of news, art, culture, entertainment, farm harvests, sports, schools, government, kids, cats in trees, 100th birthdays and 75th wedding anniversaries — all that and much more.

To those of you surprised to have the La Conner Weekly News delivered, please read. Take the wrap-around page with you into town and visit the merchants wanting you to stop in and look for holiday gifts. Every week, every day is a good time to be shopping locally.

Subscribers — readers — are the reason for the Weekly News. The paper is on the verge of surpassing 900 subscribers. With your decision, it will enter the new year with over 1,000. As a way of saying thanks, and encouraging you to sign up, your subscription will be FREE if you are the 950th, the 1,000th or the 1,050th subscriber. And everyone subscribing or renewing their subscription in December will be entered in a drawing for a \$50 gift card to the display advertiser of your choice. Three households will be winners.

This is a fun way to say thank you: Thank you for caring about your local community. Reading — and supporting — the newspaper is one of the many ways our neighbors pay attention to the place they call home. Many of the projects and special activities volunteers support are covered in these pages. In December readers may see their children — or their grandchildren, or their neighbors' children or grandchildren — on Santa's lap either at the La Conner Rotary Club's pancake breakfast or at Gilkey Square, where the community Christmas tree will be lit Dec. 4.

The Weekly News strives to put on its pages every week the news of the day, stories big and small, serious and not so serious. That is because the paper is about your community.

The Weekly News is also about democracy. Yes, that means covering the local school board, the town council and the fire district commissioners' meetings. But democracy is about more than meetings and more than the local, county and state legislature elections that are covered. That is why the editor encourages engagement and participation and invites every one of you to write letters and guest columns. We are all the heartbeat of the community.

Your local newspaper is as old fashioned as democracy and as current as the conversations you have with your neighbor over the fence or at your kids' soccer game.

If you are new to the Weekly News, please consider subscribing and inviting the community into your home weekly.

— Ken Stern

## Musings — on the editor's mind

It is a strange business with an odd purpose, newspaper publishing. It is a business and earns its profits by selling the interest and purchasing power of its readers to advertisers.

It attracts its readers with the news of the day, but that is more than just the facts that pop up in town. Reporting does start with, for example, news of water line breaks, whether on Channel Drive or Reservation Road. But that is the start of the story, both for staff and what appears on the page.

Journalism occurs when the editor and staff analyze underlying causes. That can be through examining the age of the infrastructure and historic funding sources that first built water and sewage treatment systems. It is linking heavy rains that eroded soil causing the road to sink and break the pipe. And it is through editorials that ask readers to consider a sustainable future is only possible if we cooperate and invest now for the sake of children yet unborn.

Newspapers are a business. Yet they have a critical role in a healthy democratic society. Our Founding Fathers planted newspapers' community oversight role squarely in the First Amendment of the Constitution, the only business named in that document, call-

ing for and defending freedom of the press.

It is in the nature and purpose of newspapers to ask questions, not for grandstanding or gotcha moments but to probe so the entire community can consider both the news of the day and underlying causes of decisions and reasons things are done or not done.

Not every resident can attend a council or school board meeting or observe a rising river or a leaking dike, but a newspaper takes the initiative as the eyes and ears of the community. A paper's staff considers and plans, anticipating coverage but also helped by you, citizens who stop by or call or email with issues concerning them and which they believe the community would be helped by having it broadcast.

Broadcast. That is originally a farming term. One hundred years ago radio allowed the seemingly instantaneous widespread broadcasting of information. This paper reaches you weekly, as the name, Weekly News, states. Its goal is not to be first but to be accurate and helpful. Not every business owner considers that. For this publisher, it is the purpose for, yes, publishing.

## LETTERS

### Abortion needs to be legal

Women marched in October, as they will again and again, to demand the right to control their bodies and to make their own choices as to when or not have a child. Access to abortion is currently eroding with at least seven states considering laws severely limiting access to abortion, mimicking Texas law, SB 8.

“Since, for forty years, anti-abortion lawmakers have gone to great lengths to block abortion access, October 2021 marked a shameful milestone in their efforts: (This is t)he 40th year of the Hyde Amendment, which keeps Medicaid and other government insurance plans from covering abortion.” (NYT)

Where, I wonder, are the lying-in clinics and post birth-care facilities provided by anti-abortionists for the poor, the 14, 15 or 16-year-old moms who could not get abortions, who are probably both financially and psychologically unprepared to be a mother? As a teenager I was blindfolded in Tijuana, Mexico and driven to an unknown location to get an illegal abortion. I remember the fear of not knowing if I'd make it back alive and the societal shame of the secrecy. I knew I was too young, naive and ill-equipped to be a mother and took a chance for my own life.

“The number of illegal procedures in this country plummeted from around 130,000 to 17,000 between 1972 and 1974. The number of deaths associated with illegal abortion decreased from 39 to five in that same time period; women who died as a result of illegal abortions typically were black, were more than 12 weeks pregnant and had self-induced in their own community.” (Guttmacher Institute).

Do we want to go back to those days before 1973's Roe vs. Wade, to a time of illegal abortions? Does righteousness trump right? Women fight for legality.

Sincerely,  
Christine Wardenburg-Skinner  
Edison

### Center Street apartment building not right fit

Regarding the proposed building construction at 306 or 310 Center Street, La Conner.

Reasonable development is not only unavoidable, it is desirable. Housing is necessary and should be affordable and available in safe communities with good schools, infrastructure and other amenities.

The location in question is a very appropriate location for housing for many reasons but the scale and scope of this project, as proposed, is ill-conceived. To place 20 housing units into a space appropriate in a residential area for four houses seems speculative and suspiciously like someone seeking to gain approval and build with an intent to spin and profit with scant consideration for the La Conner community. It seeks to capitalize on what makes a small town so desirable while at the same time eroding the small-town esthetic.

There are a number of procedural questions that need to be addressed since it appears that the checklist that lead to a finding of environmental insignificance has overlooked the fact that the property in question was for decades

A citizen's view —

## A possible new apartment building

By Linda Talman

The talk of the town is the proposed development in back of the old gas station (in back of Sliders) on Center Street. To set the record straight, we in the neighborhood welcome the addition to the rental housing inventory. But we don't welcome a gigantic building that will kill the neighborhood.

The proposal is three stories, the bottom level of which is short term lodging. There is tons wrong with the proposal, but this letter will not address those failings.

This is letter is about vision — or the lack thereof.

When the town was looking at the treasure of the Hedlin property, they thought nothing of rezoning a chunk of it to residential. We need this, they said and while they needed to reconsider the zoning they did not need to make it unaffordable residential. They could have worked with the Skagit Home Trust to make it affordable,

Now we have this Center Street proposal. The part of the property abutting Center is commercial. It didn't need to be zoned commercial but it was. History. The developer is now in a bind because residential use is not allowed in that location except as a Conditional Use above the commercial use. So they put two stories of residential above the commercial lodging on the ground floor to meet code and all of that will be above the increase in height necessitated by the flood plain. That makes three stories on top of an already elevated base flood level. That will be well over thirty feet tall with all entrances of residential on the back side. Picture that unneighborly facade.

But is there a way out of this? There always is. If Maple Avenue happened, Center Street could too. There is a way. A disputed planning decision of the past should not have to doom a neighborhood. The ideal outcome would be to allow the two stories of residential rentals that are proposed and ditch the lodging on the ground floor. It would save the owner from wasting money on a losing business and might allow for a more interesting design.

The design could actually serve our housing needs and even have some open space. It could have enough proper parking. It could have a charging station.

Commercial lodging is not a need. Tall buildings are not a need. We need a good neighbor to build a place worthy of La Conner—the gem we call home.

The town could call for a moratorium on the current zoning of that property -- which is not yet vested and give La Conner what it needs — this time. Make the property residential only because that is what a residential neighborhood needs.

A 50-year resident of La Conner, after decades of service Talman resigned from the town's planning commission this year.

### LETTER POLICY

Please write! Letters up to 350 words are welcome as are longer analyses and statements.

Write a 500 word guest column.

**Deadline: 5 p.m. Sunday for next issue.**

Include your name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are edited for civility clarity and style.

SEND TO  
editor@laconnernews.com

## Donations needed for Nooksack Valley children

The day before Thanksgiving the Nooksack School District reached out to the North Counties arm of the Forgotten Children's Fund to see if they could possibly help in providing a Christmas for the flood victims in the areas of Sumas and Everson.

Unknown challenges now confront hundreds of families in the Nooksack Valley, including the towns of Sumas and Everson, due to recent flooding. Christmas this year for these families will take a back seat to survival.

We have an immediate opportunity to make a difference. If you can drop off a new unwrapped toy, a jacket, diapers or a blanket at the La Conner Town Hall or at Washington Federal bank on Morris Street by the end of the workday on Wednesday Dec. 8, your contribution will be delivered to the Nooksack School District on or before Dec. 10. There they will be individually wrapped and distributed by Christmas.

The Forgotten Children's Fund is a 501.c3 state approved all-volunteer charity that has provided Christmas to families throughout the greater Puget Sound region since 1975. [www.forgottenchildrensfund.org](http://www.forgottenchildrensfund.org).

The generous citizens of greater La Conner, working with the Forgotten Children's Fund, have provided a Santa and teams of elves to this program for the last 15 years. Each year they work diligently to locate families who are going through challenging times and then on Christmas Eve, Santa and his team deliver gifts, jackets, food and hope.

This Christmas Eve will be no different for the families served in La Conner. Santa will make his rounds in Skagit County. You are needed to help get gifts and necessities to our neighbors to the north.

—Source: The Forgotten Children's Fund

### La Conner Weekly News

An adjudicated Skagit County Newspaper. Published every Wednesday in La Conner, WA

#### Subscriptions

- Skagit County Print & Online: \$60
- Out of County Print & Online: \$75
- Online only: \$60

Member of Washington Newspapers Publisher's Association

Copyright ©2021



### Ken Stern, Publisher & Editor

editor@laconnernews.com

Continuing the tradition of weekly publishing in La Conner since 1878

*The Weekly News sits on the original homelands of the Coastal Salish peoples*

#### La Conner News Publishing Co., LLC

119 N. Third St., La Conner, WA 98257  
USPS 363-550

360-466-3315 • Fax: 360-466-1195

[www.laconnerweeklynews.com](http://www.laconnerweeklynews.com)

#### Postmaster:

Send change of address to:

La Conner Weekly News

PO Box 1465, La Conner, WA 98257

Michelle Havist, General Manager

michelle@laconnernews.com

Bill Reynolds, News Editor

news@laconnernews.com

Rhonda Hundertmark, Production Manager

production@laconnernews.com

Marissa Conklin, Sales Representative

marissa@laconnernews.com

Eileen Engelstad, Proofreader

Rick Shorten, Special Projects

#### Contributors:

Anne Basye, Judy Booth, Robin Carneen, Nancy Crowell, Don Coyote, Mel Damski, MaryRose Denton, John Doyle, Janna Gage, Bob Hamblin, Ollie Iversen, Katie Kramer, Bobbi Krebs-McMullen, Patricia Paul, Brad Reynolds, Claire Swedberg.



*From the editor —*

## Get the local scoop in your news weekly

How different La Conner and the western Skagit Valley is because a community newspaper is delivered to about 1,000 readers weekly. Stop, really, and consider how rare that is, how special and important at the end of 2021. You have your local weekly newspaper in your hands. Do you know how many people in Skagit County or the 39 counties in the state of Washington can say that? A lot fewer than could in 2020 or 2015 or 2010 or the year 2000.

The La Conner Weekly News is a rare bird because hundreds of newspapers have gone out of business the past 20 years, a tragedy accelerated by the coronavirus pandemic.

It is increasingly rare, because the La Conner Weekly News is a strong, award winning and profit making newspaper. Weekly, and in this issue, through stories and photographs, it is keeping its readers current on arts, business, government, school, sports and Santa activities. Kentucky journalists decided 23 times last spring that our Weekly News staff were winners, among the best small circulation newspapers in the state.

Here is a way your community newspaper connects you to your community. Read the page 5 story on the Skagit County Historical Museum efforts to collect local items of interest — stuff from you — that are the real life stories of the coronavirus pandemic in the Skagit Valley, where we live. How many items have they collected to date? A handful. Not very much.

Here is betting that they will bring in more good stuff by the end of the month than they have all year. Why? Because you read about it on page 5 and you were nudged into action by your friendly neighborhood editor. That is not something all your friends and neighbors have visiting them every week. If you engage in your community by investing not so much — \$60 a year: \$1.15 a week — you make time and a willingness to pause and reflect and ground yourself in your community. That is what inviting your local newspaper in to your life does.

It is not just the editor or staff, writers and photographers — and the back of the house people — making this issue real. Readers engage and challenge fellow community members, as seen again in this issue's letter page. The Weekly News reports on a proposed 20 unit apartment building but it is readers who are raising questions and urging their neighbors to pay attention and take action.

This democracy thing is not just about the First Amendment and freedom of the press. It is not just about voting or arguing or polarizing yourself or others. Newspapers succeed because the people who read them engage with each other, with leaders — elected or otherwise — and sometimes with the newspaper editor. Yes, find your name in the Weekly News because you took the time to share a fun fact or a serious concern with your neighbors through the newspaper. Rebecca Kerr did that, applauding another great American institution: her local volunteer fire department. Read her story on page 7.

Are you worried and frustrated that the town government bought and sold Hedlin Field without stopping for a year or two to discuss the possibility of turning it into a mini-campus of affordable cottages? And upset again now that plans for a three-story apartment building are making their way through the government process? Linda Talman is concerned. Her letter on this page says so.

Finally, this paper employs and pays 10 people throughout the year. It directly contributes to the town and county's economy. It is a real business located in the town on its page 1 banner: La Conner. Its staff are working hard with pen and paper and camera in hand or behind the scenes laying out pages, updating mailing lists, getting invoices out. They answer the phone and answer your question when you call to ask about someone who died but you cannot remember all the details. That happened Monday.

Enjoy this week's issue. Staff did, putting it out for you and your family, neighbors and friends. Like the post office, we are here to serve. And, like school teachers we believe in contributing and shaping the future of our community by talking to you about the facts, ideas and hopes you have in front of you, in your heart and on your mind.

— Ken Stern

## Musings — on the editor's mind

A wonderful thing happened to our neighbor and the Weekly News proofreader, Eileen Engelstad, last week, though she did not realize it until after the fact. She had to skip her Nov. 30 work shift, called to superior court in Mount Vernon for jury duty. Oh my god. How much fun is that? How stuck was she?

Read her column on the right side of the page and find out how much she learned about citizenship and democracy and how we are all in this together. Yes, the people you are in the grocery store with might be your fellow jurors or judging you if your car slips horrifically off the road in absolutely the wrong way and place and runs into someone. Or who knows what the case may be.

But whether you ever are on either side of a jury box railing in a courtroom, please read Eileen's article and pause and reflect about being a citizen and the opportunities you have to think and discuss and decide and affect a fellow citizen's life.

Our society is not very democratic, with a small “d.” We might be clever debaters and get good lines in at the bar or at the neighbor's Sunday while watching football or gathering with family for the holidays. But look around and count on your ten fingers and ten toes the number of times you are called upon to debate and jointly decide the future of an issue or judge a person's actions. Consider: The jury only finishes its job when everyone agrees to and shares in the decision to convict or acquit.

Being on a committee at work or church or the softball team is not the same. This trial by jury thing — think about it, a jury of your peers. That could be the bank president, but more likely the bank teller. It could be the store owner, but there are a lot more clerks on the floor. But it is not a matter of status or power. In a jury, everyone gets an equal say. The lawyer and doctor might be smoother talkers, but they only get one vote and if their fellow jury members assert their authority, they can tell the guys in suits that they are not in charge, that this is a group of equals and each has the same weight and that one vote.

Juries might be the oddest thing about American democracy. I am so glad Eileen was called, that she went, that she paid attention, was affected by her experience and had the willingness to share her reflections. And if I ever do something so stupid and so bad that I end up in court and before a judge, I will ask for a jury trial and hope someone like Eileen gets chosen from the jury pool to hear my case.

### La Conner Weekly News

An adjudicated Skagit County Newspaper. Published every Wednesday in La Conner, WA

#### Subscriptions

- Skagit County Print & Online: \$60
- Out of County Print & Online: \$75
- Online only: \$60

Member of Washington Newspapers Publisher's Association

Copyright ©2021



## LETTERS

### More on Center Street apartments

The rest of the story

Recently the town posted a green announcement on the property on Center Street in the back of Sliders — raising alarms in town — because of the scope of the oversized proposal and the shoddiness of the application. Since then many letters have been written — ten of them posted on the town website through Dec. x.

The deadline for the letters was Dec. 1 but that doesn't matter.

After the deadline, the mayor called four of the citizens who wrote letters. He told one that she didn't need to send her letter to the council and mayor — which I recommend because it gets posted on the town website.

He allegedly told the other three — who compared notes — that this proposal wasn't really the way it was really going to be. What?

Why would the planner do that to us — notifying neighbors of their worst nightmare when the application had so many application problems? Are we supposed to do the homework for the town?

Why would the mayor allegedly tell a neighbor that she didn't have to send her letter to the mayor and council? There is no other way to let them know. And why would he tell other three letter writers that the project would not actually be the way the application said it would be?

Is this just throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks?

\*So for the record — if you want to get your letter out to more people but you are shy about a letter to the editor or your letter is too long for the paper — do what he allegedly said not to do. Send it to all council members. It will be posted on line at townoflaconner.org and widen your audience. (Send to both the paper and the town!)

\*Also for the record — you can still send letters to the mayor and the council. Planning, too. Heck, the spaghetti didn't stick.

\*\*We are all ok with modest residences.

La Conner United,  
Linda Talman  
La Conner

### Debating abortion

I thank Christine Wardenburg-Skinner for her letter on abortion (Dec. 1). I would offer three observations. First, I grieve with her for women dying from illegal abortions — and I grieve for those dying since the Supreme Court's 1973 decision. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control say that since then, at least 521 women died from abortion, all but 57 from what supporters call “safe and legal” abortions.

These deaths may be seriously undercounted. Investigative journalists at the Chicago Sun-Times (“The Abortion Profiteers,” 1978) and Slate magazine (“The Back Alley,” 2011) have documented how laws upheld by the Supreme Court protect unscrupulous abortion practitioners who harm women.

Second, the letter asked whether those against abortion provide health care and other services for pregnant and parenting women. That is happening especially in the Catholic hospitals that make up a major part of our health care system.

In our area, Catholic Community Services assists women through the Farmworker Center in Mount Vernon, the PREPARES (Pregnancy and Parenting Services) program helping women and their families from pregnancy to a child's fifth year and Project Rachel offering counseling and healing for post-abortive women. When

(continued on page 3)

## Journalists: 'Your mission is to explain the world'

By Pope Francis

I want to pay homage to your entire working community (of journalists), to tell you that the Pope cares about you, follows you, esteems you and considers you precious. Journalism does not come about by choosing a profession, but by embarking on a mission, a little like a doctor, who studies and works so that the evil in the world may be healed. Your mission is to explain the world, to make it less obscure, to make those who live in it less afraid of it and look at others with greater awareness, and also with more confidence. It is not an easy mission. It is complicated to think, to meditate, to study more deeply, to stop and collect ideas and to study the contexts and precedents of a piece of news. The risk, as you well know, is to be overwhelmed by the news instead of being able to make sense of it. This is why I encourage you to preserve and cultivate that sense of mission that is at the origin of your choice. And I will do so with three verbs that I believe characterize good journalism: listen, investigate and report.

To listen is a verb that concerns you as journalists, but it concerns us all as a Church, at all times and especially now that the synodal process has begun. For a journalist, listening means having the patience to meet face to face with the people to be interviewed, the protagonists of the stories being told, the sources from which to receive news. Listening always goes hand in hand with seeing, with being present: certain nuances, sensations and well-rounded descriptions can only be conveyed to readers, listeners and spectators if the journalist has listened and seen for him- or herself. This means escaping - and I know how difficult this is in your work! — escaping from the tyranny of always being online, on social networks, on the web. The journalism of listening and seeing well requires time. Not everything can be told through email, the telephone, or a screen. As I recalled in this year's Message for Communications Day, we need journalists who are willing to “wear out the soles of their shoes”, to get out of the newsroom, to walk around the city, to meet people, to assess the situations in which we live in our time. Listening is the first word that came to my mind.

The second, to investigate, is a consequence of listening and seeing. Every piece of news, every fact we talk about, every reality we describe needs to be investigated. At a time when millions of pieces of information are available on the web, and when many people obtain their information and form their opinions on social media, where unfortunately the logic of simplification and opposition sometimes prevails, the most important contribution that good journalism can make is that of in-depth analysis. Indeed, what more can you offer to those who read or listen to you than what they already find on the web? You can offer the context, the precedents, the keys to interpretation that help to collocate the fact that has happened. You know very well that, even when it comes to information about the Holy See, not everything said is always “new” or “revolutionary.” I tried to document this in my recent address to the popular movements, when I indicated the references to the Social Doctrine of the Church on which my appeals were based. Tradition and the Magisterium continue and develop by facing the ever-new demands of the times in which we live and enlightening them with the Gospel.

To listen, to investigate, and the third verb, to report: I don't have to explain it to you, who have become journalists precisely because you are curious about reality and passionate about telling it. Reporting means not putting oneself in the foreground, nor setting oneself up as a judge, but allowing oneself to be struck and sometimes wounded by the stories we encounter, in order to be able to tell them with humility to our readers. Reality is a great antidote to many “ailments.” Reality — what happens, the lives and testimonies of people — deserves to be told. I think of the books you write, Valentina, on women who suffer the tyranny of abuse. Today we are in great need of journalists and communicators who are passionate about reality, capable of finding the treasures often hidden in the folds of our society and recounting them, allowing us to be impressed, to learn, to broaden our minds, to grasp aspects that we did not know before. I am grateful to you for your effort to recount reality. The diversity of approaches, of style, of points of view linked to different cultures or religious affiliations is also a wealth of information. I also thank you for what you tell us about what goes wrong in the Church, for helping us not to sweep it under the carpet and for the voice you have given to the victims of abuse: thank you for this.

*Pope Francis recognized two Vatican reporters, Philip Pullella and Valentina Alazraki, in a Vatican address Nov. 11, 2021.*

## A citizen does her jury duty

By Eileen Engelstad

Like many others, last month I received a summons for jury duty. Since it was the beginning of the holiday season, with upcoming events and obligations that are important to me, I did not want to have an uninvited intrusion in my life. My immediate reaction was to plead for a release from jury duty. In fact, when I returned the initial papers I “mentioned” my advanced age, 77, in hopes they would deem me unfit. Much to my chagrin, I received another letter from Skagit County Superior Court, this time welcoming me into service, thanking me for being a good citizen and informing me of the time and place to report (after phoning in the night before, to confirm there was a case pending).

Well, that was not welcome news at the time! Then I began to put things in perspective. First, if I were on trial, I would want someone like me as a juror, since I am a fair-minded, analytical and reasonable person. Second, I recalled that once before, many, many years ago I was on a jury and it was a memorable experience in every sense. At that time, a young man's life was placed in the hands of eleven strangers and me. It was a daunting responsibility, not taken lightly and I actually was the hold-out when the rest wanted to give him the strongest punishment for something I viewed as a horrific accident, not an intentional act. I was stubborn, probably despised by the other jurors, but unwilling to forfeit a young man's life because of his youthful bad judgment and immense bad luck. Eventually, I persuaded the others to agree to a lesser charge.

(continued on page 10)

Michelle Havist, General Manager  
michelle@laconnernews.com

Bill Reynolds, News Editor  
news@laconnernews.com

Rhonda Hundertmark, Production Manager  
production@laconnernews.com

Marissa Conklin, Sales Representative  
marissa@laconnernews.com

Eileen Engelstad, Proofreader  
Rick Shorten, Special Projects

#### Contributors:

Anne Basye, Judy Booth, Robin Carneen, Nancy Crowell, Don Coyote, Mel Damski, MaryRose Denton, John Doyle, Janna Gage, Bob Hamblin, Ollie Iversen, Katie Kramer, Bobbi Krebs-McMullen, Patricia Paul, Brad Reynolds, Claire Swedberg.



From the editor —

# Our second cold COVID-19 winter

The world is suffering through the end of the second year of the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the United States, scientists developed vaccines that were getting widespread distribution as 2021 began. That was needed good news after months of widespread lockdowns that stifled everyday life and wreaked havoc on the economy, schooling and the healthcare system.

Alas, in most countries around the world, the pandemic rages on. In the United States 2021 ended with daily record numbers of new cases of COVID-19. Public health professionals adapted to the more contagious omicron variant by shifting the focus from the number of and rate of infections to hospitalizations. The critical metric is now hospital capacity because there is not any capacity.

In Washington state, infected people have flooded hospitals, filling them and causing Gov. Jay Inslee to halt elective surgeries for 30 days last week. New cases and hospitalizations are at record highs.

The numbers represent real people, people you know, as Washington state passed 1 million cases and 10,000 dead. Welcome to 2022. As of last week 71.1% of residents five and older are fully vaccinated, but there are more cases and more deaths than in 2020.

More healthcare workers are getting infected, sick, burnt out and quitting. The omicron variant may quickly crash, but its demise only leaves us more worn out than before. Almost certainly new variants will emerge.

The coronavirus' success in spreading is not a failure of Inslee's, President Biden's, federal, state or local healthcare professionals leadership or decisions. Everything they have advocated as public health measures — distancing socially, staying out of crowds and wearing masks — were proven pandemic spread minimizing approaches 100 years ago in slowing the 2017-2019 three-year flu pandemic. There was no vaccine to save the population then.

In 1920 the U.S population was 106 million. Radio, the age's only social media, was in its infancy. TV and the internet were not even fantasies. How did that pandemic end? Was it herd immunity — such a high percentage of the population was infected and had antibodies that the dwindled host population, your neighbors, was so small that the source for continued infection and mutation became too few and far between for virus reproduction? Was it a much more limited spread of falsehoods — lies?

Another possibility is that the population — your neighbors — pulled together in cooperation and mutual aid, the old common purpose, all for one, one for all pledging of our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

We are not joined together in common cause now, we, the people. We do not have unanimity and we are not universally aligned. The one way the novel coronavirus may bring us, as a society, together is the seeming inevitability that everyone will become infected. Vaccinated or not, asymptomatic or not, mild infection or not, masked or not, it seems that the mere fact of being out in public places people at risk till they — we, you, me, us — get sick.

The novel coronavirus will continue to change. That is what mutations and variants are. The virus does not think, does not have emotions, is not happy to have hosts welcoming it into their lungs but like other parasites seizes on opportunity.

The one drumbeat that leads us out of the pandemic is universal vaccination. That is a tune that a sizable faction of our neighbors will not learn, okay or sing. Without their cooperation and participation the country and the world remains stuck in a real life Groundhog Day. There is only one way to get to a happy ending. It requires people to consciously change heartfelt positions and ideological beliefs.

While fear and anger abound, there is not yet enough pain reaching enough of us. Love is a possibility, but there is too much resistance to that, too.

— Ken Stern

# Musings – on the editor's mind

Last Wednesday I screwed up my courage and went against my own caution guidelines to see the new film “West Side Story” at the Lincoln Theatre. As everyone else attending did, I showed my vaccination card to get in and I kept my mask on once I finished my popcorn.

I had the entire front right section to myself. I sat in the aisle seat in the last row, my bum left leg on the arm rest of the seat in front of me. On Jan. 12, 2022, it was my first movie in about two years. I needed a night out, a night off and the pleasure of seeing a classic in the American theater and film canon approached by 21st century masters.

The original “West Side Story” is the stuff of which legends get made, a reimagining of Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” as a musical set in contemporary, 1957 New York City with two teenage gangs, the Jets and the Sharks, filling the roles of the House of Montague and the House of Capulet, rival Verona families. Leonard Bernstein wrote the score, a starting out Stephen Sondheim wrote the lyrics with the book, or script,

brought into the 20th century by Arthur Laurents. Jerome Robbins, another heavyweight, added modern dance to the mix as choreographer.

“West Side Story” was a Broadway smash and a hit on the screen in 1961. It lay untouched — how could it be improved? — until Steven Spielberg took up the challenge of directing his vision, reimagined for our time.

Tony Kushner, of “Angels in America” fame, wrote this screenplay, a signal that the story would be updated to our moment and not be a simple remake. The politically astute Kushner set the scene in the Manhattan neighborhood being knocked down for the Lincoln Center complex and associated luxury apartments. The backdrop looks like bombed out buildings. There are more brown and black faces, as whites move out and Spanish becomes common on the streets.

The tension, then, is a battle over shrinking turf with forced removal. The fight between the gangs is about survival. Maria, or Juliet, falling in love with

(continued on page 3)

## LETTERS

### Town’s “population goals”

I appreciate the inclusion of the “State of the Town” in the Jan. 5 Weekly News. It’s useful to hear the mayor’s thoughts in his own words. I hope you’ll ask him regularly for his views on other Town matters.

I am, however, concerned with these words: “The Town has been working to achieve its population goals with the creation of two new subdivisions ....” My concern is with his reference to the Town’s population goals. I was not aware that the Town had population goals and, if we do, where they came from or for how they are to be met.

As a starter, I do not believe that the Town is behind in meeting the population growth targets set by the state Growth Management Act. So where do the Town’s population goals come from? In what other forum or process did the Town, or town, create population goals? And how was it decided that such a goal be met by new subdivisions?

I imagine if the community were to weigh in on the question of whether or not we should promote greater growth than is required by the GMA process, many would answer “no,” or at least, “let’s think about it.” And if we were to be required by GMA to accept greater growth, should we do so by encouraging subdivisions, as is cited by the mayor? Again, I believe the answer would be “no.”

It may be way too late, but it might be worthwhile to actually establish some population growth guidelines; and to involve the planning commission, the council and maybe even the residents in that process. Bob Raymond La Conner

### Three story Center Street project

Sunday I had a conversation with Brandon Atkinson while watching the demolition of the building behind Sliders. He is the owner and developer. I mentioned to him that we would like his project a lot more if it were solely residential and only two floors. He told me that that is what he would like as well. Incredulous, I asked him to restate multiple times. And he did.

He said that he had asked for that rezone (from commercial to residential) but was told by the Town that the Town could not make that change.

But they can.

The Town can rezone and has rezoned multiple times. E.g. 1. South end transition zone. 2. Maple field. 3. The dentist’s office. 4. The COA building. 5. The doctor’s office. 6. The old police office. 7. And some of the buildings on the north end of Maple.

The Town also allowed for the change of use on some buildings on Morris Street when it became apparent that the homes that had become commercial but were no longer commercially viable were allowed to revert to residential. (i.e., the home next to Santo Coyote).

Bottom line: The Town could call for a moratorium on the current zoning of that property — which is not yet vested and give La Conner what it needs — for a change. They could make the property residential only and two stories because that is what a residential neighborhood should have. (It is surrounded by residential on three sides.)

Or perhaps it is better to say, the Town could have done it, but they did not. Another missed opportunity. Linda Talman La Conner

Have Faith —

# A missionary from Ireland

By Fr. James Dalton

When we Christians think of missionaries we think of dedicated Christians traveling miles to far-off lands, usually to third world countries to convert people to Christianity and to better their lives. They leave family and friends and immerse themselves in a very different culture; many times becoming martyrs and never returning home.

Let me introduce you to a “modern missionary.” Fr. Sean Fox was born in Pontoon, near Foxford, in county Mayo, Ireland, in 1928. After high school he entered the seminary at All Hallows in Dublin to study for the Catholic priesthood and to serve in the Archdiocese of Seattle. He arrived in Seattle by train from Chicago in September 1953 with five other priests from Ireland. He served in five parishes in the Archdiocese. His last parish was St. Pius X in Mountlake Terrace where he served over 30 years. He was an expert in finances and fundraising. By the time a new church, parish hall, office and priest’s house were completed, they were paid for. He proudly embraced the multicultural communities in the Mountlake Terrace area for what continues to be a hallmark of the parish.

In spite of being in America for almost 70 years, Fr. Fox stayed connected to his roots in the “West of Ireland,” visiting there often until he was 90. With the advantage of air travel, this “modern missionary” was able to stay in touch with his family and friends. He could brush up on his Irish accent, which he never lost. He died Dec. 30 and his body will be buried in Ireland.

A soft spoken man, even a hesitant voice, belied his determination and thoroughness to achieve. He made major contributions of time and talent to serve the needs of senior priests.

Fr. Fox possessed a gentle manner with an Irish twinkle in his eye. He was a private man who respected the privacy of others. Daily he prayed the Divine Office, the official prayer of the Catholic Church. He was a priest-gentleman and a wonderful example to be imitated.

There is a funny story — some say it is a myth — about Fr. Fox, which we priests like to tell. He was known to have a lead foot, which caused a few roadside visits with the state patrol. On one occasion in Battle Ground, where he served for fourteen years, he rolled down his car window and asked the officer, “Don’t you know who I am?” The officer replied, “No”! Fr. Fox said, “I’m Fr. Fox.” The officer then said, “I don’t care if you’re Mother Goose you’re still going to get a ticket.” Of course Fr. Fox denied the whole story, but it continues to be told, even as recently as his funeral vigil service.

Leaving his childhood home in Ireland and traveling to a foreign country to spread the Catholic faith for 70 years makes Fr. Fox truly a modern missionary who sacrificed his life to bring Christ to others.

*James Dalton is a retired Roman Catholic priest, having served the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle for 53 years. He calls himself a “Roam’n Catholic Priest,” as he substitutes for priests in the Archdiocese.*

## Spike in COVID-19 cases concerns FD 13

By Bill Reynolds

Another new year, another COVID-19 surge.

That is the grim scenario with which La Conner area residents faced while ringing in 2022.

Chief Wood Weiss spelled the situation out numerically at the Skagit County Fire District 13 Commissioners Zoom meeting Friday, Jan. 14. He recounted 1,144 positive cases in Skagit County since Jan. 1. On Swinomish Reservation alone, he said, the count was 139 over the same two-week period.

“It’s exploding in our county,” Weiss told commissioners. “The numbers are huge. People opened up around Christmas. People were jammed into every bar and restaurant that I drove by.”

The most recent COVID-19 spread has impacted district personnel and strained staffing, Weiss said.

“Some of our people have gotten sick,” he said. “We’ve had four, total, sick the last couple weeks and two are out now. Everybody’s working more hours. I’m working more hours. It’s just the way it is.”

Health care workers and facilities have dealt with similar conditions. Capt. Ted Taylor saw that first-hand recently when he was admitted to Island Hospital in Anacortes to treat of a dislocated shoulder.

“The hospital was full,” Taylor said.

“If you go to the hospitals, if you could go to hospitals, you’ll see that they’re overloaded,” Weiss confirmed. “They can’t fit anyone else in.

“We can’t afford having any more people getting sick,” Weiss stressed. “So, we need to do the masking and keep out of big social occasions. When hospitals get overloaded like that, they start having to do triage. Patients

end up out in the waiting room instead of where they should be.”

Commissioner John Doyle, infected with COVID-19 during the early stages of the pandemic, said firefighters and emergency responders appear to be “getting hit harder now.”

“We’re in for a tough month,” Weiss lamented.

Commissioners reelected Bruce Shellhamer to be chair. Doyle, the second most senior member, was made vice-chair.

Staff responded to 1,248 calls in 2021, its second highest annual total, surpassed only in 2019, pre-pandemic. December saw 112 calls. Transport calls numbered 278, compared to 232 in 2020 and 267 in 2019. About 75 percent of the district’s calls are for emergency medical aid. Over 250 calls were inside La Conner. Most were patient transports. Almost five percent were structure or wildlife fires.

Weiss gave shout-outs to the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community for assistance during holiday severe winter weather events. They provided plowing service at a moment’s notice for the district’s Sneer Oosh Road station. Weiss praised Brian Geer of the Swinomish Department of Emergency Management for opening a warming station.

### LETTER POLICY

Please write! Letters up to 350 words are welcome as are longer analyses and statements.

Write a 450 word guest column.

**Deadline: 5 p.m. Sunday for next issue.**

Include your name, address and phone number for verification.

Letters are edited for civility clarity and style.

SEND TO editor@laconnernews.com

## La Conner Weekly News

An adjudicated Skagit County Newspaper. Published every Wednesday in La Conner, WA

### Subscriptions

- Skagit County Print & Online: \$60
- Out of County Print & Online: \$75
- Online only: \$60

Member of Washington Newspapers Publisher's Association

Copyright ©2021



## Ken Stern, Publisher & Editor

editor@laconnernews.com

Continuing the tradition of weekly publishing in La Conner since 1878

*The Weekly News sits on the original homelands of the Coastal Salish peoples*

### La Conner News Publishing Co., LLC

119 N. Third St., La Conner, WA 98257

USPS 363-550

360-466-3315 • Fax: 360-466-1195

www.laconnerweeklynews.com

### Postmaster:

Send change of address to:

La Conner Weekly News

PO Box 1465, La Conner, WA 98257

Michelle Havist, General Manager

michelle@laconnernews.com

Bill Reynolds, News Editor

news@laconnernews.com

Rhonda Hundertmark, Production Manager

production@laconnernews.com

Marissa Conklin, Sales Representative,

Production Assistant

marissa@laconnernews.com

Eileen Engelstad, Proofreader

Rick Shorten, Special Projects

### Contributors:

Anne Basye, Judy Booth, Robin Carneen, Nancy Crowell, Don Coyote, Mel Damski, MaryRose Denton, John Doyle, Janna Gage, Bob Hamblin, Ollie Iversen, Katie Kramer, Bobbi Krebs-McMullen, Patricia Paul, Brad Reynolds, Claire Swedberg, Sarah Walls.



# Council starts year with three new members

By Bill Reynolds

Rick Dole and Ivan Carlson, III, successful election challengers, joined victorious incumbent MaryLee Chamberlain in being sworn into their La Conner Town Council positions Jan. 11.

Councilmember Mary Wohleb was not on the ballot but count her among La Conner’s election winners. She was the unanimous choice to serve the next six months as La Conner’s mayor pro-tem.

“This position,” Town Administrator Scott Thomas explained, “is typically filled by two council members each year. The mayor pro-tem takes over for the mayor in case of illness or when something else comes up to cause the mayor’s absence.”

With three new members, it was quickly decided that MaryLee Chamberlain, the other incumbent, should also hold the role in 2022.

“It should definitely go to the senior members,” said Dole.

Committee assignments, meanwhile, will be determined within the next week, Thomas and Mayor Ramon Hayes said.

Hayes explained Town staff research confirmed council assigns its members to committees. To facilitate the process, Thomas and Hayes suggested Council members indicate committee preferences by submitting “wish lists” to Town Hall.

The committee assignments will be set at the Jan. 25 meeting.

By then, Town officials could receive anticipated water service billing from the City of Anacortes, a statement Dan O’Donnell, a former mayor, is asking them to contest. He believes the \$5,587 bill should instead be an \$18,526 refund. He insisted numerous flaws in the billing process penalize La Conner and



**SHORING IT UP OR IT WILL FALL DOWN** – Last week Town of La Conner staff placed fencing blocking the Swinomish Channel and Caledonia Street sides of the old Moore Clark fish processing plant. The long neglected building was heard to be falling in on itself. The owners have been notified yet again.

– Photo by Ken Stern

renewed his pleas for Town leaders to resolve the matter.

“I’ve been at this for eight years,” said O’Donnell, “trying to get the council to address these problems.”

“We’ll wait for that bill to come in,” Hayes said, “and go from there.”

Hayes said that the long-vacant Moore-Clark Building on the channel at Caledonia Street continues to deteriorate. The Town will contact its owners to address structural concerns. Most recently, said Hayes, debris has fallen from the building’s rafters and the public works department was installing fencing for public safety.

“The library project needs additional support,” Hayes told council. “The town is working with the Swinomish Tribe to ask the legislature for \$625,000.”

La Conner Hook & Ladder Captain/Training Officer Adam Avery reported that the department made 321 calls in 2021. Avery said 90 per cent of those runs were medical aid calls. The rest were a combination of mutual aid calls with Skagit County Fire Districts 2 and 13, structure

fires and motor vehicle crashes.

Town Planner Michael Davolio, questioned by Dole, said he had not yet received a completed application for a housing project behind Pioneer Market from developer Greg Ellis. Ellis said in September he would provide plans in October.

Hayes read into the record resolutions of appreciation of service for former Council members Jacques Brunisholz, John Leaver and Bill Stokes. The resolutions praised each for their specific talents and skills sets and saluted them for the tireless service they rendered the Town. He also read a resolution of appreciation of Town Public Works Director Brian Lease and his staff for its yeoman service in response to recent severe winter weather events.

The council met in a 20-minute closed executive session to discuss an unspecified real estate item. No action was taken.

Council meetings will be Zoom only, Thomas informed council in his administrator’s report, a precaution given the “dramatic increase in infections due to the omicron variant” in Skagit County.

# Town council again hears citizens patrol pitch

By Bill Reynolds

It was not entirely an “out with the old, in with the new” La Conner Town Council Zoom session last Tuesday.

After recently elected members Ivan Carlson, III and Rick Dole were sworn into office before the council meeting, Mayor Ramon Hayes revisited starting a citizens patrol, first discussed during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hayes suggested training volunteers to act as “eyes and ears” for the Skagit County Sheriff’s Office in response to recent property crimes, including theft of a truck from a driveway Jan. 9.

The rig was eventually recovered by deputies outside a Burlington motel, sporting switched license plates and a pistol inside.

“We need to talk again about a citizens patrol,” Hayes said. “Property crimes are crimes of opportunity. We need more eyes and ears out there. If people think we’re vulnerable, they’ll take advantage.”

Local property crimes, including yard art thefts, graffiti tagging and vehicle prowls, have risen since the spring of 2020.

When Hayes initially raised the possibility of forming a citizens patrol modeled after one in Mount Vernon established in cooperation with the sheriff’s office, he received plenty of push-back from residents concerned it could encourage vigilantes. He dropped the issue.

Now he wants a second look. “We’ll be looking at all op-

tions,” Hayes vowed. “Enough is enough. We’re going to be putting our arms around this.”

Town Planning Commission member Bruce Bradburn, alluding to a downtown drive-by by someone with a pellet gun breaking vehicle windows, asked about the use of increased or updated surveillance technology.

“If we could get some cameras,” Bradburn said, “we might get some information on the people responsible for these property crimes.”

Councilmember MaryLee Chamberlain, the lone incumbent re-elected last November, queried Sgt. Jeff Willard, who administers the sheriff’s office’s La Conner detachment.

“There have been changes and because of what’s happened, is there a response the sheriff’s office takes that has been influenced by what’s been going on in town?” Chamberlain asked.

“Absolutely,” he said, citing stepped up patrols and “other procedures” he said he can’t publicize.

“We’ve been identifying crime trends,” he said. “Each season and community are different. Vehicle prowls, though, are a

problem countywide.”

Still, Hayes said neither the sheriff’s office, Washington State Patrol, or Swinomish Tribal Police can “be everywhere, all the time. The world is changing, the community is changing. We need to take appropriate actions to achieve the level of security we’re used to.”

Willard has consistently endorsed a plan for La Conner and the sheriff’s office to collaborate on a citizen’s patrol.

He, Hayes and Dole discussed deputies taking into custody a suspect who had acted suspiciously while sledding on the Washington Street hill and later was involved in an altercation on Maple Avenue the same evening, Dec. 26.

The man’s latter actions led to him being the subject of a 9-1-1 call, said Hayes.

“The sheriff’s office was already looking for that person,” Hayes said, “and was there, on the scene, within a few minutes.”

“We were grateful,” Willard said, “to have had eyes and ears out there.”

(continued on page 6)



## Home Loans Made Simple

**Jessica Nguyen**  
Skagit County Home Loan Specialist  
Specializing in Shelter Bay lending  
Office: (360) 848-7211 | Cell: (360) 420-4192  
peoplesbank-wa.com/jessica

Peoples Bank



## We can help you stay ahead of inflation.



**Scott A Price**  
Financial Advisor  
708 E Morris St Ste C  
La Conner, WA 98257  
360-466-2933

[edwardjones.com](https://www.edwardjones.com)

## A View From The State House



**Greg Gilday**  
State Representative



District 10

# Championing specific bills this legislative session

The Washington State Legislature convened at noon on Monday, Jan. 10, starting the clock on a 60-day legislative session. For the House of Representatives, at least for the first few weeks of session, that means another fully virtual format. For now, I am able to work out of my Olympia office. In the coming weeks, I will continue to push for changes that improve the public’s ability to take part in-person in the legislative process.

## Repealing the Long-Term Care Act

There will be some tough public policy debates this session. One of the most crucial is the Long-Term Care Act. It is imperative the Legislature address the major inequities in the program this session. The maximum lifetime benefit of \$36,500 will not cover much. Whether you need a nursing home, assisted living services, or long-term care – the average yearly cost is closer to \$100,000 or more, depending on how much help you need.

Worse yet, the program is fundamentally unfair. Many will be forced to pay into the program and not receive any of its “benefits.” Individuals must reside in Washington state to qualify. Those living in another state, but working in Washington, will pay into the program but not receive benefits. Current retirees who have no income from an employer are also ineligible.

At this point, it’s clear the program needs to be repealed. Changes to the program will only cost more for taxpayers and those unable to opt-out. That’s why I have co-sponsored House Bill 1594, which would fully repeal the Long-Term Care Act.

## Retaining and attracting more ferry employees | HB 1608

Another bill I’ve co-sponsored would remove barriers to hiring and improve working conditions for Washington State Ferry workers. Current employment practices make it difficult to keep and attract new employees. House Bill 1608 would require a review of the collective bargaining agreements that govern state ferry employees to identify provisions that create hiring barriers. That includes looking at barriers for women, people of color, veterans and other employees belonging to communities that have been historically underrepresented in the workforce. This analysis would be required prior to collective bargaining negotiations in 2023-25.

This bill takes a common-sense approach in managing the WSF’s hiring and employee retention strategies and is long overdue. More importantly, it would improve the traveling experience of the public relying on this crucial transportation service.

## A bipartisan issue |

## Reforming the governor’s emergency powers

The framers of our state government never intended for the governor to wield the kind of power he’s maintained for nearly two years. The public, through their elected legislators, should have a voice in how we move forward. I am hopeful both sides can come together to pass balanced legislation on this issue in the coming months.

Please remember your input in the legislative process matters. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions – please call, write or email me. I’m happy to help.

*Rep. Greg Gilday has practiced law locally for several years. He and his wife, Megan, live on Camano Island with their two sons, Laker and Graham.*

# Musings. . . (from page 2)

Tony, parallels Shakespeare, but there are no parents and the families are feral animal packs, not royal bloodlines.

Make that the Jets, the white gang, as the only white adult characters are authority figures, cops or a high school principal. These gang members, true to the script, refer to themselves as no good and juvenile delinquents. They know they are headed to prison or an early grave.

In contrast, Maria has a close relationship with her brother

Bernardo, the Sharks leader, and Anita, his partner. The three share an apartment, plans and hopes. Their future will be in “America,” an iconic song.

While set in 1958, this is a story looking to the future. The Sharks share the screen equally with the Jets, and characters and audience alike listen to their conversations in Spanish. There are no subtitles, not in English and not in Spanish. It is not our grandparents “West Side Story,” but it is our kids and grandchildren’s, reflecting their – and our - America.

# Healthcare for the whole family



## North Cascade Family Physicians

(360) 428-1700  
2116 E. Section St.  
Mount Vernon



Family Care Network  
*We Take Care*

Local, independent family medicine. [familycarenetwork.com](https://familycarenetwork.com)



# Port of Skagit

**Aerospace Manufacturing**  
**Marine Manufacturing**  
**Value-added Agriculture**  
**Broadband Infrastructure**  
**Economic Development**  
**General Manufacturing**  
**Business Aviation**  
**Outdoor Recreation**


*And so much more.....*



## Good Jobs for the Skagit Valley

[www.portofskagit.com](https://www.portofskagit.com) | 360-757-0011

# KERN



## FUNERAL HOME

RECEPTION ROOM  
MOUNT VERNON CEMETERY  
MOUNT VERNON CREMATORY  
MOUNT VERNON

**360-336-2153**

*“Since 1913”*