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ESD: Roettger moving on to new post

BY BOB KIRKPATRICK
CHENEY— Superintendent Rob Roettger is vacating his position with the Cheney School District. Roettger will become the new superintendent for NorthEast Washington Educational Service District (NEWESD) 101 effective July 1.

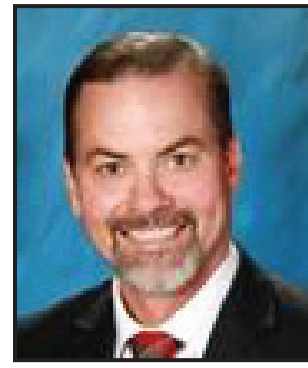
The news of his departure came from a March 1 NEWESD 101 press release. Roettger replaces Dr. Michael Dunn, whose term expires June 30. Roettger said he was honored to be the new superintendent.

"I'd like to thank the NEWESD 101 Board of Directors, leadership

team and staff members for allowing me to join such an amazing team and organization," Roettger said. "I am truly looking forward to the opportunity to advocate on behalf of and serve and support the school districts and educational leaders within our region.

"I would like to thank Dr. Michael Dunn for the outstanding leadership he has provided to our school districts throughout his 14 years as superintendent of NEWESD 101. His leadership, support and service to the school districts in our region will most defini-

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Rob Roettger



Shari McMahan

Eastern appoints second female president

By JONATHAN OLSEN-KOZIOL
Cheney Free Press

CHENEY - Shari McMahan is the new president of Eastern Washington University. The board of trustees announced the news in a Feb. 24 press release. McMahan is the 27th president of the university and the second woman president in

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Mitchel Palmquest

Cheney School District hires spokesman

By JONATHAN OLSEN-KOZIOL
Cheney Free Press

CHENEY - Mitchel Palmquist, Cheney School District's new communication director, was hired on Wednesday. See Director page 2



Matthew O. Stevens photo

Jurassic Parking

Traffic was halted along West Aero Road on Wednesday morning as Freedom Convoy 2022 trucks passed through the area. For story, see Page 8.

Medical Lake School District adding resources

By MATTHEW O. STEPHENS
Cheney Free Press

MEDICAL LAKE - Residents wanting to de-stress, connect, or learn more about the schools and the resources provided within the Medical Lake School District will have their

questions answered at the Wellness Center at 317 N. Broad Street on March 7. The information session is part of the Help Unite Build (H.U.B.) program from 8-11 a.m.

The school district's Parent and Family Partner, Nikki Bauman, worked

to develop a relationship with the wellness team and social workers to get this idea on the ground and operational.

As the parent of a child with specific needs, Bauman wanted to have a space where parents of children and kids could

learn or find a moment of respite. She initially focused on children with individual needs but looked to help all kids and families with this effort.

"Connection is everything for some special needs children," Bauman said. "This can help break

the boundary between the community and the schools."

Bauman specializes in answering parent questions and explaining specific processes such as 504 Accommodation Plans. The plans, guided by the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA), allow changes such as frequent breaks or modified homework for qualifying students.

To qualify, children must have received a diagnosis for a physical or

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Gov. Inslee's mask mandate ending March 11

By BOB KIRKPATRICK
Cheney Free Press

CHENEY - Washington's indoor mask mandate is ending ahead of schedule. Governor Jay Inslee made the announcement during a press conference on Monday, Feb. 28. The original date for removing the mandate was set for March 20, but

has now been moved up to March 11.

"We have good news today. We are turning a page in our fight against the COVID virus," Inslee said. "This page will be based more on empowering individuals and families and protecting themselves rather than based on government restric-

tions. We can do this because we are significantly declining the activity of the virus in our state—this is good news."

Inslee said Washington joins California and Oregon in announcing a shorter timeline in lifting the mask mandate including in the educational environment.

"After March 11 the vast majority of business and public spaces will be free of a mask mandate and that includes our schools in the State of Washington," Inslee said.

Inslee gave several reasons for ending the mandate.

"Our epigraph is showing a significant de-

cline in COVID cases the last month and are seeing a significant continual level of reduction in the past two weeks and we are pleased with that," he said. "Obviously, the virus is still active in our state, but we are confident the decline will continue.

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Gov. Jay Inslee

Cheney school board meeting ends abruptly

By JONATHAN OLSEN-KOZIOL
Cheney Free Press

CHENEY - Refusing to adhere to COVID protocol, Cheney resident Ivan Khala forced board president Mitch Swenson to close the in-person portion of the Feb. 23 school board sooner than anticipated and ask for assistance from local law enforcement to settle the matter.

"Unfortunately, we had to go to virtual and call the police because he refused to—I don't know what to say," said Swenson, who was visibly frustrated with the situation.

Khala, however, seemed proud of the disruption he caused.

"That's how you do it," Khala said.

Khala is firm in his belief that Cheney's school board should do everything in its power to end mask mandates. He disagrees with any of

the reasons given not to, including the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) withholding funding if the board acted on its own to do so.

"Why are we worried about funding when we should be worried about our kids," Khala said. "These people (OSPI) are not invested in this school district—they don't have kids attending here and they make up the rules."

After the meeting, Swenson and Khala got into a heated debate, and at one point, Khala told Swenson he had the power to stop the mandate.

"You can make this go away, Mitch," Khala said.

Swenson told him the issue was out of the board's hands.

"We live in Washington state—it is what it is—it's another three weeks, chill man," Swen-

son said. "It's a mandate, so what are we supposed to do?"

Swenson also took offense regarding the point Khala made about the board not caring about the kids or being invested in the school district.

"I have had 20 family members starting with me go through the school district and one of my nieces is a teacher," Swenson said. "I am so vested in this community. I've lived here most of my whole life. I love Cheney. Otherwise, I wouldn't do this."

This latest incident comes on the heels of Khala's outburst at the Feb. 9 meeting. He accused Superintendent Rob Roettger of being irresponsible and ending his speech by throwing a wad of \$1 bills in his direction.

Despite the school board's pleas with Khala to keep things civil, he

continues to bring attention to his cause by disrupting the school board meetings.

After the meeting adjourned, Cheney PD showed up and spoke with Khala and members of the school board. Everyone left peacefully and cordially afterward.

Washington state is slowly rolling back COVID restrictions. Cheney School District Superintendent Rob Roettger announced in the Community Connections bulletin that middle school and high school cafeteria and commons spaces would return to pre-pandemic breakfast and lunch service and structures on Feb. 28. Middle schools will also begin to assign hall lockers to students the week of Mar. 7. The district is also planning a hybrid approach to upcoming parent/teacher conferences.



Ivan Khala disrupts school board meeting, gets into intense talk with board president Mitch Swenson

Roettger

continued from page 1

initely be missed. I am also extremely grateful to the Cheney School District and community for providing me with the opportunity to lead such a phenomenal school system."

Dunn said he's enjoyed his tenure at NEW-ESD 101.

"It's been a great experience. I've enjoyed working regionally—working with wonderful school districts, educators and students

across Northeast Washington," Dunn said. "It's certainly been a challenge the last couple of years with COVID, but it's been a wonderful opportunity."

Dunn's next job will be in the private sector.

"This is my 43rd year in public education and it's time to rewire into something new," Dunn said. "I also teach at Washington State University in the graduate program and I'll continue to do that."

"Our new superintendent is fabulous—I'm a huge fan of Rob Roettger. He's going to be awesome."

Cheney Public Schools hired Roettger in 2016. He began his career as an elementary teacher in the Yakima Valley, had a five-year stint as principal of St. John-Endicott Cooperative Schools in Whitman County and was superintendent for Lind-Ritzville Cooperative Schools in Adams County for five years.

Freedom Convoy rolls through the Spokane area

By MATTHEW O. STEPHENS

Cheney Free Press
WEST SPOKANE

— Hundreds of area residents lined up with flags and signs in hand behind the Freedom Convoy 2022 in parking lots along Aero Road to show support for the truckers heading to Washington D.C. in protest of COVID mandates. Parking spots went extinct quickly as area drivers filled in the lot.

The group arrived late-night on March 1 and left the following day at 8:30 a.m., heading east toward Idaho. The convoy's next planned stop is Missoula, Montana.

Residents and participants echoed similar concerns over mask and vaccine mandates and showed up in support of personal and individual freedoms.

"My wife and I are former public defenders from Kootenai County. We tried to fight the COVID mandates through the court



Photo by Matthew O. Stephens

Angie Seubert rushed down to the Geiger overpass to show her support for the convoy heading east on I-90 Wednesday morning.

system, and they wouldn't allow us. So effectively, our voices were silenced," said Air Force Veteran Jason Lambert. "Since we were silenced, we are going to go to Washington D.C. and have our voices heard."

"Since the suit and tie didn't work, I'm going to dress in a dinosaur suit

and I have a bullhorn to make a peaceful statement."

While some supporters plan on driving the entire way with the convoy, other people offer donations to help the convoy continue along the way.

"Today, we drove over from western Washington to bring some money

that we raised in a fundraiser, which was about \$4,000," said Sara Jones, who follows the convoy as far as Idaho. "We brought that along with food and goods donations to the truckers because they are fighting for our freedoms. So we needed to support them, and that's the way we knew how to do it."

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Bob Kirkpatrick photo

Medical Lake stand-off

Spokane County Sheriff Deputies close the highway at 16300 W. Medical Lake Four Lakes Road Tuesday afternoon, March 1, as the county SWAT Team investigates an incident at a residence. No additional information was available at press time.



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