

State grant completes funding for Twisp civic building

Last-minute action in Olympia closes gap

BY DON NELSON

If you knew where to look in the massive state capital budget passed by the Legislature—specifically, page 64, line 15 of Substitute House Bill 1080 as amended by the Senate—you would have come across this entry: Twisp Civic Center: \$1,500,000.

The unexpected last-minute appropriation, facilitated by 12th District State Rep. Mike Steele, essentially completes the necessary funding to build the town’s new civic building and regional communications center.

In basketball terms, that single line item was like sinking a game-winning, three-point shot from half court at the buzzer.

A jubilant Mayor Soo Ing-Moody confirmed this week that the funds are part of the capital budget, and will cover a \$1.5 million construction funding gap for the new building.

“These funds in the capital budget were critical to the project,” Ing-Moody said in an interview. “We now have all the money we need, based on the latest [construction] bid, to ensure that the project is whole.”

The Twisp civic building funding was not in the first version of the capital budget, Ing-Moody said. She credited Steele with shepherding Twisp’s urgent request through the legislative process

as it drew to a close.

“He really worked hard on behalf of our community,” the mayor said of Steele. “I’m so grateful that the Legislature saw the value of this project ... it was an answer to our prayers.”

Ing-Moody said the request to the Legislature for “emergency” capital funding cited soaring construction costs, largely COVID-related, that had outstripped original cost estimates for the civic building.

Ing-Moody said the support for the emergency communications element of the new building by other governments and agencies in the region was also helpful. She said that the availability of a regional emergency communications center “mitigates against future costs” by making preparedness and

response more effective. “The ability to coordinate our community emergency responses is critical,” she said.

“It really takes all of us,” Ing-Moody said. “We can’t work isolated in a vacuum.”

“I have a lot of thank you cards to write,” Ing-Moody added.

Quick turnaround

The news about the capital budget, which was passed unanimously by the Senate on April 23 and the House on April 24, happened so quickly that Ing-Moody was still processing the information early this week.

Only last Tuesday (April 20), the Twisp Town Council had given final approval to apply for a loan of up to \$1.2 million



Rep. Mike Steele

from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development program to

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Photo by Steve Mitchell

Eric Prestbo, of Bellingham, was feeling a bit jauntty near the end of the Sunflower Marathon last weekend. Prestbo finished 20th overall. For more results, see story on page B1.

J & J vaccine again approved for use

North Valley plans mobile vaccinations

BY NATALIE JOHNSON

After a 10-day pause, on Friday (April 23) the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended that providers could again give doses of the Johnson & Johnson COVID vaccine — but suggested that it come with a warning that the vaccine can in some cases cause a rare blood clot.

“Due to the slowdown in ordering Johnson & Johnson during the FDA and CDC recommended pause, the supply in some clinics is low, however ordering can resume now,” said Julie Wehmeyer, employee health/infection control manager at Family Health Centers. “We hope to have more Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine within the next week to 10 days.”

North Valley Hospital District CEO John McReynolds said Monday that the district will again offer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine after it updates its consent forms to reflect the new FDA warning.

In addition to continuing to host vaccination events, Tonasket Family Medical Clinic recently began taking walk-in vaccine appointments and plans to launch a mobile vaccination program next week.

“To increase access to the vaccine we will be traveling to small communities that do not have vaccine providers

and conducting events to try to improve access to the vaccine,” McReynolds said.

Because the North Valley Hospital District is a public hospital district, they’re restricted to areas in their district, but plan to take the program out to places like Loomis, Wauconda and the Aeneas Valley.

“We have a van that we use permanently for our nursing home for resident transports and we also have a vaccine cooler that plugs into a cigarette lighter so we can keep the vaccine cool as we go,” McReynolds said.

The cooler can’t get as cold as the long-term storage requirement for the Pfizer vaccine, but can keep the vaccines cool enough during transport, he said.

By the numbers

As of Monday, Okanogan County has given 29,156 total doses of COVID-19 vaccines, with 16,804 people having had one dose and 18,812 totally vaccinated. That means in the past week providers in the county have given more than 1,600 doses, according to the state Department of Health’s (DOH) numbers.

“It’s my understanding that there has been somewhat of a slowdown over the past couple of weeks in various areas of the county; however, the Twisp clinic receives calls every day asking about getting the vaccine,” Wehmeyer said.

Over the past seven days, statewide, an average of 61,184 vaccinations were given each day, beating the DOH’s goal of 45,000.

As of Monday, more than 4.9 million vaccine doses had been given in Washington. Statewide 39.2% of people had at least one shot, while 26.82% had been fully vaccinated.

In Okanogan County, 38.96% of residents had at least one shot, while 32.02% were totally vaccinated as of Monday.

Okanogan’s vaccination rate is still ahead of most other eastern Washington counties, but providers have reported slowdowns in vaccination appointments in recent weeks.

Immunity growing

On Thursday, (April 22) the state DOH released its most recent statewide situation report on COVID-19 Thursday, which concludes that immunity from vaccines is increasing, but that transmission of the disease and hospitalizations have also grown.

“At the start of April, the best model-based estimate of overall population immunity was 26.8%,” the DOH reported. That included about 15% who had immunity from a vaccine and 11% with immunity from a previous infection with COVID-19.

“Vaccination is working, but immunity isn’t high enough yet to combat increasing disease levels. All of us, including people who are fully vaccinated, need to keep taking steps to slow the spread while we vaccinate more people,” said Acting State Health Officer Scott Lindquist.

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TwispWorks’ Don Linnertz to retire this fall

Sees more potential for organization’s future

BY NATALIE JOHNSON

After six years as executive director of TwispWorks, Don Linnertz plans to retire this October, but he knows the organization he’s put so much work into will end up in good hands.

“I feel such a sense of peace,” he said. “The organization has grown so much in the last six years. ... It just feels like it’s at a high place and I think it can go even higher and I’m excited for the next person to be able to bring it there.”

Linnertz has had an eventful tenure as executive director of the organization, beginning in 2015. He told the Methow Valley News he was first introduced to TwispWorks at Winterfest in 2013. At that time, the organization was still in its beginning stages.

When he first interviewed for the job, Linnertz told the board he would develop all of the leasable space on campus and develop a business model to sustain the facility.

Now the facility can sustain itself on rental income alone, he said,

though TwispWorks’ programs still require community support.

“Don has helped build the organization into a problem-solving entity for all residents and businesses in the Methow Valley,” said Board Chair Perri Howard in a statement. “TwispWorks would not be the organization is it today without Don’s collaborative spirit and keen leadership.”

Having a self-sustaining facility was a requirement for TwispWorks to get the deed to the property, another accomplishment Linnertz is proud of.

When donors bought the U.S. Forest Service property for \$1 million, they promised to give TwispWorks the deed and forgive the loan if the organization could make the facility self-sustaining in 10 years.

“That’s what happened in 2019, so that I’m super proud of that,” Linnertz said.

Team effort

While that was his major goal in his tenure, Linnertz says he’s a Type A personality — he just couldn’t stop there.

When Twisp’s Community Solar project ended in 2020, TwispWorks bought the buildings, which still have

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Noma reflects on life after leaving prosecutor’s office

‘Racially motivated’ issues still reverberate

BY MARCY STAMPER



It’s safe to say that Okanogan County isn’t often on the national radar. But the resignation of Okanogan County Prosecutor Arian Noma in January garnered widespread attention after the story was picked up by news-wire services, spawning coverage from Spokane to New York City.

Part of what focused the national gaze on a county of 42,000 people was the letter Noma addressed to “citizens,” in which he attributed his departure not only to insufficient money to do his job, but also to “racially motivated attacks” that made him fear for his and his family’s safety. It’s an issue that played out in a year that shone a spotlight on race relations, highlighted by Black Lives Matter demonstrations last summer.

This February, the Daily Beast, an online publication based in New York City, explored Noma’s

story in an in-depth, 5,200-word article entitled “This Republican Prosecutor Stood Up for Black Lives Matter Protests. Haters Ran Him out of Office. Coincidence?” Journalist Kate Briquette talked with people from the Methow Valley and Okanogan County, many of whom, like Noma, attributed his experiences in the county to racism.

The article also described an anonymous Facebook page called No More Noma that said Noma had created a hostile work environment

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