



LUKE WHITTAKER

Ilwaco junior Austin Taylor, right, started the protest Tuesday afternoon. "We're protesting the mask mandate, we're fed up with the masks and everything going on in the school about it," Taylor, 17, said. "We plan to be out here every day until they change the rule. We want to get back to getting our education without having to wear a mask. It should be a choice."

'No More Masks'

County students protest covid-safety mandate

By LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

LWACO — Several local high school students walked out in protest over mask mandates last week.

Approximately 30 Ilwaco High School students, and several parents, amassed near the front steps of the high school, waving signs and voicing their concerns regarding their requirement to wear masks in school on Wednesday, Feb. 10, with some vowing not to return until the rule was changed.

“Stop the Insanity,” “No More Masks,” “Masks Should Be Your Choice,” “Unmask Our Children,” and “Let Our Kids Breathe” were among the slogans on handmade signs waved by protesting students. Some of the protesting students were escorted home by parents while others stayed to protest, including Ilwaco junior Austyn Taylor, 17, who started the protest a day earlier.

"We're protesting the mask mandate, we're fed up with the masks and everything going on in the school about it," Taylor said.

“During sports and if you’re in the cafeteria, you don’t have to wear them. It doesn’t make sense since everyone is around each other. We’re tired of wearing the masks and we don’t want to wear it anymore.”

Taylor said he had been sent home a few times for mask violations this year, but felt some students were

See Protest, Page A6



LUKE WHITTAKER

The protest started Tuesday around 1 p.m., near the end of lunchtime, Taylor said, adding that he's been surprised by the response by fellow students. He returned at 7:30 a.m. Wednesday, with more students joining in throughout the day.

New phase for covid response as case counts drop in county

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — With cases of covid-19 continuing to fall from last month's pandemic peak in both the county and state, health officials are preparing for the pandemic to enter a new, less-intensive phase.

In Pacific County, 112 new cases of the virus were reported last week, down 30% from the week before. The case rate per 100,000 people over a two-week period was 1,303 as of Feb. 13, down from 1,894 on Feb. 6 but still above the county's pre-Omicron high.

See Covid, Page A9

Munger abruptly departs prosecutor's office

By JEFF CLEMENS
For the Observer

SOUTH BEND — For the third time in a year, the Pacific County Prosecutor's Office will be looking for a chief civil deputy prosecutor after the abrupt departure of Tracey Munger on Feb. 3.

Munger first joined the office in January 2021, when she was hired by Benjamin Haslam, former prosecutor, to be his second-in-command.

During her time with the office, she sat the second chair for the Mickey Pine trial and prosecuted the Andrew K. Windrow trial by herself, both of which

secured guilty verdicts.

Munger fulfilled the role of chief criminal deputy prosecutor up until shortly after Michael Rothman took office following Haslam's abrupt resignation in October 2021. She was replaced by Rothman's former colleague at the Mason County Prosecutor's Office and close friend, Daniel Crawford.

Following Crawford's hiring, Munger was reclassified to chief civil deputy and filled the role until her departure from the prosecutor's office via a separation agreement, in which she will receive a three-month severance of \$25,362.

Unlike typical separation agreements issued by the county, Munger was only given six days to approve and sign the separation agreement instead of the usual 21 days. The *Observer* obtained a copy of the separation agreement

through a public records request. The 21-day review clause was crossed out, and six days was written in its place.

Munger, citing a stipulation of the agreement, declined to comment on her departure, but stated, "I enjoyed working for, and serving, the Pacific County community."

While Munger's separation agreement did not include a formal non-disclosure agreement, Section 9 of the agreement states, "Munger agrees that she will not make any derogatory or disparaging comments about the County, or any of the County's executives, managers, or Board members in any communications with third parties, in a press release, or in any other similar forum or manner."

See Munger, Page A10

Oller dollars crucial for OBSD education initiatives



Verna Oller left millions in her will to help peninsula young people.

Funds managed to aid students far into the future

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

LONG BEACH PENINSULA
— Over the past decade, projects and initiatives at the Ocean Beach School District have been lent a helping hand by the Verna S. Oller Foundation, the charitable organization supporting education on the peninsula that has often flown under the radar compared to the Verna S. Oller Aquatic Trust.

See Oller, Page A9

Protest

Continued from Page A1

being unfairly targeted by school staff regarding mask enforcement.

“We’re not allowed in the school without a mask and we’re not going in without one. We plan to be out here every day until they change the rule. We want to get back to getting our education without having to wear a mask. It should be a choice,” Taylor said.

The protest started Tuesday around 1 p.m., near the end of lunchtime, Taylor said, adding that he’s been surprised by the response by fellow students. He returned at 7:30 a.m. Wednesday, with more students joining in throughout the day.

“We started protesting yesterday with about seven people and it got up to about 16 by the end of the day. I didn’t expect this many, but I would love to have more. It’s about 30 now,” Taylor said.

District respondsOcean Beach School District officials issued an email in regard to the protest, offering safety parameters for high school and middle school students who chose to participate, including guidelines for checking in or out of the school.

“We respect the rights of parents and students to engage in such action to make their voices heard,” the email said.

In a followup email, the district wrote that it did not know in advance about the protest, but did its best to try and accommodate those who were protesting. Further protests must be done off of school property, the district clarified.

In the future, the district also wrote that any parent wanting their student to participate in any mask protests need to keep their child out of school and take them to the protest. A student who leaves



Approximately 30 Ilwaco high school students gathered near the front steps of Ilwaco High School waving signs and voicing their concerns regarding their requirement to wear masks in school on Wednesday, Feb. 10, with some vowing not to return until the rule was changed. Several Hilltop students and a few parents joined in support.

school to join a protest will be out of school for the rest of the day and be considered truant, while a parent who takes their child to a protest can call the school to excuse their absence.

“We respect the right to protest, but we also have a legal responsibility for the students in our care, and parents have a right to determine their child’s participation in such activities during school hours,” the district said.

Superintendent Amy Huntley told the *Observer* that the district doesn’t have a problem with the protests, as long as people are respectful and follow the parameters the district has set in place. She said she was concerned about potential parent protests at Long Beach Elementary, “just because the kids are little and that’ll scare them.”

Washington state’s outdoor mask mandate will be lifted by Feb. 18, Gov. Jay Inslee announced at a Feb. 9 news conference. In Sep-

tember, an outdoor mask mandate was put in place for events with 500 or more people.

There is currently no date for when the indoor mask mandate, including K-12 schools, will be lifted, but an announcement on that could come as early as this week, Inslee said. In Washington, a statewide indoor mask mandate, regardless of vaccination status, has been in place since Aug. 23, 2021.

Last week, Washington state Schools Superintendent Chris Reykdal recommended in a letter to Inslee and the state health department to allow local health departments to make decisions about mask requirements.

“With high immunity rates and our ability to carry out rapid antigen tests with nearly every school district participating in our state’s covid-19 testing program, the time is now to rebalance the health and educational benefits of masking in our schools,” Reykdal wrote.

“When there was limited or no access to vaccines or rapid tests and rates of hospitalizations and mortalities were high, mandatory face coverings were an essential part of the larger community mitigation strategy – masks worked! However, universal masking impacted the learning environment,” he continued.

Huntley said she doesn’t want the decision to be in the hands of local school districts, and would rather have the state provide new universal guidance — such as making it optional for students and staff to wear masks.

Naselle protestProtests also took place at the Naselle-Grays River Valley School District last week, with an estimated 40-50 students and parents protesting the mask mandate for schools.

And about 15 student protesters were reported in South Bend.

Naselle Superintendent Lisa Nelson spoke with high school students ahead of the

protest, assuring them of their right to engage in peaceful protests, advising them of extant requirements for conducting protests and explaining the boundaries of school property.

On Wednesday, Feb. 9, a group consisting of parents of school students and some parents of homeschooled children began to gather at the door to the school’s commons/lunchroom. They were joined by students carrying signs. The group was informed by Nelson they would need to wear masks if they wished to enter the building. They were asked to move off of school property and not gather at the doorway where students were trying to enter. Otherwise, they would be trespassing.

At this point, perceptions of the situation diverged among those involved. Administrators felt the protesters were making it difficult for students arriving to attend classes to enter the building, and staff went out

to assist students in entering the school. They also believed younger students were scared by the events that were unfolding.

The protesters felt the school staff was blocking the door from them entering and were the ones making it difficult for arriving students to enter the school. In either case, there was a period of time where words such as “Communist” were heard to be coming in raised volume from the parent group. One unnamed adult male reportedly got in the face of Nelson and school district secretary, Rhiana Jacot, while loudly declaring that “something stinks.” As calmer minds prevailed, the protesters moved around the building and down by State Route 4.

The protests continued on Feb. 10, with protesters located near the highway in front of the school.

“I understand the frustration of parents and students with this seemingly never-ending barrage of closures, covid test requirements and mask mandates,” Nelson said. “These are not things we asked for and no one will be happier than teachers and staff when it finally comes to an end. At the same time, we are required to follow the governor’s proclamation. To do otherwise simply opens up too many liabilities for the school, the students and staff.”

Nelson said the district’s students and staff have been hit hard by covid, and had 39 students out of school at the same time during its peak. There have been times where the district has barely been able to keep school open, she added.

“[Covid] has been a tremendous strain on our staff, and I have nothing but praise for the dedication they showed in the face of it,” she said.

—Brandon Cline and Nick Nikkila contributed to this reporting.

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Village Club Meeting Part 2
OCEAN PARK — On Feb. 17 starting at 2 p.m., the Village Club will be holding a second meeting to discuss the proposed OBSD bond resolution. There is so much to digest about this \$96.15M proposal; the reasons for and reasons against and as well as other possible options. The meeting takes place at the PCFD#1 Fire Hall, 26110 Ridge, Ocean Park. Masks are required. As always, the meeting is open to the public.

AAUW Meeting
OCEAN PARK — The regular meeting of the American Association of University Women will resume in person on Feb. 19 at 10 a.m. at the Ocean Park Library. Masks and vaccination required for attendance. For questions please call 360-642-3636.

Project Community Connect
LONG BEACH — On Feb. 24 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., the Project Community Connect event will take place at the Long Beach Elks Lodge. The events includes free lunch and free haircuts, with items for veterans, pet assistance, food resources, medical and dental resources, employment help, and other resources. There are free bus rides available for the event. Volunteers are needed; please visit www.penisulapov-ertyresponse.org. Their phone is 360-214-6241.



“Blues Is A Woman” is a six-woman group is coming to Raymond on Feb. 27 to perform for Sunday Afternoon Live.

Bazaar, Chili Cook Off & more
SEAVIEW — St. Mary at 4700 Pacific Hwy. in Seaview, is having a Bazaar, Boutique, Bake Sale and Chili Cook Off at the parish hall. On

Friday, Feb. 25, the Bazaar, Boutique will be open from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. On Saturday, Feb. 26, along with the bazaar, boutique and bake sale there will also be a Chili Cook Off with music the Holy Trio. Chili entries

accepted from 10 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. free. Taste and vote from noon until 1:45 p.m. for a \$5 tasting fee. Awards will be 2 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. For information call 360-642-2002 or 352-586-0082.

‘Blues Is A Woman’
RAYMOND — Sunday Afternoon Live announced that a six-woman group is coming to Raymond on Feb. 27 to perform “Blues Is A Woman,” a theatrical concert with music and storytelling of old-time female blues singers whose legacies have fallen into the cracks of time. The Feb. 27 event will begin at 3 p.m. at the historic Raymond Theatre, marking the theater’s re-opening after nearly two years of pandemic closure. The theater doors will open at 2:30 p.m. Tickets for the concert are \$25 at the door, cash or check only, or \$20 in advance by calling 360-836-4419 or visiting SAL’s website at www.sundayafternoon-live.org. Some COVID-19 requirements apply: Masks and proof of vaccination are required, or for those who haven’t been vaccinated, ages 12 and older, proof of a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours prior to the event. Those 12 or younger must show negative test results within 24 hours of the event. Locally, the show is sponsored by Pacific Eye Clinic, Luke and Brianne Probasco, Bayshore Realty, Jan Norman, and Sequest Motel. Fans of the blues, women singers and all things historical will find something to celebrate in this

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Letters

Continued from Page A5

far from home.

Two years after the wreck of the *Solano*, on the cold and stormy morning of Jan. 15, 1909, Willie’s dog was heard barking and howling mournfully on the beach near the Taylor place. The dog made such a racket that Willie investigated, and was surprised to find the French ship *Alice* stuck in the sand. Willie sent out the alarm, and the lifesaving crew from Klipsan Beach responded. The French crew made it to

shore, and whatever could be salvaged was brought ashore as well. The *Alice* carried a cargo that included 2,200 tons of English cement packed into barrels. When the salt water washed through the hold of the ship, the cement hardened and the incredible weight buried her hull into the sand.

The *Alice* became a popular tourist attraction and one of the most famous shipwrecks on the peninsula.

In the photo archives at the Columbia Pacific Heritage Museum there is a great picture showing the crew of

the *Alice* posing in front of the Taylor House. Also in the picture is a boy and his dog. The boy is holding the dog up by his front legs, as though the dog is standing at attention for the photog-

rapher. Although they are not specifically identified as such, I like to think it is Willie Taylor and his famous dog, Solano.

FRANK J. LEHN
Long Beach

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Covid shots climb as cases spike

County death toll rises to 16 people

By **BRANDON CLINE**
Chinook Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — Vaccinations in Pacific County were the highest they had been in almost two months last week, as covid-19 con-

tinues to spread rapidly throughout all areas of the county.

Last week, Pacific County finally crossed the 50% threshold for its total population being at least partially vaccinated against the disease. But cases continue to rise at an alarming rate, with another 57 cases reported in Pacific County from Aug. 2 to 9 and the county's pandemic death toll rising to 16, the third consecutive week a death has

been reported in the county.

Hospitalizations also jumped from 47 to 54, the most in a one-week span for Pacific County since the pandemic began. The county's case rate per 100,000 people over 14 days sat at 462 as of Aug. 7, up from 335 a week ago and the highest it has been since December.

For much of the pandemic, a supermajority of total cases have been reported in people who reside

in north county. In recent weeks, however, people in south county are making up the bulk of newly reported cases. From July 21 to Aug. 4, 65 of the 88 cases with a listed address resided in south county, including 20 cases in Long Beach, 17 in Ocean Park and 13 in Naselle.

County health director Katie Lindstrom said the delta variant is fueling the sharp rise in cases, with more cases being traced back

to workplaces and not just mostly within households.

"What people are hearing about delta being a lot more contagious is absolutely playing out locally," Lindstrom said. "Typically, when we have a positive case, it used to be that maybe one or two people would maybe catch it. Now, it's many more people."

See Covid, Page A9

Hardy commercial diggers sustain long tradition

BIG RISK, BIG CLAMS



By **LUKE WHITTAKER**
Chinook Observer

WILLAPA SPITS — On isolated, shifting spits in seemingly perpetual fog, some dig their living from the sand.

Razor clammers each collected about 110 pounds per day on average last season, but diggers are finding more clams and a more favorable market this year, making for some memorable days for the relatively small group who work the detached Willapa Spits off the north end of the Long Beach Peninsula.

"At \$3.75 per pound, I've never made more money this quickly," said Les Strange, 58, of Raymond, standing over a 50-quart cooler of clams. After averaging \$2.20 in 2020, commercial diggers like Strange are hopeful the current market demand will continue.

"That's pretty much what I do for a living all year. It's back-breaking work, but you get in shape. You get out what you put into it. You can't

See Diggers, Page A8

Despite the seasonal disruptions, dedicated diggers return year after year, like David Tegen, 68, of Westport. Tegen has been clamming for decades, he said.



A bucket full of razor clams collected along the Willapa Spit. Last season, commercial razor clammers each collected about 110 pounds per day on average.

LEARN HOW

See wdfw.wa.gov/fishing/commercial/razor-clam to learn how to become a commercial digger.

LUKE WHITTAKER



LUKE WHITTAKER

Participation among licensed commercial clammers in Washington has declined over the past five years, from 132 diggers in 2015, to 68 in 2020 to just 29 this year. An aging workforce and seasonal disruptions due to domoic closures are considered the primary reasons.

Talks ignite interest in fireworks clampdown

Countywide limits not possible until July 2023

By **BRANDON CLINE**
Chinook Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — Cognizant of past failures to clamp down on the sale and use of consumer fireworks around the Fourth of July weekend, local officials are continuing onward with a coordinated effort to take action on the hot-button issue.

At an Aug. 4 meeting to discuss adopting fireworks restrictions, Pacific County, Long Beach, Ilwaco, Raymond and South Bend officials agreed to keep the process

See Fireworks, Page A9

New state police reform laws generate questions

Mental-health interventions are a key issue here

By **JEFF CLEMENS**
For the Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — Two Washington state police reform bills, House Bill 1054 and House Bill 1310, went into effect on July 25 and have generated questions in law enforcement agencies across the state. Among those has been the Long Beach Police Department, where Chief Flint Wright is still trying to make sense of the laws that were passed this past spring.

Police now must exercise "reasonable care" before they can use force, including deadly force; background checks for hiring officers have been strengthened;

See Police, Page A10

Sailor wants to save aircraft carrier — in Astoria

Ocean Park man says historical attraction would generate revenue

By **PATRICK WEBB**
For the Observer

OCEAN PARK — A retired sailor campaigning to save the *USS Kitty Hawk* aircraft carrier from the scrapyards is pressing ahead seeking support.

Veteran Bill Nix divides his time between homes in

Ocean Park and Underwood on the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge.

He was billeted on the supercarrier during a varied career that included civilian service as a police officer, legal clerk, judge and parole officer, in addition to his active-duty and lengthy reserve service with the U.S. Navy and Army. "It was a really good ship," said Nix, a Navy photographer who served two tours in Vietnam and retired as a master-at-

arms/chief petty officer.

He believes it could attract 325,000 visitors a year if preserved and docked permanently in Astoria as a conference center and museum. "It's in fairly good condition," Nix said. "It hasn't deteriorated."

However, the *U.S. Kitty Hawk* Veterans Association has reluctantly ended its campaign to save the ship and Astoria-area leaders have given him little encouragement.

The association, with 1,200 members scattered throughout the United States, asked the Navy to try to preserve it in 2001. It secured pledges of \$5 million.

When officers rejected this idea, reportedly because it was not among ships listed for possible preservation, the group's leadership changed direction. In a recent newsletter, its president, Jim Melka of Independence,

See Carrier, Page A8



U.S. NAVY PHOTO/PH2 WILLIAM H. RAMSEY

The USS Kitty Hawk, one of the last oil-fired aircraft carriers, sails past some Japanese fishing boats in this U.S. Navy file photo from more than a dozen years ago. An Ocean Park man is trying to save the ship from being scrapped. Bill Nix believes it could become a museum and Astoria would be an ideal location.



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Diggers

Continued from Page A1

beat that,” said Strange, adding that he hoped to dig 250 pounds that day.

High risk, reward

In Pacific County, the commercial harvest is allowed only on the Willapa Spits, located within the mouth of Willapa Bay. The sand spits, only accessible by boat, present unique challenges and opportunities for commercial diggers each season. The relatively small area has abundant clam numbers and accounts for an out-sized portion of the state’s commercial clamming.

“For the past 10 years, they’ve accounted for about 35% of the [commercial] harvest. Just this little area in the spits is a pretty big producer,” said Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife coastal shellfish biologist Zach Forster during a recent patrol of the grounds in late July.

The reward, however, doesn’t come without risk. In order to reach the area, diggers must arrive by boat, since it’s illegal to drive on the beaches leading to where the sand spits begin. Clammers come on small skiffs, often relying on GPS plotters to navigate through the heavy fog that frequently blankets the area.

“It only occurs on the detached spits of Willapa Bay. The only way diggers can access the spits are by boat.



WDFW biologist Zach Forster, left, talks with commercial clammer Les Strange, center, as WDFW shellfish manager Dan Ayres inspects clams.

It’s boat-in only, which limits any potential interaction with driving on the beach or [bird] nesting,” Forster said.

The shifting sand spits are several hundred yards from the peninsula, and sometimes disappear underwater depending on the tides.

“They’re probably under 6 to 10 feet at high tide. It’s breaking surf on the spits typically. It’s all sub-tidal. They change from year to year. One area of the spits that’s good digging might not even show the next year,” Forster said.

Diggers dwindle

Participation among licensed commercial clam-

mers in Washington has declined over the past five years, from 132 diggers in 2015, to 68 in 2020 to just 29 this year. Scores of commercial diggers once ranged the sands of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties.

An aging workforce and seasonal disruptions due to domoic closures are considered the primary reasons for the drop in participation.

The season typically starts in April and lasts about eight weeks, but was delayed until July this year due to a common neurotoxin.

“We had a late start this year because of issues with domoic acid. The same that

affected the recreational beaches also affected the clams on the Willapa Spits. We continued to test from March clear through July, when we got our two good [back to back] samples to open,” Forster said. “July 2nd we got the green light from the Department of Health and we announced the opening date from July 10 running through Aug. 31, with the possibility of extending the fishery into September.”

Despite the seasonal disruptions, dedicated diggers return year after year, like David Tegen, 68, of Westport. On his best day, Tegen once dug 389 pounds. But on a Wednesday morning in late July, he had more moderate goals.

“I like to get up around 200 (pounds) or better,” he said. “But my age is catching up with me.”

Evolving razor clam market

In 2020, Pacific County accounted for 71% of the statewide commercial clam harvest, followed by Grays Harbor with 25%. The fishery landed 184,379 pounds of clams last year during an 87-day season, representing an ex-vessel value of about \$415,000, the fifth highest on record.

A majority of the commercial clam harvest historically



Commercial clammer Les Strange, 58, of Raymond, describes the motion he uses to collect clams with his left hand after breaking his right hand years ago.



Many commercial clammers use baskets to hold their clams as they dig.



Joshua Van Hess pulls a clam from the sand Wednesday, July 28 near Willapa Spits.

went to the commercial bait market, where they’re a popular choice for everything from Dungeness crab to surf perch.

“A reason a good majority have been sold to the crab market is because, if you talk to a commercial crabber, they’ll tell you razor clams are the best bait. They’re going to get sold where the demand is,” Forster said.

Lately however, a growing percentage is destined for the fresh seafood market, as much as 40%. Many local seafood retailers and restaurants now have razor clams

readily in stock or featured on menus. Commercial-harvested Pacific razor clams are considered a “best choice” among sustainable seafood, according to Seafood Watch.

“Their population is mostly driven by natural mortality and recruitment, not the recreational or commercial harvest,” Forster said.

And by the way, preliminary population surveys on the peninsula’s ocean beach indicate strong numbers for this coming fall’s digs — if domoic levels stay below 20 parts per million.



In Pacific County, the commercial harvest is allowed only on the Willapa Spits, located at the mouth of Willapa Bay. The sand spits, only accessible by boat, present unique challenges and opportunities to commercial diggers each season.

Carrier

Continued from Page A1

Iowa, lamented, “It looks as if we have lost the battle to save the ship.”

“We are trying to find a location to set up a *USS Kitty Hawk* museum,” the group told members online. “More details will be forthcoming, but association leadership is considering everything from a place on *USS Midway* on the West Coast to a building in Kitty Hawk, N.C., on the East Coast, and everywhere in between.”

‘Too much’ to handle?

Nix pointed to the *Midway*, a carrier in San Diego, as an example of how a community can preserve history while creating a lucrative tourist attraction. His research suggests that 1.3 million visitors annually pump \$4.7 million into Southern California. Other retired fighting ships attract visitors in Bremerton and elsewhere in California and the Atlantic coast.

He estimates potential visitor counts on the North Coast might reach one-quarter of *Midway*’s numbers — resulting in \$1 million revenue.

Astoria-area leaders who replied to Nix’s campaign offered unanimous respect for preserving the nation’s military history. But their consensus was that installing a 1,069-foot aircraft carrier on the Astoria waterfront and coping with the influx of

visitors would overwhelm the community.

Bruce Jones, mayor of Astoria, is deputy director of the Columbia River Maritime Museum. He replied to Nix in March that the museum is focused on the \$1.15 million dry-docking of the 128-foot *Lightship Columbia*. “I’m afraid our museum does not have an appetite for taking on a project of such exponentially larger proportions and logistical requirements,” he wrote.

He noted as mayor he would be interested in learning of others’ interest, but added, “An attraction that could generate an additional 400,000 annual visitors might be seen as *too much* of a good thing, because of the additional infrastructure required to support so many visitors in a town of only 10,000.”

He warned that deferred maintenance costs and the costs associated with docking the ship would have to be factored in.

‘Overburdened’ highways

In his reply to Nix, David Reid, executive director of the Astoria-Warrenton Area Chamber of Commerce, pointed to the brief Astoria stopover of the *USS Missouri* in 1998. The historic battleship, site of the Japanese 1945 World War II surrender, was being towed from Bremerton to become a museum in Hawaii. The crowds and accompanying

ABOUT THE CARRIER

The *USS Kitty Hawk*, nicknamed “Battle Cat,” was launched in 1961 and served missions in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Its designations were CVA-63 and CV-63. Some 40 fighter-bombers plus five helicopters and eight other planes could be deployed from its decks. It is 282 feet wide and draws 38 feet.

Ship histories note the U.S. used it in 1963 to test whether high-altitude U2 reconnaissance aircraft — key early assets in the Cold War — could be launched from a carrier. Stories also highlight how it hit a Russian submarine near Japan in 1984. Its final mission was in Japan.

traffic chaos demonstrated how the North Coast could not cope, he wrote.

“Since those days we have expanded operations and land use at the port, redeveloped other waterfront buildings, increased our year-round (and especially summertime) visitorship, and increased our population,” wrote Reid. “The roads leading to and from town, however, have not widened a single lane and are already overburdened on busy weekends.”

Reid said in his discussions with maritime and government leadership, all agreed that the ship should be preserved for future generations to enjoy. But he added, “This is an eminently worthy project that is simply out-sized for our community.”

Like Jones, he cited additional needs. “It’s that the presence of something this large and, shall we say, magnetic, would change the character of this town to its detriment and that’s only if we could somehow squeeze that

much dock, hotel, highway, parking and visitor space out of a peninsula that has been basically fully built-out since the 1960s.”

Deadline approaching

Nix is not deterred and is seeking support from elected leaders. He has received replies from the offices of U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) plus Oregon state Rep. Suzanne Weber (R-Tillamook), whose House District 32 includes the North Coast. “I am trying to spread the word and hope we can get some state resolutions,” said Nix, who is encouraged by the belief that federal matching funds could help with costs.

He said it is important to save the *Kitty Hawk* because it is the last of the oil-fired carriers. Later nuclear-powered craft may be less likely to be saved for private use because they pose potential contamination issues. “There are only two supercarriers

left,” Nix said. “Once they are gone, they are gone.”

But the clock may be ticking.

The carrier was decommissioned in 2009 at a ceremony Nix attended. It is docked at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton amid other unwanted military vessels. The *Kitsap Sun* newspaper, which covered the association’s unsuccessful campaign to save it, noted that will likely be sold for scrap. Since 2014, surplus carriers *Constellation*, *Ranger* and *Independence* have been towed around the tip of South America to ship-breaking yards in Brownsville, Texas, on the Gulf Coast, the newspaper has reported.

The latest action in April was a thorough exterior cleaning so its hull will not carry invasive species when it is moved. No scrap bids

have been announced, the newspaper reported.

Some support

However, Nix is not entirely alone.

When his project was highlighted in the *Astorian’s* In One Ear column earlier this year, it was enthusiastically supported by Seaside resident Nguyen Trung, who noted the size of the vessel, including its 4.5-acre flight deck, would be its attraction. “This offers limitless potential for usage: restaurants, stores, festivals, museum, garden, park, lodging, conference rooms, theater, sports, etc.”

Trung highlighted the manner in which the *Queen Mary*, a 1936 luxury British cruise ship, had been preserved in Long Beach, California. “What a cool idea,” Trung added. “I do hope this gem will be saved.”

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Wednesday, September 15, 2021

Vaccine bypass not OK'd for county workers

Two commissioners reject underlying shot mandate

By **JEFF CLEMENS**
For the Observer

SOUTH BEND — Pacific County Commissioners earlier this month left county employees without medical and religious exemp-

tions from covid-19 vaccines after the two north county commissioners objected to the underlying concept of requiring shots.

The Sept. 2 special meeting to consider exemptions quickly turned into a free-for-all of differing opinions.

Many questions, few answers

The meeting opened with a call for public comments, which only

generated remarks about issues such as who would decide on exemption requests and the likelihood of the vaccine mandate expanding.

There was ambiguity about who would make individual exemptions, but it would likely be Pacific County Prosecutor Ben Haslam and his office.

"No one decides if a religion is adequate enough," Haslam said. "In terms of the application of a sincerely held religious belief that pre-

vents a person from being able to comply with a vaccine mandate, I believe the intent is that the department directors will make that decision in consultation with [Risk Manager] Kathy Spoor and myself."

According to Haslam, several hundreds of years of case law interpretation will dictate how he and department heads will decide whether an employee's religion and sincerely held beliefs qualify for them to be exempt. The criteria for

medical exemptions are expected to be even more narrow, with none even specified during the meeting.

Governor's edict

Commissioner Lisa Olsen responded directly to a question regarding if the mandate will be expanded, stating, "it's been the practice of this governor in my view that things get expanded if there's no

See Vaccine, Page A10

EPIC CAR SPECTACLE: ROD RUN 2021



PHOTOS BY LUKE WHITTAKER

Kolton Groth, of Woodland, wipes the hood of his father's 1950 Plymouth during the 37th annual Rod Run in Ocean Park. Kolton's father purchased a 1961 Ford at the event, which Kolton will enter next year, he said.

LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

PENINSULA — South Pacific County's hectic summer visitor season reached a grand finale last weekend with return of an officially sanctioned Rod Run to the End of the World following last year's pandemic-driven intermission.

The Beach Barons-sponsored event brought around 950 official entries, plus hundreds more vehicles owned by car buffs who come to the beach for a weekend of automobile-oriented celebrations. Observers commented that this year was exceptionally well attended, resembling how Rod Run once was when it used to be held on Labor Day weekend. Crowds levels on and along Pacific Avenue invited comparisons to the Sturgis, South Dakota motorcycle rally.

As usual, attendees and the vast majority of other celebrants enjoyed law-abiding fun. However, there were two dangerous traffic incidents over the weekend, with a report on Page A14. See more photos on Pages A12-13, and see next week's *Chinook Observer* for Bonni Hilderman's Wilson Field photos and trophy winners.



ABOVE: "Rev it!" shouted Stetson Lehman, 9, center, as a classic car rumbled by during the annual Rod Run in Long Beach. Looking on is Jerry Burgin and Bruce Pagano, 7.

LEFT: Tricia Huff, of Aumsville, Or., wipes the fender of her 1925 Ford Model T during the 37th annual Rod Run in Ocean Park.

VIEW PLENTY MORE PHOTOS FROM THE 37TH ANNUAL ROD RUN ON PAGES A12-A13

Rod Run, Hilltop cases fuel peninsula covid concerns

Two more deaths bring total to 22

By **BRANDON CLINE**
Chinook Observer

PENINSULA — Communities on the Long Beach Peninsula have seen their covid-19 caseloads decrease considerably over the past few weeks, but exposures on both ends of the peninsula in recent days have health officials on notice.

Last Saturday, the Pacific County Health and Human Services Department warned of confirmed covid-19 exposure at Wilson Field in Ocean Park during Rod Run festivities for the day before, Sept. 10, as well as potential exposure the day of the announcement, Sept. 11, county health director Katie Lindstrom said. On Monday, Ocean Beach School District Superintendent Amy Huntley confirmed a pair of coronavirus cases at the Hilltop School, which has forced the entire 7th grade class into remote learning for the rest of the week.

See Covid, Page A13

LB eyes modest fireworks reform

Days could be cut to 4 or 5, down from 8

By **BRANDON CLINE**
Chinook Observer

LONG BEACH — With the results from a city-sanctioned survey in hand, Long Beach officials are inching closer to implementing new — but not stiff — fireworks restrictions in the city.

At a Sept. 7 workshop, a majority of city councilors signaled their support for city staff to move ahead with drafting preliminary language to update the city's fireworks ordinance. The changes recommended by Mayor Jerry Phillips and key city officials, and currently favored by the council, would cut the number of

See Fireworks, Page A10

Dollar General opening slated for this month

By **BRANDON CLINE**
Chinook Observer

OCEAN PARK — If all goes according to schedule, Ocean Park's newest variety store will be open for business before the calendar flips to October.

Last week, Dollar General Corp. confirmed to the *Observer* that its new Ocean Park store, located at the former Oman & Son Builders Supply site at 25312 Vernon Ave., is tentatively scheduled to open in late September, pending construc-

tion progress on the store. Signage for the new store had also gone up in recent weeks.

Once open, the store is expected to employ between 6-10 employees, according to Katie Ellison, senior manager for Dollar General Corp. Dollar General is still listing an open store manager position for the Ocean Park location on its company website, in addition to listings for an assistant store manager, full-time and part-time lead sales associates, sales associate, and temporary store clerk.

The store will offer an array of private and name-brand merchandise. Private "DG" brands include food products such as cereal, canned goods, baking ingredi-

ents, condiments, beverages and frozen and fresh food, as well as home, health, beauty and kitchen products. Name-brand offerings include products from Kellogg's, General Mills, Nabisco, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, Hanes, Clorox and Procter & Gamble.

The company has no imminent plans to open any additional stores in Pacific County this year, Ellison said. Along with the Ocean Park store, Dollar General recently opened a South Bend location as well, its first store in the county. Gearhart and Clatskanie are also home to Dollar General stores.

See Store, Page A10



LUKE WHITTAKER

Once open, this new Ocean Park store is expected to employ between 6-10 employees, according to Katie Ellison, senior manager for Dollar General Corp. Dollar General is still listing an open store manager position for the Ocean Park location on its company website, in addition to listings for an assistant store manager, full-time and part-time lead sales associates, sales associate, and temporary store clerk.





Classic cars fill Beach Baron Field in Ocean Park, ground zero for the the 37th annual Rod Run.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Crowds gather at Beach Baron Field in Ocean Park for the 37th annual Rod Run.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Erica Gibson, of Vancouver, greets dogs in the back of a classic truck during the 37th annual Rod Run in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Spectators watch as classic vehicles drove through downtown Long Beach during the annual Rod Run.

LUKE WHITTAKER



“It’s a small town but a big show,” said Tom Wood, standing before his 1949 Lincoln.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Onlookers gather as police arrive to investigate an alleged hit-and-run Saturday night in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



A unique badge is pictured on a 1930 DeSoto.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Spectators are silhouetted on the street as classic cars pass through downtown Long Beach during the 37th annual Rod Run.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Smoke billows from car exhausts near the intersection of Pacific Avenue and Sid Snyder during the annual Rod Run.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Randy Dundas, of Astoria, wipes down his 1967 during the 37th annual Rod Run in Ocean Park.

LUKE WHITTAKER

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Wednesday, August 4, 2021

DELTA VARIANT SURGE

County urges masks for all as cases explode

Death toll reaches 15, as 60+ cases reported in just past week

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — Last week, Pacific County Public Health Officer Dr. Steven Krager predicted that the county was going to see a surge of covid-19 cases, driven by the easily transmissible delta variant. Just one week later, Krager’s forecast has already come true and county health officials are now urging all residents — regardless of vaccination status — to mask up again when in an indoor public setting.

Over the past week, 61 new cases have been reported in Pacific County, a staggering total that isn’t expected to slow down in

the near foreseeable future. As of Aug. 2, the county’s case rate per 100,000 people over the past 14 days is 335, the highest it’s been in more than three months and on pace to become the second-biggest wave of cases the county has faced during the entirety of the pandemic, trailing only last year’s miserable November-December downpour.

In all, 1,186 cases have been reported in the county and 47 people have been hospitalized, up from 45 the previous week. And in back-to-back weeks, a county resident has died from complications due to covid-19, bringing the toll to 15.

See Covid, Page A8

Final appeal leaves Jones behind bars

Court rejects alternate shooter theory

By JEFF CLEMENS
For the Observer

LONG BEACH — It’s been more than a decade since former Washington State Patrol Trooper Scott Johnson stopped Susan Jones in Long Beach on Feb. 10, 2010, for driving under the influence, was grabbed from behind and shot in the head.

A manhunt, investigation and a coincidence led state investigators to arrest Martin Jones of Seaview for attempted murder after ammunition in his home was found to be consistent with the evidence at the scene.

Ten years and appeals

galore later, Jones is at the end of his legal rope, having had his last chance to overturn his conviction during a hearing held June 22. One month later, the Washington State Court of Appeals made its final decision, sealing Jones’ fate.

As a result, Jones will continue serving a 50-year sentence. Johnson, who after being shot went on to serve two terms as Pacific County sheriff, now helps operate his family’s Naselle-based earth-moving business.

“My office worked to ensure the defendant faces the consequences of his egregious actions against a law enforcement officer who put his life on the line. Where we have jurisdiction to prosecute violent

See Jones, Page A10

Hospitality employment lags in record year for tourism

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — The proof is in the pudding — or in this case, the data: As has been presumed for months, new data shows that Pacific County’s hospitality industry is facing a steep labor shortage this summer, coming during what local industry veterans say is the busiest tourism season they can recall on the Long Beach Peninsula.

According to unemployment figures released by the Washington State Employment Security Department last week, the number of people employed in the county’s leisure and hospitality industry in the month of June sat at an estimated 920 people. While the number of workers in the industry is up 21.1% from 2020’s pandemic-plagued June, it is down 17.9% from June 2019.

Overall, Pacific County’s unemployment rate in June was preliminarily pegged at 7.4%, up slightly from May’s revised total of 7.2% but down from that month’s preliminary projection of 7.7%. The unemployment rate in June 2020 was 13.7%, and 6.8% in June 2019. The county is tied with Grays Harbor County for the highest unemployment rate in the state, with the statewide rate at 5.3%.

See Hospitality, Page A8



‘GREEN ACRES’ FIRE BLACKENS 10 ACRES

No injuries or structure damage in last week’s fast-moving grass fire

By LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

ILWACO — No injuries were reported after a fast-moving brush and grass fire charred a field and neighboring woods threatening nearby homes last week outside Ilwaco.

Nearly 11 acres were burned Thursday in the blaze officially dubbed the “Green Acres” fire, which drew dozens of firefighters from more than half a dozen agencies.

The fire was first reported around 2 p.m. Thursday afternoon, when Pacific County Fire District No. 2 and Ilwaco Fire Department were initially dispatched to a brush fire spreading between the 5700 and 5300 blocks of 40th Street (U.S. Highway 101) in Ilwaco. Responding crews were met with an “evolving fire that was spreading rapidly and threatening structures,” according to a report by a responding fire chief.

See Fire, Page A9



PHOTOS BY LUKE WHITTAKER
ABOVE: The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) responded with multiple ground and air resources to fight a fire along U.S. Highway 101 east of Seaview, including three helicopters who made many repeated runs to help contain the fast-moving flames.
BELOW: A DNR firefighter douses hot spots in a charred field following a 10-acre brush and grass fire Thursday that generated an intense response.

Local mental health diversion program offers second chances

By JEFF CLEMENS
For the Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — Criminal offenses don’t always land defendants in jail because of several diversion options available, including a unique and not-well-known mental health diversion in Pacific County.

The program is the only one of its kind in Washington state and gives hope to some offenders who would otherwise be incarcerated if it wasn’t for underlying mental health issues.

Started in 2016, it is the county’s response to Washington State Supreme Court case Trueblood v. DSHS that challenged unconstitutional delays in competency and restoration services for defendants suffering from mental health disorders. Tessa Clements, now the Therapeutic Courts manager, was tasked with building the program from the ground up.

See Program, Page A11



LUKE WHITTAKER
There have been an extraordinary number of tourists visiting south Pacific County this year. Pictured here, attendees admire sand sculptures during the Sandsations event Saturday, July 31 in Long Beach. See more photos inside.



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Nearly 11 acres were burned Thursday in the blaze officially dubbed the ‘Green Acres’ fire, which drew dozens of firefighters from more than half a dozen agencies.



Crews from DNR work to establish fire containment lines.



Crews set up 1,500-gallon portable water stations to help firefighters access the further reaches of the fire inaccessible by trucks.



A DNR firefighter is silhouetted behind a backdrop of smoke during a fast-moving brush fire Thursday.



No injuries were reported after a fast-moving brush and grass fire charred a field and neighboring woods threatening nearby homes last week outside Ilwaco.

Fire

Continued from Page A1

Flames spread into tall grass, which erupted into a hot blaze. They advanced to within about 50 feet of a home at 5306 40th St., but were blocked by helicopter water drops and fire-fighting on the ground. Shifting winds also pushed the flames south toward China Hill, a residential area with significant surrounding forest.

Over the next hour, several fire departments from surrounding agencies, including Pacific County Fire Districts No. 1, 2, 3 and 4, and Ilwaco and Long Beach Fire Departments, joined the fight as the fire threatened to spread to a nearby wooded area. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) also responded with multiple ground and air resources. Three DNR helicopters took turns making repeated runs, each dropping hundreds of gallons of water with each pass as other public agencies responded and assisted with scene control.

The fire was largely contained and considered no longer a threat to structures by 7 p.m., an official said, however DNR crews worked through the night to establish containment lines around the fire and extinguish any hot spots.

The response generated an outpouring of community support, with Long Beach Towing delivering over 40 lunches to the DNR firefighting crews. Food was donated by Drop Anchor Restaurant, Captain Bob’s Chowder and Hungry Bob’s Harbor Grille. Water, Gatorade and soda was donated by Dennis Company and Sid’s Market.

A closed section of U.S. 101, from the U.S. 101 alternate to Sandridge Road, was eventually reopened around noon Friday. The fire advanced to within 20 feet of the highway, but it was mainly closed to provide unimpeded access to the scene for dozens of emergency vehicles.

Fire marshals were dispatched to determine the official cause of the fire, which remains under investigation, officials said.

Your loved ones need you. Get the COVID-19 vaccine to be sure you can be there for them, and so you can protect them.



Community Immunity is your choice.

If you are homebound, the O3A Information and Assistance office can help you get vaccinated, including providing transportation. North Pacific County, call: 360-942-2177; South Pacific County, call: 360-642-3634.

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Sunday, May 1, 2022





State unveils vaccine incentive program

Local shots keep slow but steady pace

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

OLYMPIA — Washington state is set to end pandemic restrictions that have been in place for more than a year at the end of the month. But officials hope that a new statewide incentive program announced last week will help bring an end to restrictions sooner than that.

At a June 3 news conference, Gov. Jay Inslee unveiled the state's vaccination incentive program. Over the next five weeks, \$2 million in cash prizes will be given away via a lottery to those who have received at least one covid-19 vaccine dose, as well as a variety of other prizes that includes gift cards, free tuition, tickets to professional sporting events, video game consoles, smart home devices and even hunting and fishing licenses.

Most pandemic restrictions are set to end on June 30, but they could be lifted sooner if 70% of all Washingtonians age 16 and older have received at least one vaccine dose. As of June 5, 63.7% of people in that group have received one or more doses.

Washington's incentive program follows in the footsteps of more than a dozen other states that have launched their own programs, with the hope that they will convince holdouts to roll up their sleeves as well as reward residents who have already done their part to try and bring an end to a pandemic that has hospitalized more than 2.5 million Americans, killed nearly 600,000 and leaves millions still unemployed.

In Ohio, the first state to announce vaccine incentives, five vaccinated adults will win \$1 million each and five 12 to 17-year-olds will each win a four-year scholarship to a public college or university in the state.

See Vaccines, Page A8



LUKE WHITTAKER

Ilwaco class of 2021 graduates toss their caps following commencement Saturday, June 5 at Peterson Field.

'FIERCELY LOYAL'

IHS Class of 2021 graduates as one tight-knit family



LUKE WHITTAKER

Ilwaco graduate Cory Morrison reacts after receiving his diploma.

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

ILWACO — If you ask Ilwaco High School's Class of 2021, they'll tell you that for years they've been doubted, labeled as troublemakers and told they were bad news. But through it all, they've remained loyal to each other.

At an outdoors graduation ceremony at Peterson Field on June 5, the class of 53 students proved their doubters wrong, overcoming an unprecedented senior year and a number of other curveballs thrown their way throughout the years to earn their high school diplomas. With hundreds of friends and family cheering them on in-person, they celebrated with each other and closed the chapter on this phase of their lives.

Many of the students in the class have known each other since preschool, a virtue of living in a small and tight-knit community. Erika Glenn, the faculty-selected speaker, said knowing each other for so long has made the class feel like a family, a family that has grown individually and as a group throughout the years.

See Graduation, Page A9

*'LOSING A YEAR-AND-A-HALF OF TIME TOGETHER
IN HIGH SCHOOL DIDN'T SEEM TO MAKE A DENT
IN HOW MUCH WE CARE ABOUT EACH OTHER.'*

Erika Glenn

SENIORS OF '21

Long, tough road leads NHS senior to Navy

By way of North Carolina, Medford, and now Naselle

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

NASELLE — Oddly enough, Samantha Barbeau was in Naselle visiting family last September when she got the call from a friend that her grandmother's Medford home, where she had lived for several years and her grandmother had lived for decades, had burned down.

The house was one of many casualties of Oregon's devastating 2020 wildfire season and, ultimately, led Barbeau to Naselle High School for her senior year.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We are profiling a few south Pacific County seniors whose high school careers will be forever marked by the covid-19 pandemic.

Later this year, she'll head off to Navy boot camp.

But change isn't new to the soon-to-be graduate. Barbeau, her mother and her younger siblings lived with her grandmother for several years, but moved back to her home state of North Carolina from the Medford area when she was 17. Barbeau moved back to southern Oregon to live with her grandmother when she turned 18, and then moved to Naselle after the fire to live with family and complete her senior year.

While Barbeau lost all of her possessions in the fire, she said it's nothing compared to what her grandmother lost.

"It kind of has felt like a lie to



Samantha Barbeau overcame a major family emergency on her way to graduation from Naselle High School.

tell people that it's been my traumatic event, because it was my grandmother's traumatic event. She built her whole life around that house and lost everything," Barbeau said. "My loss compared to her loss is nothing. I'm just starting my life, most of my stuff is replaceable ... For my grandma, I'm sure it felt like losing a person, because there was so much in there and her dad had just died and her husband had died in that house."

See Seniors, Page A8

Peninsula churches look back on pandemic year

By AARON MEAD
For the Observer

PENINSULA — During the period of stay-at-home lockdowns last summer, churches were closed along with most other centers of indoor activity, as many super-spreader events had been traced to churches.

But as the pandemic continued, treating church as "non-essential" over the long term became untenable in Washington. In July, "stay home" became a recommendation rather than a requirement. Capacity restrictions were implemented and then increased. That left churches and churchgoers themselves to make the difficult decision of how much caution to exercise.

Many churches reopened locally, but a large share of congregants continued to stay home. Ilwaco New Life Assembly of God reopened in July. According to Pastor John Thomas, most of the congregation is over 60 years old, and most have been very cautious. Congregation size as of last month was barely break-

ing 20, down from around 50 pre-pandemic. Since the church has the capacity to hold 100 people, state-imposed capacity limits have never been an issue. Even rising vaccination levels have only started to bring people back.

The church lacks technology to provide a live-stream of its services, and so instead makes recordings available. Thomas said it has been a great challenge keeping people connected. To increase the feeling of connection between online and in-person church life, he solicited questions to be submitted via Facebook. His current sermon series is focused on answering these questions.

Easing back toward normal

Gov. Jay Inslee recently allowed churches to implement vaccinated sections without distancing. Not all local churches have availed themselves of this option.

"We aren't going to segregate our congregation," Thomas said.

See Churches, Page A8





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U.S. appeals court takes peninsula ICE case



LUKE WHITTAKER
In 2017, seven years after his visa expired, Mario Alberto Rodríguez Casillas was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Rodríguez regarded as key helper by local Hispanic people

By ASHLEY NERBOVIG
For the Observer
SAN FRANCISCO — The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit will hear arguments this September over whether the federal government should grant a Pacific County resident asylum in the States.
Mario Alberto Rodríguez Casil-

las entered the U.S. legally in 2005 and moved to the Long Beach Peninsula, where he became a bilingual teaching aide for Ocean Beach School District. In 2017, seven years after his visa expired, he was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the midst of a Trump administration crackdown on Pacific County migrants. Rodríguez applied for

asylum because he is a gay man and he argued he could face physical harm if he returns to Mexico. Since then, an immigration judge and the Board of Immigration Appeals have denied Rodríguez's request for asylum. Rodríguez appealed to the Ninth Circuit and his attorney, Luis Romero, said the court's decision to hear oral arguments for Rodríguez's

case is notable.
"It usually means the case is of significant legal importance or not as clean cut as the government is making it seem," Romero said. Romero is an immigration rights attorney with Novo Legal in Seattle.
Romero can't promise Rodríguez the judges will grant him asylum. But Romero said he will make sure Rodríguez's story gets

See ICE case, Page A8

Fireworks ignite heated warnings

By JEFF CLEMENS
For the Observer

PACIFIC COUNTY — The continuing dry spell that lasted into the Fourth of July weekend upped the ante on already-high fire danger here. Many jurisdictions around the state imposed emergency orders to ban fireworks at the last minute, including the City of South Bend. However, during a special meeting on June 29, the Pacific County Commissioners were reminded they haven't taken steps to give our county that option.

See Fireworks, Page A9



JULY 4
BIG PARTY, FEW PROBLEMS

LUKE WHITTAKER

Spectators watch from the boardwalk as fireworks explode Sunday, July 4 above the Bolstad beach approach in Long Beach.

First holiday post-covid restrictions passes without major incident

Little remains of one-time homicide case

By JEFF CLEMENS
For the Observer

SOUTH BEND — The case against Jeremy Jeffcoat continued getting watered down after Judge David L. Mistachkin tossed out six of eight remaining charges during a July 1 motion-to-dismiss hearing in Pacific County Superior Court. Jeffcoat initially faced up to 10 years in prison on a homicide charge



Judge David L. Mistachkin

See Case, Page A8



LUKE WHITTAKER

Participants line up for the Seaview 4th of July parade.

BY LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

LONG BEACH — The smoke and traffic has cleared, and the Long Beach Peninsula is still standing. Independence Day weekend drew thousands of visitors to the Southwest Washington coast for what some worried would turn the 28-mile stretch into a potential powder keg. Instead, the crowd of revelers — though raucous at times — partied without loss of life. A total of 71 incidents were reported to the Pacific County Sheriff's Office on Sunday — 13 were fireworks related and 20 were traffic related, with one person being arrested by Washington State Patrol

See July 4, Page A10

Senator zeroes in on upping internet speed

'Your story is the story we're trying to solve'

By BRANDON CLINE
Chinook Observer

ILWACO — U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell met with local stakeholders at the Columbia Pacific Heritage Museum last week for a roundtable discussion about the importance of broadband and the challenges many residents and businesses in Pacific County continue to face in gaining access to high-quality, affordable internet service. The June 30 in-person meeting in Ilwaco was one of

three steps Cantwell made in Southwest Washington that day, the first day of the state's reopening. Pacific County, Cantwell said, is "almost a poster child for what hasn't gone right with broadband, and what we absolutely now have to get right as we move forward to make more infrastructure investments." As chair of the Senate Commerce Committee since the beginning of this year, few in Washington, D.C. match the influence Cantwell now has on broadband issues. The committee has several

subcommittees pertinent to rural Southwest Washington, including the Subcommittee on Communications, Media and Broadband, the Subcommittee on Oceans, Fisheries, Climate Change and Manufacturing, and the Subcommittee on Tourism, Trade and Export Promotion. "In so many ways, all of [Cantwell's] activities in D.C. touch the entirety of Pacific County's interests and economic and community well-being," said Kelly Rupp, an Ocean Park-based consultant and facilitator of

the Pacific County Broadband Working Group. Growing importance The pandemic, Cantwell said, has laid bare the inequities that exist when quality broadband infrastructure isn't available in a community, whether it be small businesses receiving internet service through antiquated technology or students learning from home who don't — or can't — receive internet access.

See Internet, Page A9



BRANDON CLINE

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell addresses local stakeholders during a roundtable discussion on broadband at the Columbia Pacific Heritage Museum on June 30 in Ilwaco. Cantwell said the pandemic has laid bare the inequities that exist when quality broadband infrastructure isn't available in a community.



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Independence Day revelers are silhouetted by fireworks Sunday, July 4 in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



A man carrying all the 4th of July necessities rides a skateboard down Bolstad Avenue toward the beach Sunday, July 4 in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Fireworks explode Friday, July 3 above the Port of Ilwaco.

LUKE WHITTAKER

July 4

Continued from Page A1

and booked into Pacific County Jail on a DUI charge.

The first major holiday since the lifting of covid restrictions was met with bone-dry conditions statewide, prompting an emergency statewide burn ban issued Friday, July 2, just as thousands were descending on the peninsula for the long holiday weekend.

The change in restrictions caught many by surprise, resulting in discarded piles of firewood at several beach approach entrances.

Fourth of July fun

On Saturday, hundreds lined the Ilwaco waterfront with lawn chairs and blankets at the Port of Ilwaco in anticipation of a fireworks show over the harbor. The roughly hour-long show served as a perfect warm-up for the main event Sunday in Long Beach.

On Sunday morning, July 4, official holiday festivities kicked off near the corner of 34th Street and K Place in Seaview, where dozens of people of all ages gathered dressed in red, white and blue to participate in the 10th annual Seaview Fourth of July parade.

Meanwhile, local beach approaches from Seaview to Ocean Park experienced steady traffic as thousands of beachgoers poured into local approaches until sundown.

The spattering of fireworks all afternoon grew into a steady crescendo around dusk as volley after volley of consumer fireworks — mainly a mix of mortars, cakes and rockets — showered the skyline with glowing bursts and shimmering sparks for hours.

The intensity of the fireworks peaked around 11 p.m., sparking two small fires that erupted minutes apart but were quickly contained.

The first was a grass fire started by an errant firework in the dunes near the Bolstad beach approach. The small grass fire was doused by two witnesses with buckets of water. Minutes later another fire erupted from a dumpster along Bolstad approach and was quickly knocked down by firefighters from the Long Beach Volunteer Fire Department.

Volunteers lead cleanup

Monday morning revealed the aftermath of the revelry the night before as volunteers began to arrive at daylight to begin to remove tons of debris from local beach approaches.

The effort was spearheaded by the Grassroots Garbage Gang, a nonprofit group of volunteers who for the past 20 years have been responsible for removing more than 40,000 tons of garbage littering local beaches.

Volunteers Kelly Rupp and Shelly Pollock were among the group distributing garbage bags and cleanup gear while directing a steady stream of arriving volunteers Monday morning in Long Beach.

The multi-shot cake-style fireworks, which have become increasingly popular in recent years, are especially problematic.

“It’s thousands of pieces of plastic,” Pollock said.

By 11 a.m. several tons of trash and firework debris had been cleared from the beach by a concerted effort of volunteers and city cleanup crews, leaving little trace of the scene that unfolded the night before.



Foot traffic peaked Sunday, July 4 along Pacific Avenue in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Richie Perez, 13, of Vancouver, fires a Roman candle Sunday, July 4 in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Spent firework debris is pictured Monday, July 5 in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



An American flag billows in the wind Sunday, July 4 in Long Beach.

LUKE WHITTAKER



A dumpster fire ignited near the Bolstad beach approach was quickly contained by the Long Beach Volunteer Fire Department.

LUKE WHITTAKER

SURVIVE AND ADVANCE

Fishermen fade against Adna, rebound by burying Rainier; Wahkiakum awaits

By LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

ILWACO — The Ilwaco basketball team rinsed any lingering Adna agony with a 74-49 steamrolling of Rainier. The 25-point rout was the perfect remedy for the Fishermen following a single-digit loss (71-63) to Adna in the second round of district playoffs last week. Ilwaco (18-2) will next face Wahkiakum (10-9) on Wednesday night in Castle Rock. A win against Wahkiakum and the following game would secure a spot in the regionals for Ilwaco, but a loss in either would conclude their season.

Cold second-half sinks Fishermen against Pirates

After starting the district playoffs with a narrow 60-56 home victory over No. 15 seed Toledo on Feb. 5, the No. 2 seed Fishermen traveled to face No. 7-seed Adna on Wednesday, Feb. 9 in Montesano.

The game started fast for the Fishermen, who raced to a 15-6 lead in opening eight minutes. Both teams went on short scoring spurts in the second period, with Ilwaco holding a 32-25 advantage at the half.

Adna opened the second half on a 14-4 run, allowing the Pirates to pull ahead (39-38) midway through the third period, their first lead of the game. Meanwhile, the Fishermen struggled to find their rhythm offensively as the Pirates gained more confidence and added to their lead, taking a 49-45 lead into the final period. Ilwaco drew within striking distance (63-57) with 1:05 to go, but Adna was able to seal the win at the free throw line, earning a 71-63 victory.

Fishermen regain rhythm against Rainier

Ilwaco buried No. 13 seed Rainier (13-8) 74-49 on Friday, Feb. 11 at Rochester High School to remain alive in the District 4 2B playoffs following a loss to Adna. The Fishermen delivered a strong and balanced performance overall, but it was how they finished that impressed head coach Bob Enos.

“What really stood out was the energy and teamwork we came out with after half-time. All six guys that played in the third quarter scored, because we showed patience on offense and kept moving the ball to the open man for better shots. All six also played great defensively in the second half as we limited Rainier’s two post players to just one basket,” Enos said.

Enos credited Ilwaco senior guard Jaden Turner for limiting the Mountaineers’ leading scorer.

“Jaden Turner did a great job defending Ian Sprouffske, who was Rainiers leading scorer. Sprouffske had a good third quarter scoring 9 of his 17 points but only one other Rainier player scored in that third quarter. Jaden also played more as a pass-first point guard and got everybody involved in the second half. All five starters ended up in double figures and Sam Needham had seven [points] off the bench.”

Up Next: Ilwaco (18-2) will next face Wahkiakum (10-9) at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday night at Castle Rock High School. Wahkiakum has defeated No. 14 seed Onalaska (62-48) and No. 6 seed Forks (65-50) after an opening-round loss to No. 8 seed Raymond (74-56). The Fishermen will again be tasked with containing an all-league guard.

“The biggest challenge against Wahkiakum will be Brodie Avalon,” Enos said. “We will need to defend him as well as we did [Sprouffske]. They are both first-team all-league in the Central B.”



Jaden Turner (10) shoots a jumper against Adna.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Kyle Morris (2) scrambles for loose ball near the Ilwaco bench.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Sam Glenn (33) reacts after an Ilwaco three-pointer forced a timeout against Adna.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Beckett Turner (32) battles for rebound position while sandwiched by Adna players.

LUKE WHITTAKER



Alex West (1) scores on a reverse-layup against Adna.

LUKE WHITTAKER

IHS senior gears up for state return

Lake headed to Mat Classic; Smith is alternate

By PATRICK WEBB
For the Observer

ADNA — Ilwaco wrestler Chris Lake is returning to state.

He qualified for the WIAA Mat Classic by earning second place in the 152-pound weight class at the regional tournament Saturday.

Seven other Fishermen wrestlers competed for the opportunity to advance to the 1B-2B WIAA state championship at the Tacoma Dome Feb. 18-19.

Traveling with him will be sophomore Xavier Smith, who placed fourth in the 120-pound weight class. The top three from regionals advance automatically, but the fourth-place wrestler is named as an alternate with the chance to compete at state if a wrestler in his class drops out or does not make weight.

Lake defeated the No. 1 seed Robert Reed of Concrete High School and had another win before falling to a 6-2 decision against Tristan Ridley of Adna.

Head coach Larry Kemmer commended his commitment. “Chris is like our rock. We always know he will do well,” he said. “If he happens to lose, he always charges back. If he loses, he comes off the mat with his head held high.”

Two seniors closed out their Ilwaco wrestling careers with solid performances — and wrestled each other to determine their final placement. For the record, Gabriel McCargish placed fifth and Noah Cherry sixth in the 160-pound weight class.

“They are great teammates and have worked their tails off,” said Kemmer. The two were freshmen when he moved up to become head coach. “They were in a tough weight class and I am not at all disappointed.”

Kemmer said the final match ended with a memorable moment. “They

went at each other just like they would a drill in practice and both scored points. When they were done, they shook hands and had a hug.”

The fourth IHS senior, Alex Schock, had advanced to regionals at 195 pounds but suffered a sprained ankle.

Two underclassmen placed creditably. Marcus Lynch was fifth at 195 pounds and Wade Smith was sixth at 138. “They are both good kids who worked hard and were greatly improved,” Kemmer said.

Ilwaco’s lone female representative at regionals, junior Bethany Martin, wrestled in the 190-pound bracket at Aberdeen Saturday, but did not place.

Kemmer is pumped about his team’s Tacoma trip.

“I am always excited to go,” he said. Fishermen team members will join fans in the upper level looking down on the spectacle of simultaneous action on multiple mats spread on the surface of the Tacoma Dome. “It is so much fun, regardless of whether you win or lose. And just to have the younger kids see it — in puts a fire in them for next year.”

He is optimistic about his contender. As a sophomore, Lake placed fifth at the Mat Classic in 2020, which took place three weeks before covid restrictions changed everything. Lake, wrestling at 138 pounds, lost to the eventual champion, Colin Silverthorn of Tonasket, who helped his school to another 2B team title.

WIAA postponed and rescheduled sports throughout the worst months of the pandemic. Because wrestling is the closest-contact sport, there was no state tournament in 2021.

“I think he has got a definite shot,” Kemmer said.

Art Trail Guide

DON NISBETT ART GALLERY

Open 11am to 4pm Daily, closed Tuesdays.
Appointments available.
167 Howerton Way, Ilwaco
(360) 642-8831
Your local artist! Don Nisbett is known for his original, whimsical and colorful paintings depicting local scenes. Subjects include local wildlife, crab, fish, mermaids and more. Nisbett also does commissioned paintings and portraits, including beach houses, boats, pets, cars, etc. Original art also available on cards, magnets, prints, hand painted glassware and other gift items available. A fun and affordable place to shop along the waterfront at the Port of Ilwaco.

MARIE POWELL GALLERY

177 Howerton Way, Ilwaco
(360) 244-0800 • marie-powell.com
GALLERY OPEN
Hours: Most Saturdays (weather permitting) until April 1, 2022.
11am-4pm Call Susan at 360-665-5515 for current hours and appointments.
Original one-of-a-kind fine art pieces by Marie Powell are featured in this waterfront gallery at the picturesque Port of Ilwaco, Washington. Monotypes, mixed media paintings, oils, pastels, acrylics, original notecards. There is always something new and fresh to see at the Gallery, Beach Baskets by Susan Spence, Pottery by David Campiche.

WIEGARDT STUDIO GALLERY

2607 Bay Ave., Ocean Park,
(360) 665-5976 • ericwiegardt.com
Thursday-Saturday 11am-4pm.
Featuring original paintings and limited-edition prints by award-winning watercolorist Eric Wiegardt. Eric is well known for his bold, loose painting style. His paintings reflect his deep roots here on the Peninsula.
Eric will be teaching his Painterly Watercolors workshop at Chautauqua in Long Beach March 28-31. Attention locals: This is your opportunity to learn from a master!
2022 Destination Plein Air workshops include San Juan Island and Ghost Ranch, NM. Eric teaches weekly online composition classes and monthly online paint-alongs.
Wiegardt Studio Gallery also offers expert custom framing, art supplies, small prints and art supplies. Stop by and see Eric's newest creations or visit us on the world wide web!

BAY AVENUE GALLERY

Please visit our Facebook page or our website at bayavenuegallery.com
1406 Bay Avenue, Ocean Park,
(360) 665-5200
Thursday - Sunday 10AM - 4 PM
Masks & Social Distancing Required
Sue Raymond, Owner/Artist. Bay Avenue Gallery's goal is to exhibit unique works by local artists. This is a place that is usually filled with artists, exciting ideas and creative energy. New, exciting art comes in almost every day. This is a great chance to take home some artwork. Whether you are a peninsula local with an interest in art, or a visitor to Ocean Park, please visit us and see some great local talent!

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Through rain, silt and oyster spat

Seasonal oyster crews serve essential role

LUKE WHITTAKER
Chinook Observer

NAHCOTTA — A dull hum echoed from a silhouette on the distant tide flats before sunrise on a late-May morning in Nahcotta.

As the sun rose, dozens of shellfish farm workers emerged from the mist, each dressed in rubber boots and bibs as they toiled in a driving rain at low tide to help cultivate a future crop of Willapa Bay oysters.

The workers, a mix of full-time oyster farmers and seasonal seed crew, were employed by Pacific Seafood to fulfill an essential step in maintaining Willapa Bay's aquaculture abundance, which overall accounts for about a quarter of the U.S. total.

The workers were busy gathering mesh cultch bags, each filled with shells holding oyster larvae, also known as spat.

Workers passed the bags of baby oysters hand-to-hand with the last handler cutting the bag open and dropping the young oysters onto a conveyor belt that carried the tiny mollusks onto an awaiting barge.

See Oysters, Page B4



TOP: Shellfish farmer Oscar Martinez moves a basket into place before he begins filling it with oyster cultch on a sodden Monday, May 24 in Nahcotta.

LEFT: Shellfish farming is arduous work often in adverse conditions, but brings a special satisfaction. "I love it," said Cesar Rodriguez, a shellfish farmer for the past seven years.

BELOW: Dante Negrete prepares to break open a cultch bag into a basket on the tideflats east of Nahcotta on a rainy May morning.

PHOTOS BY LUKE WHITTAKER



LUKE WHITTAKER
Shellfish farmers are silhouetted against Willapa Bay.

