

Students Fight Racism at Peninsula and Gig Harbor High Schools

Two student groups at both schools have formed to push back against what they call a complacent and at times hostile environment.

JONAS KOLLER, SPECIAL TO KP NEWS

At the Peninsula School District board meeting Jan. 30, Gig Harbor High School student James McCourt took the podium to point out the district's low diversity rate and what he called persistent issues with racism in PSD schools.

According to the 2022-23 PSD annual report, only 0.76% of the student population is African-American. McCourt, a senior at GHHS and a member of its newly formed Black Student Union, asked the district to implement a Black history curriculum to address these issues.

This initiative comes at a time when incidents of racism are so commonplace for many high school students at Gig Harbor and Peninsula High Schools they have become numb to it, he said.

The board listened to McCourt's suggestions but took no action at the meeting.

McCourt, who spent his first three years of high school at Peninsula, recalled numerous times he and his peers witnessed racial jokes and heard racial slurs in the district.

"Black students have almost gotten used to it because it's like, OK, whatever," McCourt said. "(Then there's) kind of a fear of being told, oh, you're being way too sensitive about it."

He described a time at Peninsula when he experienced racist speech personally.

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There was time for sharing knowledge, history and wisdom during a tour with Great Peninsula Conservancy leadership and neighboring forest owners. *Tina McKail, KP News*

Great Peninsula Conservancy Expands Fil Lucy Bay Preserve by 55 Acres

Four parcels donated to Great Peninsula Conservancy extend the preserve to the Pitt Passage shoreline.

CHRIS RURIK, KP NEWS

Fil Lucy Bay Preserve continues to grow. An anonymous donor has given Great Peninsula Conservancy, the nonprofit land trust that owns the preserve, four parcels totaling 55 acres. The preserve now totals 170 acres.

While past additions focused on protecting the shoreline forests of Fil Lucy Bay's north cove, the new parcels extend the preserve across Mahncke Road into uplands to the east, with one arm reaching all the way to Pitt Passage. It includes 265 feet of undeveloped shoreline. There is currently no public access.

The preserve was created 10 years ago



Healthy forests of the future depend upon the benefits of diversity. *Tina McKail, KP News*

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WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT THIS

Here's What I Think About That

LISA BRYAN,
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

A few days ago I read that doctors in France are writing "museum prescriptions" as a treatment for people with chronic illness or mental health issues.

"There is something powerful about the direct confrontation with a piece of art, and that can have benefits on numerous levels," one said. "It helps them find community."

Several museums have changed their spaces and prices to meet that need.

It reminded me how much art surrounds us on the Key Peninsula, how much beauty, and how much community if only we remember to look for it.

I took myself on a private KP art tour.

There is always a show on display at our local library. This month it's a collection of different mediums from yarn to glossy magazines, repurposed into abstract images. At the Crandall Center, it's local watercolors. At the KP History Museum, it's the story of our roadways. And there's always the student murals at the Key Center Corral and Minter Elementary School. And the pavilion built by local artisans at Gateway Park. And the efforts of the Key Peninsula Beautification Project to turn traffic medians and busy intersections into lovely gardens.

And then I learned about the death by suicide of a local middle school student, and it all seemed so pointless.

We need to talk about it.

"Talking about suicide doesn't put ideas in someone's head or cause suicide, it helps create a safe environment where children can ask questions," said Kristin Francis, MD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at Huntsman Mental Health Institute in Utah (where in 2022 suicide was the leading cause of death for ages 10 to 24).

"Suicide impacts almost everyone directly or indirectly," she said. "Hearing about it from a trusted source, like a parent or caregiver, will assist your child with the right information and they can speak to others about it accurately. Don't avoid the conversation because it is difficult."

In Washington state, an average of 13 youths between the ages of 15 and 19

take their own lives each year, making us 30th in the nation, according to America's Health Rankings. Guns are the leading method for both boys and girls, according to the Harborview PNW Suicide Prevention Resource Center.

"Middle schoolers are dealing with a lot of big emotions and likely have heard someone talking about depression or suicide. Ask what they have heard or what they know

about suicide, what feelings they have about it, and what they believe to be true about the causes of suicide," Francis said.

"Most importantly, when you ask about suicide, be ready to listen," said Anne Nesbit, a member of the Gig Harbor & Key Peninsula Suicide Prevention Coalition (and KP Fire Department Public Information Officer). "Asking about suicide does not make anyone suicidal. Instead, when one asks about suicide, by asking directly, 'Are you thinking of suicide?' one makes it clear they are in a safe space to talk about it."

Too often society makes suicide or mental health struggles a dirty secret. It is that shame and stigma that keeps people from asking for help.

Talking like this helps prevent misinformation and can help an adult meet a child where they are, without fearing judgment.

"By the time a child reaches high school, it is likely they know someone with a mental health condition," Francis said. "The conversation about suicide needs to continue, but at this point, they need to know what to do when

they or a friend has suicidal thoughts."

Depression, anxiety, stress and other mental health conditions do not arise from weakness or a lack of willpower.

It is critical that parents reassure their children, and anyone else in their lives, that these are a normal part of life, that they can be treated, and that people deserve to be heard.

"We need to focus on our mental health as much as we do our physical health," Nesbit said. "We need to do

this as a community and allow those who are struggling and feel they are in a dark, hopeless place to enter into the light knowing they will have support and not judgment as they navigate their journey to wellness."

Suicide affects the entire community. There is help for everyone, no matter their age. We can work together to create a community where asking for help is the norm, and this starts with knowing the signs and symptoms of mental health challenges.

There are many local avenues: The Tacoma-Pierce County Department of Health sponsors classes, as does the Gig Harbor & Key Peninsula Suicide Coalition. There are instructors available at the KPFD, Communities in Schools of Peninsula, and Peninsula School District. If you don't want to take a class, these agencies can help with resources and support.

No one should feel they are alone. There is a big, beautiful community here ready to help.

Anne Nesbit and Ted Olinger contributed to this article. ■



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Anyone in crisis or with questions can call or text 988 or use the following resources at any time.

- Suicide Lifeline: 800-273-8255
- Teen Link: 866-833-6546
- Text "HEAL" to 741741 Crisis Text Line
- For more information, go to 988lifeline.org or hope4you.org

Contact Key Peninsula Fire Department for more information on mental health and suicide awareness classes at info@keypeninsulafire.org

State Champ Mira Sonnen Draws Strength From Memories

The Peninsula High School junior is already a three-time state champion in softball and wrestling.

EDDIE MACSALKA, KP NEWS

Mira Sonnen is in awe of high school wrestling at the Tacoma Dome.

The junior 140-pounder on the Peninsula Seahawks girls wrestling team found a spot near the mat to take in the atmosphere of the 2024 WIAA State Wrestling Mat Classic as she waited for her state championship match Feb. 17.

“When you see all those athletes, and you look up to the top of that building, there’s no way you can’t be excited to be here,” she said.

Just two years ago, having never wrestled a match in her life, Mira sat with her mom, Margaret, her oldest brother, Kel, and a swarm of other family members near that same spot, in the same building during that same state tournament watching middle brother Kylen take eighth place at the 2022 Mat Classic. Kylen didn’t reach the podium that day, but the moment was still special for the Sonnen family.

To Margaret, it signified the start of the family’s “comeback tour.” In 2020, the patriarch of the Sonnen family, Cory — a high school state champion and PAC-10 wrestling champion at the University of Oregon in the early 1990s — died of brain cancer. It was the first time the whole family was together since the funeral and Mira remembered all the emotions and excitement from watching her brother that day.

“I think that’s what drew me (to wrestling).” After avoiding the family legacy for 14 years, she finally cracked. Later that night she told her mom, “I think I can try this and get really good at it.”

Just a year ago, having started wrestling only months earlier, she was back at the Tacoma Dome, getting her hand raised for a hard-fought third-place finish.

Two months earlier, having only wrestled for about 18 months, Mira was warming up near that exact same spot, in the exact same building during that exact same state tournament, to compete in the school’s first-ever individual state title in girls wrestling.

Talk about life coming full circle.

“I remember (sophomore teammate) Bailey (Parker) turned to me and said, ‘Within the next 10 minutes we’re going to know if we’re state champs or not. Either way, it’s going to happen,’” Mira said. “So, I thought, when you think of it like that, I might as well not worry about it and just go for it.”

And she did.

Mira ended up pinning defending state



PHS junior Mira Sonnen is the first-ever girls wrestling state champion in school history.

Tina McKail, KP News

champion Flor Parker-Borrero from Graham Kapowsin High School in 1:30. “When the whistle blew (after the pin), it was just chills throughout my whole body,” she said. Mira will officially go into the Seahawks record books as the first-ever girls wrestling state champion in school history, but seeing as how Parker performed the same feat minutes later, Sonnen said she considered them winning it together. And the cherry on top was the Peninsula girls winning a team state championship by the end of the night.

In less than two years, Mira created a new era in her family’s wrestling legacy.

“Pressure is a privilege,” Mira said about the expectations she sets for herself in athletics. Growing up she was just as active in softball as she is now in wrestling. She was the starting right fielder on Peninsula’s 2023 3A state championship softball team.

That means with two team championships and an individual title, she can already call herself a three-time state champion. Her softball team this year is already halfway through the season and has four home games this month: April 8 against River Ridge; April 23 against Central Kitsap; April 29 against North Thurston; and April 30 against Yelm. The Seahawks play Gig Harbor April 10.

Just a few years ago, Mira never imagined wrestling would leapfrog softball as her top sport. Her mom, Margaret, was a college softball player at Pacific Lutheran and Mira was originally heading in that direction, too. But now she’s grappling with the wrestling bug.

“For me, the idea of her starting wrestling her sophomore year, I figured she would hurt herself or not do well,” Margaret said. “She’d have to go all-in, and I didn’t want

her expectations to be crushed.”

Mira’s inexperience and late-blooming is now what drives her. “I only have a little bit of time to get a lot better at what I’m doing,” she said. Early on Mira focused mostly on learning techniques and honing a few main moves. She picks up the rest by competing against wrestlers better than her. Watching films, taking notes, and “getting beat up by my brothers” has also helped her along the way.

“Truly, the most I learn is from my losses,” said Mira, who finished this season with seven of them and had 12 losses in her first year.

“Mira had to be a real student of the game to get where she is,” Margaret said. “(In two years) she has bridged the gap between not knowing how to wrestle and being one of the best wrestlers in the state.”

Gary Griffin, the Seahawks longtime boys and girls wrestling coach, agreed. “What she has accomplished in this short amount of time is not normal in the eyes of the wrestling community. But she’s shown that it can be done with the right person, perspective and athletic skill set.”

Mira has another year to improve her game and she now has every intention of wrestling in college. She doesn’t know where yet but plans to study biochemistry. To prep her for the college transition, Mira will spend time this summer learning freestyle wrestling, which is used at the collegiate level, while also working on her high school-level folk style wrestling.

In honor of her dad, Mira wears a shirt at every tournament with a picture of him in his wrestling days. “I do this because he wrestled, but it’s weird because he doesn’t know that I ever wrestled,” she said, admitting she doesn’t know if she ever would have started wrestling if her dad was still alive. “I could’ve used his coaching and I wish he could’ve seen me have success.”

The Peninsula girls have a great chance of repeating as state champs next year with six of the seven state qualifiers returning. Mira hopes to use her and her team’s state championships to promote this still up-and-coming girls program, which just finished its eighth year of existence. The team had a record turnout this past season, but it was a small team compared to others across the state.

“We’re building a program that is excited to learn and grow,” Mira said. “I was able to find success and I hope others can see that and know they can, too.” ■

High School Junior Writes Mental Health Manual for Peers

At 17, Tessa Booth has pulled together the diverse pieces of her life to create a book nearly ready for publication as part of a years-long project.

VICKI BIGGS, KP NEWS

Tessa Booth is a 17-year-old junior at Peninsula High School preparing to publish her first book, a mental health manual, “You Are Not Alone.” It is the culmination of two years of work and the goal of her Gold Award for Girl Scouts.

“It’s been kind of a hard project because it’s so big,” she said. “It’s been going on since 2022, and my parents have been very supportive.”

Booth is new to PHS, having moved from Federal Way about a year ago and transferring from Summit Olympus High School in Tacoma, a smaller charter college-preparatory high school. She belongs to the National Honor Society and has been a member of the Girl Scouts since she was 6 years old.

“I’ve always been a good student, and I have always taken an interest in mental health as I got older, and I have always wanted to help my community. I enjoy the community hours I have put in with the National Honor Society. That has always been my passion, helping others. So that is how this project started.”

Reflecting on her personal mental health challenges led to creating her manual. “I first started out addressing it (by) writing down healthy skills to help me remember.”

Booth said she has struggled with social anxiety from her early years onward. “I have always had a problem connecting with people since I have Asperger’s Syndrome.” Like many young people, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated her symptoms, and depression also became part of her mental health challenges. Returning to in-person classrooms was very difficult. Booth accepted mental health counseling and medication as a part of her treatment.

In response to her own needs, Booth created an after-school support group for students at Summit Olympus High School focused on mental health issues. In part, it fulfilled some of the requirements of the National Honor Society.

“Originally my project was just supposed to be starting a club at my old school in Tacoma,” Booth said. “It did help quite a bit, but I decided I wanted to make a bigger impact in the surrounding community. I played with the idea of writing a book and it kind of morphed into that.” This larger project fulfills her



Tessa Booth is going for the gold with Girl Scouts. *Lisa Bryan, KP News*

Girl Scout Gold Award requirements, the highest award possible in Girl Scouting.

The Gold Award requires a vision for change. The Scout needs to identify a problem that does not have an immediate solution, work with Scout leaders to shape a project that addresses the problem, and provide a framework and plan for implementing an ongoing and self-sustaining solution.

Through her own experience, Booth identified the need for mental health resources for young people, including how to observe and understand mental health conditions commonly experienced. Like others, Booth understands the stigma and isolation for those affected.

The result is her 200-page manual for young adults that identifies and describes typical mental health issues. The book gives an overview of a mental health diagnosis, with resources and tips for addressing issues. It is not meant to be a diagnostic tool, but rather a way to gain awareness and familiarity with mental

health challenges. The book uses a simple format, is easy to navigate, and aims to lessen the stigma felt by those struggling with many forms of mental health needs. Booth also illustrated the book.

The support group she founded continues to have an impact on students at her former school. It is self-sustaining, with the school counselor providing guidance. Booth will complete her project with the publication of her manual.

Booth said of her writing experience, “It kind of opened my eyes a bit to the experiences of other people. It has improved my empathy.”

Less than 6% of Scouts complete a Gold Award Project, which takes one to two years and requires the scout to learn project management, collaboration, time management, problem-solving, decision-making and public speaking.

“Tessa showed a lot of initiative by doing this project,” said Maureen Lull, Booth’s scout leader from the begin-

ning. “She’s one of those kids who is quiet but is smart and a hard worker. She is thoughtful of others. She tries to figure out when she can be helpful. It has been a pleasure working with her, watching her grow. Girl Scouts focuses on the whole person. Watching Tessa grow from age 6 to 17 was cool.”

Lull also said “All people see are the cookies, but it is an incredible organization. Such a cool place to watch girls become their authentic selves, building confidence.”

Booth said she enjoyed her move to Peninsula High School. “I feel that I have gotten a lot better since transferring here over the summer. It’s like exposure therapy, meeting all these different people has pushed me out of my comfort zone quite a bit. Now I feel comfortable talking to people I don’t really know well.”

“You Are Not Alone” will be finished by mid-March, and Booth will most likely pursue self-publication. ■

Alleged DUI Accident Blocks KP Highway During Commute

Fatal car crashes are on the rise across the state. So are police pursuits of impaired drivers.

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

A rollover car accident at approximately 5:15 p.m. March 5 blocked the Key Peninsula Highway in both directions just north of Key Center for 45 minutes, leading to substantial traffic at a busy hour.

The accident was significant not just because of the traffic delay but because it involved only one vehicle and its driver, according to KP Fire Department Public Information Officer Anne Nesbit.

“It was a single-car crash, but he had to be extricated and transported to the hospital,” she said. “It is safe to say that the vast majority of our accidents occur due to excessive speed, and many of those drivers are impaired,” though she did not comment on the condition of the driver.

One firefighter on the scene who spoke to KP News on condition of anonymity said, “He reeked of alcohol. He’s lucky he didn’t take somebody else out.”

A second responder said, “And then you have the other people that are (angry) at you when you’re directing traffic at the accident. It’s mind-blowing.”

In an email to KP News, Pierce County Sheriff’s spokesman Sgt. Darren Moss, Jr. said the injured driver was not cited. He did not answer questions about the driver’s alleged impairment or any pending charges. He included this narrative:



The one-car rollover accident blocked KP Highway NW in both directions for 45 minutes.

Key Peninsula Fire Department

“Vehicle No. 1 was traveling southbound on Key Peninsula Highway NW in the 9700 block. Witness was following vehicle No. 1 and reported swerving and speed fluctuation prior to vehicle No. 1 striking the embankment twice, then rolling on its side.”

KPFD has responded to 30 serious car accidents on the KP between January 1 and press time, March 15. In the last quarter of 2023, there were 42.

“I have significant concerns about the number and severity of auto crashes we

see here,” said KP Fire Chief Nick Swinhart. “Almost daily I see people passing cars in the turn lane in Key Center or passing on blind corners at a high rate of speed on the KP Highway. I’d ask that people please slow down. The few minutes you might save isn’t worth your life or the life of other drivers on the road.”

In 2021, there were 345 traffic fatalities in Washington state due to impaired drivers, according to the Washington State Patrol. In 2022, there were 389.

In 2023, there were 400.

Since the Washington State Legislature passed House Bill 1054 in 2021 restricting police pursuits, among other tactics, the number of local chases has declined significantly, according to the December 2023 Pierce County Sheriff’s audit of its performance. But at the same time, it said, “the proportion of pursuits for DUIs has increased ... More DUI offenses occurred from July 2021 to July 2022 than in the four previous years of data.”

The audit also said “Statistical models suggested that in Pierce County, HB 1054 resulted in 26 avoided accidents, eight avoided injuries, with 45 arrests not made. Law enforcement agencies have reported a dramatic increase in failures-to-yield and stolen cars, but more analysis is required to identify the direct impacts of HB 1054 on car theft.”

HB 1054 limited pursuits to when officers had probable cause to suspect someone in a vehicle had committed a violent offense, a sex offense, domestic violence-related offenses, was driving under the influence, or trying to escape arrest.

The Legislature passed initiative 2113 March 5 lowering the bar to police chase to reasonable suspicion that someone in the vehicle has broken the law, not specific crimes. The initiative will take effect 90 days after the end of the legislative session March 7. ■



From left to right, racers Hansen, Morse, Shipp and Pittman. Courtesy Adam Morse

Key Peninsula Firefighters Climb for the Cure

In his first climb for KPFD, FF/EMT Andrew Pittman, 41, finished in 18:36, coming in 198 out of 1,093 racers who finished.

STAFF REPORT

A four-person team from Key Peninsula Fire District 16 scored well at the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society’s 33rd annual firefighter Columbia Tower stair climb in Seattle March 10.

The route includes 69 flights, 1,356 steps, and a 788-foot elevation gain to reach the Sky View Observatory on the 73rd floor.

The annual event sold out with 2,000 firefighters participating to raise funds to find cures for leukemia and lymphoma, according to LLS.

All climbers race in full bunker gear in facemasks and helmets, breathing air from

tanks strapped to their backs. The Seattle climb is the world’s largest on-air contest.

“You go in your firefighting gear so everyone can see how hard that is,” said KPFD Public Information Officer Anne Nesbit. “It’s about 75 pounds all told. It’s supposed to be hard, like what cancer survivors endure. That’s what it’s all about.”

In his first climb for KPFD, Firefighter/Emergency Medical Technician Andrew Pittman, 41, finished in 18:36, coming in 198 out of 1,093 racers who finished the climb. The fastest time was 10:03.

Gig Harbor FF/EMT Daniel Hansen, 36, finished in 18:58, ranking 229. Hansen moved from KPFD to Gig Harbor Fire

& Rescue in February but was allowed to compete with his old team, which he founded in 2020.

FF/Paramedic Adam Morse, 35, finished in 25:11, ranking 657.

FF/EMT Ami Shipp, 42, finished in 27:09, ranking 751. Shipp first competed as a volunteer in 2020. This was her second climb as a professional.

Each firefighter must raise a minimum of \$300 in donations to participate. At press time, the KP team had raised \$3,819, with more to come according to Nesbit. The event raised \$1.9 million of its \$3 million goal. Firefighters have raised over \$28 million since the first LLS stair climb in 1991. ■

John Pat Kelly

HOME ON THE KEY



The Cabin at Lake of the Woods

I had almost forgotten about my first trip to the Key Peninsula until 2002 when I was driving my stepdaughter to a friend's place in Lake of the Woods. Hearing the name of the neighborhood brought back the memory of a weekend in August 1977.

I was a sophomore at Mount Rainier High School in Des Moines. I headed south with Lee, Scott and Gordon. Lee was actually named Gordon as well but had the good sense to go by his middle name, and had the spare key to his family's cabin in Lake of the Woods.

We packed a case of Rainier beer in bottles, 100 firecrackers, and two pairs of boxing gloves. We no sooner unloaded Lee's Firebird into his family's immaculate one-room cabin before realizing we were hungry and needed something in our stomachs before we started pounding beers.

Back home, it would've been no problem. Highway 99 offered a good selection of fast food. Gordon even worked at KFC. Once I traded him a fake joint (tobacco) for a bucket of chicken. Somehow, he remained my friend anyway.

Lee explained our only option was to go to the little country store and buy some sandwich fixings. It was in a place called Key Center, and I joked that must be where the locals got their keys made. The country store, Walt's, was nothing like I imagined. Instead of being Sam Drucker's general store lined with canned vegetables, Walt's was a small but bustling grocery. The aisles were crowded with vacationers buying supplies for the weekend.

After eating, we started drinking. Our rule was that nobody could open their next beer until everybody had finished their bottle, ensuring we got our six beers each. Lee asked that all bottles and caps be returned to the box, leaving no evidence for his parents.

After we opened our fourth beer, it was time to box. I knew I didn't want to fight Gordon. He was tall and thin but deceptively strong. The previous summer, at 15, he had carried his father's body for miles on a trail in the Idaho mountains after he'd suffered a fatal heart attack. Scott was stronger still, a weight lifter. However, he was nearly blind without his glasses, and I knew he'd have to take them off. I chose to box Scott. Just as I thought, I was able to dance close enough to Scott to give

him several light punches to the face, and then jump out of his reach. After swatting a lot of air, Scott gave up in frustration, unable to lay a glove on me. In some kind of all-Gordon pact, the other two friends decided not to box each other.

So, we loaded our pockets with firecrackers and headed to the lake. By this time, it was very dark, especially for suburbanites who played under the streetlight, and, of course, we had no flashlights. The night was so quiet we had to whisper for fear of being heard all the way down to Key Center. Lee quickly nixed the idea of firecrackers.

"You don't understand about these full-timers," he explained about the residents in the cabins surrounding the lake. "They're crazy, like crazy yokels. They'll come out with guns."

"Like 'Deliverance,' " Scott said.

"More like 'The Hills Have Eyes,' " said Lee. "For sure they'll tell my parents."

After finishing the beer we all found a place to sleep. Lee slept on the only small bed in the cabin, but he did not get under the covers because he didn't want to have to make the bed in the morning. The rest of us found a spot on the floor. No pillows, no sleeping bag, no problem. We woke up early with the sun blasting through the cabin's dainty floral curtains on the windows. It was then Lee informed us that he had told his parents he was staying at Scott's house, and they had no idea he'd snatched the spare key from the kitchen junk drawer to host our party. We returned the cabin to pre-party condition when Lee announced that there was one Rainier bottle cap missing and that we couldn't leave until it was found. I pretended to look for it, but all I could think about was my mom's cooking and how hungry I was. Eventually, we discovered that one beer bottle was topped with two caps stuck together.

We mostly stuck to the southeast part of King County for our outdoor recreation after that. Shortly after high school, Gordon met an older woman with kids, got married, and went to work for UPS, leaving us behind. Not long after, Scott died by suicide, leaving a note saying he felt terribly lonely.

I have no idea what became of Lee, and I would really like to know. I also don't know where that cabin once stood, or if Lee's family still owns the property.

It is a full-circle irony that I have now become one of those crazy full-timers Lee warned us about on the KP — shirtless in the yard, yelling at cars to slow down, waving my rake for attention like some yokel, at home at last.

John Pat Kelly lives in Wauna.

Meredith Browand

KEY ISSUES



Girls State

From 1995 to 2007 I was an active volunteer with the American Legion Auxiliary's Girls State program. I lived in Indiana at the time and spent a week each summer volunteering at Hoosier Girls State. The citizens in this mythical state, hundreds of girls who had just finished their junior year in high school, learned firsthand how state governments operate.

Divided into 24 cities and six counties and split between two parties, the citizens of Hoosier Girls State selected leadership, campaigned and ran for office, and worked together to form various levels of government. They learned the importance of effective government and representation. As a volunteer, I was tasked with leading citizens at the county level and helped them learn about how the political parties operate and how effective county government is established.

Although I haven't volunteered at Girls State in almost two decades, I remain a political junkie. I volunteer for political campaigns, lobby my elected officials, and appreciate effective representation at all levels of government. I've also spent the years away from Hoosier Girls State wondering how a significant portion of citizens lack a fundamental understanding of how their government works. This knowledge gap is a critical issue that undermines the very foundation of our democracy.

How did we get here? The United States' current educational system often falls short of providing comprehensive civic education. Schools tend to prioritize subjects like math and science over civics, leaving students ill-equipped to navigate political systems and processes. Many students graduate with just a basic understanding of governance if any at all.

Rapid changes in technology have reshaped information consumption and shifted how citizens interact with the news. While the internet offers plenty of verified news sources, it also cultivates misinformation and disinformation, leading to a distorted view of government functions. This misinformation fuels distrust in institutions and perpetuates misconceptions about the roles and responsibilities of elected officials.

Citizens may also feel the language of politics and governance is too compli-

cated, acting as a barrier to successfully engaging with governmental affairs. The nature of legislative processes and bureaucratic procedures can alienate constituents, creating detachment from the very systems designed to serve them.

The consequences of these knowledge gaps are far-reaching. An informed citizenry is the foundation of a healthy democracy because it empowers individuals to hold their representatives accountable and participate in important decision-making processes. Without an understanding of government structures, citizens are more likely to be manipulated by misinformation, unable to discern between fact and fiction, and vulnerable to rhetoric that thrives on exploiting a lack of knowledge.

Engaging every citizen in a government simulation like Girls State isn't feasible but there are things we can do. Hope isn't lost. Individuals can have an impact as well as education systems and the people responsible for the media that we all consume.

The top priority must be education systems that prioritize civic education. Students need to be taught not just about historical events but also about the mechanisms of government, the rule of law, and the importance of civic engagement. This education should be ongoing, extending into adulthood through accessible programs and resources.

Media literacy also plays a crucial role. Citizens must be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate information, discern credible sources, and understand the outcomes of policy decisions. Fact-checking initiatives and transparency in reporting can contribute significantly to improving public understanding.

Government at all levels and elected officials also bear a responsibility to communicate clearly and transparently with the public. Policies and procedures should be presented in easy-to-understand language, and accessible avenues for public participation should be encouraged and facilitated.

The health of our democracy is at a turning point as we approach the 2024 election. In Washington, we will elect state officials, state and Congressional representatives, and a variety of local officials who can immediately impact our daily lives. The next seven months are imperative. Are we prepared to actively engage with our elections, government, and government officials in ways that benefit each other and our democracy?

Meredith Browand is a mother and activist who lives in Purdy.

Mark Michel
RIDE ON



For What It's Worth

I sure hope every one of us has a 1972 to remember.

I was recently snapped back to that year by Pandora's random selection of Three Dog Night's song "Black and White." If you haven't listened to it for a while, or ever, I encourage you to do so. It sounds a little syrupy-sweet now, but I was absolutely taken back to the wide-eyed optimism of a suburban third-grade boy in public school.

"Black and White" was part of our annual music program in 1972. Each grade, first through sixth, would walk in single file and climb onto our assigned step of the three-level risers at Jessie Beck Elementary's cafeteria/multi-purpose room. Our music teacher would — to the best of her ability — teach us the lyrics to a few songs, have us walk in an "orderly" fashion, take our spot on the risers, sing, and exit, again in an "orderly fashion." I can't imagine the depth of patience she had to possess to manage the chaos. I sure appreciate her sacrifice now.

Another song our class sang was "Top of the World" by the Carpenters. As I remember it, our version was mostly a solo by Gina, a cute girl in pigtails and missing front teeth. It also dripped with rosy optimism. Like most of my peers, I was smitten as Gina sang.

Those were good times. At least they were good times for most of us at Jessie Beck Elementary.

Decades later I think of the big picture complexity of 1972. Richard Nixon was

president. The Watergate scandal was just breaking. The Vietnam War was getting worse. Racial tensions ran high.

The lyrics to "Black and White" were laughably and blindly optimistic for the 1970s. Lyrics to "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone" by The Temptations vividly describe a completely different culture for some Americans.

Recognizing the divide in the late 1960s, Buffalo Springfield's Stephen Stills sang a line as accurate now as it was then: "Nobody's right if everybody's wrong."

Looking back, we were definitely not on "Top of the World." Even though her voice was soothingly sweet, we would later learn Karen Carpenter was being consumed by anorexia, as a victim of the pressure of an unachievable image.

In 1970 James Taylor released "Fire and Rain." It's a poignant song of highs and lows. It's a reflection of tragedy and perseverance. "I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end." It's another great song that warms your soul while putting a tear on your cheek.

Those were volatile years. It was an inflection point in American culture. The free press was raising the curtain on systemic injustice and government corruption. Musicians were using their songs to try to pry open the eyes of anyone listening. It worked.

America backed out of the war in Vietnam, which I've heard is now an incredible place to visit (and where the conflict is called the "American War"). Instances of police abuse and excessive force were starting to be highlighted and reviewed. Legislators put the country and ethics over party allegiance, forcing Nixon to step down before being impeached.

But how do two dramatically different versions of the same time coexist? How could I have been so blind to the real world?

I was 8. Like most of my peers, I was appropriately shielded from a lot of troublesome realities. The information we were getting had been filtered. Many of us were blissfully unaware of the complex, heavy, and often dark environment around us. Others chose to either keep their eyes closed or look the other way when confronted with some bleak topics. Either way, limiting what we heard, or ignoring what seemed unpleasant, didn't mean it didn't exist. It just made us unaware.

I admit it's comforting to close my eyes and listen to the Carpenters. That feeling of blind optimism makes me happy. I smile inside when I remember Gina's warbling voice. But it's a bit like a scene from "The Matrix," where a character realizes he — along with other humans — is being fed an imaginary life while being harvested by the machines.

Do we close our eyes tight to be artificially "nourished" while being used by whoever's providing the information? Sure. Often it's enjoyable. It's easy to let others think for us. But, as part of a great community, we must open our eyes and understand "There's something happening here."

Mark Michel is a retired commercial airline pilot and a Key Pen Parks commissioner. He lives in Lakebay.

Jack Dunne
FROM THE CITIOT DESK



Signal Processing

Another catchy title from the citiot's desk, right? My last offering to this audience was "Math" in which I hoped to make some room in your heart for a topic that

often frustrates. This time I'll ask you to become an engineer since you're so good at math now.

So, what is signal processing? Broadly put, it's the act of separating the wheat from the chaff, pulling important information from all the junk that surrounds it — signal from noise.

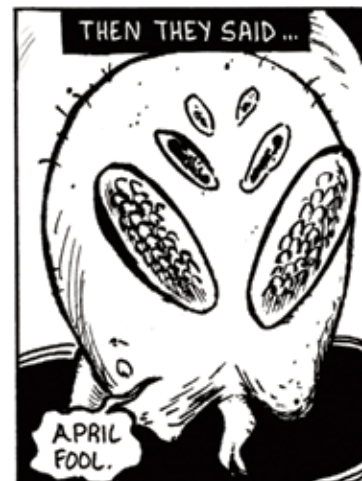
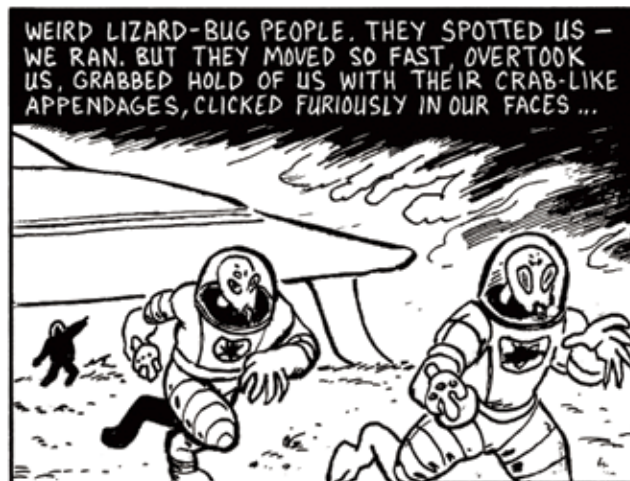
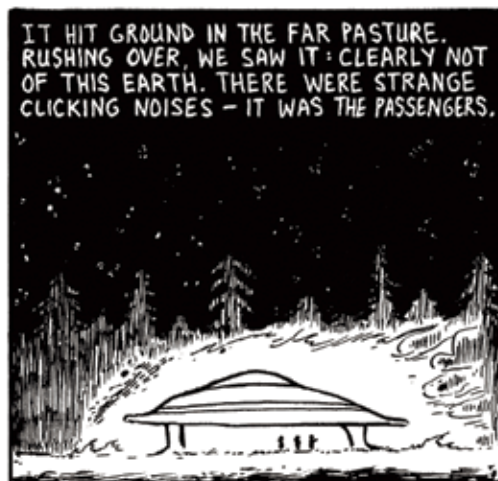
Think of your friend, the audiophile, who insists that vinyl is the only way to really hear music. Maybe there are a few pops or a hiss that distract you, but doesn't it feel warmer, more real? What he (it's probably a guy, maybe even an engineer) hears is better, more of what he wants to hear. I believe him but for me, the medium is pretty irrelevant, it just reminds me of the music that's already in my head. We're processing signals differently, no right or wrong about it.

In my career, I had the honor of working with engineers, mostly in electronics, optics and software. In making a particular kind of instrument, I was the biologist who helped them decide which signals were important for clinicians and researchers in various fields of life science. In prioritizing, of course first the signals had to be real, with no feedback from the amplifiers, no wonky connections, and no software gremlins, but beyond that the fascinating challenge was about what matters. What do we want to hear?

Early in a project, you want to hear it all. Humbly, you build a device that lets you hunt around, wander in virgin territory, and see what's what. When you decide on your signal, then it's about never missing it, no one could miss it, and it always means the same thing. Broad horizons, then robust insight, both of those designs are tricky, but we have signal processing technologies

CONTINUED PAGE 8

José Alaniz WE LIVE HERE: IT HAPPENED IN LONGBRANCH



that are powerful, not just for me or my projects, but to manage our brave new world of data.

Our phones are the most immediate demonstration. In your hand, signals from space. Come on. Video chat with your friend in Cleveland, or Buenos Aires, anytime, kind of for free. The engineering in that better shock you. And let's think about the signals going the other way, from you to the world.

Every click, every pause, every quick scroll, logged. It's identity theft, sure, but more interesting. It's a signal processor of you. There's nobody in a cube in Cupertino, Redmond, Mumbai or Guangzhou looking at your data. Signal processors filter it, amplify it, aggregate it, trend it. They know I'm an old white man, and they know what that means probably better than I do. They don't need my social security number. No coincidence that whether they're selling solar panels or reverse mortgages they include an image of an attractive woman, at least what I will think of as such. I wonder what the ads show on my wife's phone.

We're pretty good signal processors

ourselves, but a lot is coming at us these days, and the old wisdom is wearing thin. Trust is earned, and familiarity breeds contempt, but not enough to help me get through all this noise and find the truth.

We make choices all the time about our time, how we invest it, and with whom. And that means we avoid a lot. Our experience is filtered, our reactions amplified, our days aggregated. The world we know is not objective, not even fair usually. We know what we like, and we like what we know, and our lives are heavily processed, like a hot dog from a pig.

Most of what we try to teach our children are signal-processing crafts and strategies; how to read, what to read, what to believe, who to love. I hope you're good at it. Hope I'm good at it. I've been at it a long time, and I promise I'm still learning.

Maybe the most resonant teaching I can offer from my professional and personal years at the task is the importance of deciding what signal you want. Of course, it has to be real, not some yammering bot or devious marketer. But beyond that, what matters? What matters

to you and your friends, your country, our planet? How many times will I get worked up over something and only later remember that this is not important, those signals are noise and oh boy I could have handled that better.

There's a balance between signals you want and signals you need. A pleasant life is a fair goal. As I age, I am unapologetically slipping toward the beautiful signals. Honestly, I can't handle noise like I used to. My memory, my hearing, my vision, my strength, my open-mindedness, all less. I pulled my neck the other day when I changed my mind. To learn anything now is more work, so it's got to count

If I can help someone I hope I will, but I need to get some ugly signals — information about things that are not right — so I can make choices based on some kind of truth, and act on it intelligently when I choose. I hope you can find signals that matter, that your circuits are not overheating, that your software is bug-free, and that when you wake to face the bright morning you can comfortably smile and embrace all that you'll learn today.

Jack Dunne lives gratefully in Lakebay.

Letter to the Editor

ENDING RACISM, DISCRIMINATION AND HATE IN OUR SCHOOLS

It was Feb. 15 when I learned that an Asian American student had been assaulted on a Peninsula School District bus back in December. Because of my limited social media presence, not having cable, or because the story was hidden, it took nearly two months for me to find out. When I did, it was like a punch to my gut, and I was appalled, upset and disgusted.

Throughout a long run the next morning (I'm training for a race), I wrote a letter to the school district and district leadership in my head and wrote it out when I returned home. I sent it to members of Gig Harbor for Racial Justice, Moms for Peace, Pride Gig Harbor, and the Peninsula School District Parent/Guardian Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging groups for edits and comments. Eleven drafts later, and after much discussion, we now have a much better version.

Acts and words of racism, discrimination, and anti-queer hate against BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ /Disabled/ Neurodivergent students have been going on for too many years in our school district. There are individuals, groups, and organizations that have been working to help improve this reality, but each year there are more stories of these incidents. We hope that by working together, we can help the Peninsula School District see the urgency of the problem and find a solution.

We have four requests for the district in the letter: acknowledge the problem, adopt a restorative justice model, expand districtwide training, and hire diverse staff.

In response, we will: organize and act, collaborate with the district, and continue to spread awareness of the problem. We are also asking for the district to meet with us so we can work on solving this problem together.

Together we can make our school district a safe space for all our students.

Peter Fraser, Gig Harbor

Editor's note: To read the full letter presented to the PSD Board of Directors go to keypennews.org

Longest-Serving KPFD Commissioner Frank Grubaugh Resigns

EDDIE MACSALKA, KP NEWS

Key Peninsula Fire Board Commissioner Frank Grubaugh, 78, announced his resignation effective immediately at the end of the commissioners meeting March 12.

Chairman Randy Takehara read a prepared statement on Grubaugh's behalf. Grubaugh cited declining health as his reason for leaving.

"It is with regret that I submit and ask you to accept this letter of my formal resignation as a commissioner for Key Peninsula Fire Department. It's been a privilege and an honor to serve on this board for the last 12-plus years. While things have not always been clear sailing, I am comfortable with the board's choices in trying to do what was best for the community. I wish you all clear sailing into the future," he wrote.

Grubaugh was the longest-serving of the five commissioners after his election to the post in 2011. He was last reelected in 2020 and his term ends in 2025.

"I'd just like to thank you for your constant and unwavering support of the volunteer group," said Volunteer Battalion Chief and Public Information Officer Anne Nesbit. "You have always been there, and you've been part of the family."

Former commissioner and 23-year volunteer veteran Claudia Jones said, "Very good



Frank Grubaugh was a commissioner for 12 years. *Lisa Bryan, KP News*

job Frank. I enjoyed serving with you."

Grubaugh has also served the community as a member of the Veterans Association, KP Business Association, Toastmasters, the Key Peninsula Historical Society, and Friends of KP Library, among other things. After retiring from more than 30 years in business, he became a Peninsula School District bus driver.

He thanked the assembled company and moved to adjourn the meeting.

The board must wait at least 15 days to consider applicants to fill the vacant position through direct appointment to serve the remainder of Grubaugh's term. Anyone interested can apply on the district's website at www.keypeninsulafire.org.

Ted Olinger contributed to this report. ■

Nettles and Their Butterflies in a Frenetic Spring

CHRIS RURIK, KP NEWS

Watch a nettle emerge from the spring soil and tell me it doesn't remind you of a butterfly crawling from its chrysalis. The plant appears as a bulbous bundle of leaves, pointed at the tip, purple-green, and soon peels back to spread its first leaves like wings.

As the weeks pass it will repeat the trick again and again, extending its stalk, each pair of leaves coming out perpendicular to the pair below, like mint leaves.

Visions of soup, pesto and tea dance in my head as I await the nettle flush. At last, fresh-picked greens return to our diet.



So it threw me this spring when the flush froze. For weeks the chrysalises waited, refusing to open. It made me wonder: how do plants deal with

spring's frenetic weather?

After the long deep freeze in mid-January, temperatures zoomed up and twice tickled 60 degrees. On many plants, buds began to swell. A fat overwintering bumblebee stumbled around our porch. I found a few red-flowering currant buds that had split and showed the tiny, shriveled leaves within.

Then February brought a return of typical winter weather: mid-40s and rain. The swollen buds ceased to swell. Arrested development. Days slowly lengthened. Nettles appeared on schedule in mid-February. Then we had the coldest start to a March since the 1980s. Titanic snowflakes mixed with rain and several nights froze hard. The nettles ceased to grow. Would they die back? All around, plants had been putting forth their most tender and water-filled parts. How do they survive when spring weather plays hot and cold?

March finally warmed, and the nettles went right back to growing. Insects emerged. By April Fools' Day, we'll be seeing showy wildflowers on osoberry, red-flowering currant, salmonberry and evergreen violet. And still, it might freeze. For such understory plants, spring offers reward and risk. If a plant can leaf out earlier than the alders and maples above, it wins several weeks of unblocked sunlight to kickstart its growth. Its flowers, in the fleeting hours when clouds scatter, are warmed and made fragrant by sunlight that will be dappled at best when the big trees get going.

The stakes are high. In many species, the leaves will die back during a late-spring cold



Early spring nettles spotted along the trail. *Tina McKail, KP News*

snap. The plant must marshal its reserves to try again. Some cannot and die. There is a whole field of research, fascinating to me, that studies spring growth, its timing, what triggers it.

On woody plants, buds form in fall. Buds are packages of growth cells tightly protected against winter weather. The single prompt telling a woody plant to drop its leaves, form buds, and generally harden off for winter is photoperiod, the length of day, which makes sense because these things take time and must happen in advance of freezing temperatures.

In spring, however, the trigger for renewed growth is more complicated. It depends on the species and remains only partially understood, but it seems to be a complex blend of photoperiod, temperature and the number of chill hours accumulated over the winter. Even one species can show a variety of timings. Think of big-leaf maple. Come Earth Day, when the woods are flowering with dogwood, Oregon grape and bitter cherry and insects are abuzz, half the maples are draped with a million flower clusters and no leaves, a quarter are all leaves and no flowers, and a quarter have both. It's all about hedging bets.

The timing of these things matters. Hatches of caterpillars are timed to give them maximal

time on young leaves, which are more nutritious and less chemically defended than older leaves. Spring migration of insect-eating birds is timed to coincide with insect hatches.

In Concord, Massachusetts, the detailed nature journals of Henry David Thoreau have given naturalists the ability to compare spring's timings in the 1850s with those observed today. The 43 species tracked by Thoreau are leafing out 18 days earlier, on average. Insects have shifted their timings but not fully, and birds are lagging more. Naturalists worry that some migratory birds are now missing the peaks of their insect food sources.

The study of timings is called phenology. To me, it is terribly exciting. For anyone with the patience to take notes, a whole symphony of reverberating blossoms is waiting to be heard.

Back to nettles. Are they appearing earlier in spring? It remains to be studied.

Nettles grow in damp shady places, often seeming to prefer churned soil. To me, the classic image of Key Peninsula nettles is a dense stand of them on an abandoned logging road, alders overhead. Their buds form underground, part of the unseen "bud bank" that gives a landscape much of its power to regrow after disturbance.

Nettles, believe it or not, are one of our most important host plants for moths and butterflies. Pollinator-friendly flowers may get all the press, but butterflies are just as dependent on the plants their caterpillars eat, and many species are quite specialized—you won't find them away from their caterpillar host plants. In his excellent field guide to the butterflies of Cascadia, Robert Michael Pyle writes, "People denigrate native nettles as noxious weeds due to their sharp sting. By eliminating them, they exclude three of our most attractive butterflies that might otherwise be common even in town."

The first of the three is the red admirable, a big showy butterfly with red bands and white speckles on its brown wings. Winston Churchill is said to have prevailed upon his gardeners to let nettles be for this butterfly, which has a habit of landing on gardeners while they work. Vladimir Nabokov called it "a most frolicsome fly ... with an almost frightening imitation of conscious play."

Nettles also support Milbert's tortoiseshell, a mottled brown thing that flashes orange when it flies, and the satyr anglewing, which looks like a broken leaf at rest. Look for them. Look for their caterpillars on nettles and let me know what you find—I'd love a better sense of the nettle-dependent lives here. ■

KP Citizens Against Crime Transitions to Public Safety

Now a part of the Key Peninsula Community Council, the group has big plans for the community.

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

The Key Peninsula Citizens Against Crime has transformed from a standalone group to a committee of the Key Peninsula Community Council, and it has a new name — the Public Safety Committee.

“The focus will be less on crime and more on building community,” said Chair Melody Williams, who moved with her husband to a 40-acre property near Lake of the Woods a few years ago. Their first goal is to organize the KP’s first National Night Out.

Because of her interest in crime prevention, one of the first things Williams did when she moved was to call the Gig Harbor Police Department. When she learned it did not cover her property — her address is listed as Gig Harbor — she searched local social media, found Citizens Against Crime, and joined.

Founded in 1988, CAC had lost membership in recent years and members began to talk about rebranding and shifting their emphasis. (See, “Citizens Against Crime: Eyes and Ears for the Pierce County Sheriff Since 1988,” October 2015).

“‘Public Safety Committee’ is a terminology that people are used to seeing no matter what city or county you are in,” Williams said. “The group immediately let me come in and embraced what I was passionate about. Those members are still involved and excited.”

As CAC discussed its plans, the community council was considering adding public safety as a focus in part because Safe Streets closed its office on the Key Peninsula. Williams met with council president Kathy Lyons and agreed to join the council and chair the new committee.

Williams has a long history of working in community crime prevention. During the first six months of her first job in the banking industry, the bank was robbed six times and off-duty officers were hired for security. “I hung out with cops and was introduced to that world. Both of my parents volunteered for the Lakewood Police Department when they retired. They brought National Night Out to Lakewood.”

Williams joined the University Place Public Safety Committee about 20 years ago and served as chair for much of that time. The group worked closely with the police, fire department, schools, and seniors.

The Public Safety Committee is working closely with Pierce County Sheriff’s



Pierce County Sheriff’s Dept. Deputy Nathan Betts and KP Citizens Against Crime Chair Melody Williams are working to connect neighborhood watch groups to strengthen overall community safety. *Tina McKail, KP News*

Department Deputy Nathan Betts, who has been with the Peninsula Detachment for six years and served as an investigator for the last three.

Williams has a big vision. She hopes to connect and coordinate with all the neighborhood watch groups and to think about safety in a broader context than just crime. For example, she said, communities can identify who has a chainsaw if a tree blocks a driveway or who has a generator and can refrigerate medications if there is a long power outage.

“Our flagship activity will be National Night Out,” Williams said. The program was established in 1984 as “an annual community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make our neighborhoods safer, more caring places to live.”

National Night Out is held on the first Tuesday of August each year. Gatherings can range from getting together to

joining in a potluck with games. “It can be anything,” Williams said. She hopes that service providers such as law enforcement and fire department personnel will participate.

Williams also hopes to add members to the new committee, which meets monthly. She follows several Facebook pages to stay in touch with community input about crime and welcomes feedback.

“My biggest shout from the rooftop is report, report, report,” she said when asked about responding to crime on the Key Peninsula. “I am still a homeowner and taxpayer first. People know that the cops can’t quickly respond to most calls. As great as Deputy Betts is, and the team, we are on the outskirts. And until we bring attention to the problem, they can’t bring out the resources.”

“There are a lot fewer notes about incidents on social media recently,” Betts said when he spoke with the KP News in October. “And many of those posts

are about incidents that are not reported, about people wanting to increase awareness or vent.”

Peninsula Detachment Sgt. Brian Ward said that at least two deputies are working each of four shifts each day, one covering Gig Harbor and one covering the Key Peninsula. “Deputies get to know each other and the community,” Ward said. “They can take a little more time digging into what is going on in the neighborhood with the family and that kind of thing because the calls aren’t coming in immediately, all stacked up. There is more personal law enforcement.”

“Here you get more community-based experience,” Betts said. “You can figure out how to help families, bring in more services. In other detachments, you may not have the time to do that work.”

The Public Safety Committee meets on the third Thursday of each month at 6:30 in the Key Center fire station. The email is kp_psc@yahoo.com ■

PRESERVE FROM PAGE 1

with a donation of 38 acres. In five phases of land acquisition since, it has grown through deals with willing sellers and donors. The preserve is known for its pristine shoreline along Filucy Bay, the diversity of its native forest plant community and the quality of its salmon habitat.

“We are always grateful and happy to work with conservation-minded landowners willing to donate their ecologically valuable land to protect wildlife habitat forever,” said Nathan Daniel, executive director of GPC.

“This expansion of Filucy Bay Preserve will have a profound impact on the local ecosystem and allow GPC to make management choices that promote climate resiliency and help retain the rural character of the Key Peninsula.”

For neighbor Martha Konicek, the expansion represents a meaningful passageway between Filucy Bay and Pitt Passage for wildlife that is increasingly hemmed in by development.

The donated parcels vary in habitat quality. Roughly half the acreage is forested. Neighbor Maire Thornton has visited the woods since she was a girl growing up near Seattle. Her father George Thornton first bought property

here in the 1960s and added to it several times, including several of the parcels that are now part of the preserve. He worked hard to manage it.

“He was adamant that he wanted it to remain forest,” she said.

Thornton remembered being pressed into service with her siblings by their father, who always had Scotch broom that needed to be pulled, alders to be cut and trails maintained, while their mother schemed excuses to return home early. He had a particular affinity for planting redwoods.

Of the remainder of the preserve’s new acreage, one 10-acre parcel was clearcut in 2021 by the donor to remove dying cedars and replace them with drought-tolerant firs and pines. Another 15-plus acres were clearcut around 2016 by previous owners and subsequently left untended, resulting in a dense thicket of Scotch broom and blackberry. Konicek called it the Scotch Broom Farm.

The clearcut areas underscore the challenge facing GPC, and any local conservationist, when presented with degraded land. As a land trust, GPC exists to hold land in perpetuity as a steward for the health of its ecosystems. The older clearcut was replanted with Douglas fir, but the baby trees lost out to the inva-

sive species and the labor now required to restore it is daunting.

The more recent 10-acre clearcut was sprayed with an herbicide before it was replanted. Three years later it remains largely free of invasive species, though drought is a concern. Thornton said the soil in the area is outwash sand on top of glacial till. It does not hold water, and seedlings often struggle.

GPC’s three pillars are conservation, stewardship and community engagement, according to Daniel. While he acknowledged that today’s development pressure keeps the lion’s share of GPC’s focus on conservation, acquiring land while it can still be had, he said, “We’re putting a lot more energy into the property restoration and management than we used to be able to do.”

GPC stewardship manager Adrian Wolfe offered a recent example from the core of Filucy Bay Preserve. Last year GPC won a grant from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office for forest restoration. The organization used the funding to remove two giant patches of blackberry that had been the only blot in an otherwise intact forest of native species.

One patch was 5 acres; the other 1. “The blackberry was over your head,” Wolfe said.

“It had ten quadrillion berries,” Daniel added. “We don’t want it to be a seed bank. It spreads.”

GPC hired a local contractor to mow down the blackberries followed by a suppression spray. Last January the Washington Conservation Corps planted over 3,000 plants of 18 native species, including red cedar, hemlock, maple, alder, serviceberry, osoberry, Oregon grape, bald-hip rose and red-flowering currant. Wolfe said they’ll track which of them thrive.

Daniel said he knows that follow-up work will be required — the blackberries will come back — but he hopes that local volunteers can be involved who will find the work a way to connect with the preserve. “Cutting back 8-foot-tall blackberry is not a great volunteer opportunity,” he said. “It’s brutal. But pulling out little resprouts is more manageable.”

Over time, GPC plans to engage with local individuals and organizations who can become volunteer stewards for this preserve and others on the Key Peninsula. It hopes the work done this winter is a pilot for the restoration work that may happen on the new parcels, though any stewardship is dependent on the availability of funding and staff time. ■

RACISM FROM PAGE 1

“There was this kid that came up to me and I had no idea who he was, never met him, didn’t know who he was, and he was like ‘I have a riddle for you,’ and he lists every Black stereotype, you know, who loves fried chicken, who smokes weed, who goes to jail.”

McCourt said he has learned to put up with it, but those kinds of statements still sting.

“People should understand that it’s hurtful and it eventually makes a hostile environment at school,” he said. “Then you don’t want to go to school, or you don’t want to go to a specific class because you’re afraid something might happen.”

The issue appears to be compounded by students who are hesitant to speak to administrators to report a racist incident. McCourt said this is largely because kids know it’s unlikely that anything will be done.

At a recent Black Student Union meeting, the group discussed an episode involving a member’s sibling. “They were called a bunch of names and slurs, and

the teacher knew, the teacher heard, but then the teacher didn’t do anything about it,” said one participant.

This comes after a Dec. 7 incident on a Kopachuck Middle School bus when a 12-year-old Asian American student was beaten by others, one of whom said, “Must suck to be Asian.” It was recorded on video and reported by other students. According to the victim’s mother, PSD did not consider it bullying since the victim fought back. It assigned a new bus seat to the main assailant and told her to contact the police if she wanted more done.

PHS Principal Mike Benoit said he wants students to speak to adults, ideally in person, but that the administration also provides online tools.

“There’s a link to our harassment, intimidation and bullying form on our web page,” Benoit said. “There’s also some QR codes around the building (that link to that). But also I would always just encourage kids just to talk to adults. Just talk to us.”

Benoit said that while he doesn’t hear racist language around school, all reports

are handled appropriately, even when it may not seem like it to students.

“I don’t hear it, but I will tell you that if we know about it, we deal with it, and we do hear that it happens at times,” he said. “We don’t always tell students what the consequences are for somebody because everybody has a right to privacy.”

The Black Student Union at GHHS began meeting in 2023 to work on projects and organize events to promote inclusion and diversity on campus. Last January, the group worked with their Associated Student Body organization to run an assembly for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The group promotes education as a step toward eliminating racism and discrimination in PSD.

“We’re thinking we as the Black Student Union (could) create a PowerPoint and present it to homeroom classes,” McCourt said. “But make it like a semester-long class of Black history and preferably have it taught by a person of color.”

McCourt said this could help because most people in high school fall into complacency. They don’t participate in malicious racism, but they also don’t do

anything about it. This group could be swayed by education.

“There’s like three groups of students when it comes to this,” he said. “There’s the group that wants to make change and hates what’s going on and will continue to fight and fight until it’s done. And then you’ve got the opposite end where they believe in it. They believe, you know? When they say the N-word, they believe. And then you have this group in the middle that is just kind of neutral. And I feel like the majority of students are neutral. So they’re not willing to say something about it.”

PHS is also making progress toward a Black student group. A new People of Color club is putting up posters around campus. They also have an upcoming meeting with Principal Benoit to discuss their club.

“I want to hear from them,” Benoit said. “I can make assumptions about how they’re feeling but I want to hear from them about what their experiences are, so I make sure that I understand them.”

Jonas Koller is a sophomore at Peninsula High School. ■

Ex-Prep Stars React to Conference Realignment

The new Puget Sound League will not freeze the Peninsula-Gig Harbor rivalry, but it could cool it down.

EDDIE MACSALKA, KP NEWS

Key Peninsula News spoke with former Peninsula and Gig Harbor High School student athletes who contributed to this story: Cory Procter (Gig Harbor, '01; All-state offensive lineman who went to win a Division I-AA national championship at the University of Montana and earned All-American honors before spending five years in the NFL); Belle Frazier (Peninsula '19; All-state girls basketball player and conference MVP her senior year; went on to play at Portland State, California Baptist and Southern Nazarene); Peter King (PHS '20; All-conference baseball player who currently plays for Pacific Lutheran); Riley Peschek (GHHS '23; League MVP in softball and all-conference in basketball; currently plays softball at University of Montana and recently named the Big Sky Player of the Week, only the second freshman softball player in school history to earn the honor so early); Hall Schmidt (PHS '22; 2021 conference lineman of the year and currently a redshirt sophomore on Boise State's football team); Payton Knowles (PHS '23; played football and baseball at GHHS his first two years before moving to Peninsula where he was league MVP in baseball and captain of the football team; currently a freshman on Gonzaga's baseball team).

Peninsula and Gig Harbor High Schools are on the move.

They're not going all that far and it won't look all that different. But it's definitely a change of scenery.

The biggest move is the merger between the South Sound Conference and the Pierce County League to create the 3A Puget Sound League. The new league includes current SSC foes Peninsula, Gig Harbor, Central Kitsap, Timberline, Capital, North Thurston and River Ridge joining up with Silas, Mount Tahoma, Lincoln, Bellarmine Prep and Lakes.

With this many teams, the league will be split into two divisions: Peninsula will play in the Nisqually Division and Gig Harbor in the Narrows Division.

Another move takes the two schools south of the Narrows Bridge. Peninsula School District recently announced that the annual Fish Bowl football game between Peninsula and Gig Harbor is moving from the traditional Friday night game at Roy Anderson Field to a 2 p.m. game on Sat., Sept. 7 at Mount Tahoma Stadium in Tacoma. The official reason, according to PSD, is "the popularity of the Fish Bowl has outgrown Roy

Anderson Field."

Former student-athletes from both schools hope these moves won't spoil the cross-town rivalry for current and future students.

Life's Teachable Moments

There is no evidence suggesting PSD planned to split up the two schools to prevent future incidents like those in 2023. In January of that year, there were allegations of a racist remark made during the handshake line after a girls basketball game between the two schools. Then during last September's Fish Bowl, a first-half skirmish led to a Gig Harbor player getting seriously injured. In both instances, no students were formally punished. Instead, fans were banned from the next girls basketball game between the two teams, and the Fish Bowl was moved out of town.

"It was a rash decision and moving the



Belle Frazier

Fish Bowl to Tacoma isn't the answer," Peter King said. "Kids are going to make stupid decisions so it's up to the adults to educate these athletes."

"(The district) is just putting in an obstacle to cool down the rivalry," said Cory Procter. "It's like a parent saying, 'My kids are always fighting, so I'll just buy a bigger house to keep them separated.'"

He added, "(School district leaders) need to address these types of issues with the students, not hide it from them. They need to be better leaders, have consequences, and follow through with them."

Belle Frazier remembered her final game against Gig Harbor in 2019 at the Peninsula gym. One of her teammates took a swing at an opposing player. As punishment that player was forced to sit out a few games. "Rightfully so," said Frazier, who added her teammate didn't actually hit anyone. "But recently (the administration) doesn't seem to crack



Peter King



Hall Schmidt

TOP: Belle Frazier, Scott Larson Courtesy Portland State
LEFT: Peter King, Courtesy PLU
RIGHT: Hall Schmidt #14 congratulates Joshua Hinkel on his TD in Fish Bowl 43.
Tina McKail, KP News

down on things like that.”

Frazier also said that keeping the fans away from the game after the January 2023 incident likely didn't serve as an effective lesson for the players involved. “Nobody is going to learn if there is no penalty for their actions.”

“The issue is the people making the decisions haven't been in a competitive atmosphere like that,” said Payton Knowles. “Nothing between these teams is happening now that didn't happen 10, 20 or 30 years ago. The adults are making this rivalry about themselves.”

Roy Anderson Field is the Rightful Place

“The administration made a unilateral decision (to move the Fish Bowl) that affects the community but didn't get feedback from the community,” Procter said. “When you don't engage with the community, (the community) won't have your back.”

The pros of moving the Fish Bowl to Mount Tahoma Stadium: Additional parking with covered seating on both sides with more than double the capacity of Roy Anderson Field. Plus the two sets of bleachers are far enough apart to reduce the likelihood of off-the-field incidents. The cons: It's a day game 30 minutes away in Tacoma.

“Friday Night Lights is something you can't replicate,” Knowles said. “On your shared home field with a stadium packed

shoulder-to-shoulder is a memory a player and fan will never forget. Playing under the lights at Roy Anderson Field against Gig Harbor is a night I will never trade for anything.”

Frazier said she never felt unsafe at a Fish Bowl game in the past. “Granted, it's a ton of people packed into a small stadium. But that's what makes it such a fun atmosphere.” She said if fewer people choose to make the drive to Mount Tahoma and it's in a bigger stadium, it will feel like a smaller crowd.

Riley Peschek loved it when the Fish Bowl was “their stadium,” meaning when Gig Harbor was the designated home team and got the covered side of the field. “It made the game even more special.”

Though Hall Schmidt said playing the Fish Bowl at his home field will always have a special place in his heart, “Like (PHS football coach Ross) Filkins used to say, ‘Put the ball down and we'll play anywhere.’ If they need to play the game at a different site, the teams will happily play at a different site.”

Should all PHS-GHHS match-ups go neutral?

Schmidt suggested if the Fish Bowl

game is moved, then all Peninsula-Gig Harbor competitions should be played at neutral sites. Frazier and Peschek didn't go that far.

If the district decides to limit basketball games between the two schools to only once during the regular season, they would urge the district to go back to what Peschek called a “quad game” format where the boys and girls junior varsity and varsity teams all play at the same gym, the same day, rather than having the girls play at one gym and the boys play at the other.

“Half the fun of that game is having the town there to support you, but I worry if there is only one game they will go support the boys,” Frazier said.

King still wants the baseball teams to face each other at Sehmel Park every time. “It's a Rivalry Game, What Do You Expect?”

The former high school athletes feel said players understand this rivalry better than the adults making decisions about it. Players from both schools remember growing up with their cross-town rivals. Some of them have brothers, sisters and

parents who went to the opposing school.

“When you're on the field, it's intense, you want to win. That's just how competitors are,” Schmidt said. But off the field (Peninsula and Gig Harbor athletes) eat together, hang out together, train together, do everything together.”

Procter thinks the same way. “(On the field) you hate anyone who is your rival. Off the field, it's all good-natured. I love that about rivalries.”

“We always brought our best that game and expect (Peninsula) would, too,” Peschek said.

King said the rivalry game is the biggest game of the year because “you're playing against your buddies you grew up playing with or against.”

The athletes all seemed to agree that less is more: the less the two teams play, the more aggressive it may become.

“The possibility of the two teams playing less may be counterproductive. If you only get to hype one game a year (per sport), it will carry a lot more significance,” Frazier said.

“It's a high-intensity situation, and when you're competing in a rivalry game people show sides of themselves they don't normally show,” King said.

“It's a rivalry game; things get heated, what do you expect?” Knowles asked. “These games aren't supposed to be nice.” ■



Cory Procter



Payton Knowles



Fish Bowl fans

LEFT: Cory Procter in 2007. Courtesy University of Montana Athletics
 MID: Payton Knowles at Fishbowl 43 in 2021. Tina McKail, KP News
 Right: Fish Bowl 43 fan fever. Tina McKail, KP News

'The Lost Upland: Stories of Southwest France' by W.S. Merwin

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

I no longer remember when I first encountered the poems of W.S. Merwin, but it was likely in some snooty magazine back in the 1980s I had no business reading. Once discovered, I sought out his poetry but was still suitably stunned to find this work of prose on a bookstore shelf in 1992. It was just one of 50 titles he published before his death in 2019, nine years after becoming Poet Laureate of the United States.

I've bought "The Lost Upland" at least four times in the decades since discovering it because I kept giving it away to other writers. I reread it each time and each time I learned something new.

The book is a collection of three novellas set in the Dordogne region of Southwest France. It is a countryside of farms, pastures and middling vineyards among stone villages first built by the Gauls on a limestone plateau pierced with caverns painted by prehistoric hunters. It's a sleepy place where locals try to resist the creeping foreigners — meaning people from other parts of France — with their urban values, so busy driving up prices, tearing down ancient monuments to expand roads, and building fake chateaux among the sheep runs.

Remind you of any place?

Merwin begins with "Foie Gras," told in a close third person where the omniscient narrator is not part of the action but always nearby, commenting on the personality of the main character while telling his story.

We follow the final days of Pierre le Comte, a local man clinging to minor nobility status long after that was fashionable, trading antiquities of unknown provenance while trying to maintain a crumbling mansion and an elderly mother who traveled only by horse and carriage until the war, when she ceased to travel at all.

"But before any of those obvious and more or less explicable misfortunes within living memory, Pierre mourned remoter cataclysms, vaster and more vague, that had swept away whole eras and domains, and in his daily assumptions he relinquished none of his titles to those lost expanses."

It is with such skill Merwin not only tells the story of the man but invites a reader to inhabit his skin.

The second story, "Shepherds," begins with the only direct information Merwin

reveals about his own presence on the upland:

"For a few years I had a garden in a ruined village."

He befriends an unpopular neighbor who favors wearing a snug red satin tracksuit over his stout frame while driving sheep through town. Merwin writes that M. Vert, a respected landlord on the lane, "regarded the entire costume, which obviously had been imitated from pictures in the sports sections of the papers, as evidence of insanity and a deliberate affront to the world as it should be. That he wore no hat was the ultimate mark of depravity. 'He'll kill himself.' M. Vert washed his hands of the whole bad business."

But such aesthetic distance cannot shield Merwin from his neighbors' tragedies. If anything, it binds them together.

"Blackbird's Summer" is the final novella, on the surface the daily routine of an aging wine merchant making his rounds "from farm cellar to farm kitchen to farm cellar to farm kitchen," rolling out barrels of wine of various sizes and quality to a diminishing list of clients. Merwin returns to third person here, but it is less intimate and more solemn than the preceding stories, without the familiar arch intonations winking to the reader. Here we see only what Blackbird sees, and seem to hear what he hears, but knowing his feelings is a privilege earned.

M. Blackbird slumps through the world around him knowing it must change even if he will not. ("How could there be so many strangers in a place he'd known all his life?") He commiserates with clients at one languid meal after another as he attempts to settle his own final arrangements. ("Try the lamb, a little salad, a little glass for the health. Well then, for the health.") And he is constantly called upon to deliver wine, to deliver advice, and to deliver embarrassed but suffering personages to the healing waters of a secret spring that seems to offer more than he will reveal.

But it is through the mundane that much is revealed. Over a minor

disagreement about redecorating her dining room, Blackbird understands his daughter is dying, like his wife just a year before, and doing nothing to stop it — or is that fear clouding his judgment?

Later Merwin has Blackbird sitting in the village square over a small glass, "for the health." In a rare moment alone, he realizes he has already come to a decision he'd been dreading about finalizing his affairs. "He felt as he did when he was playing cards, sometimes, and everything depended on something out of sight, though he seemed to hold it in his hand."

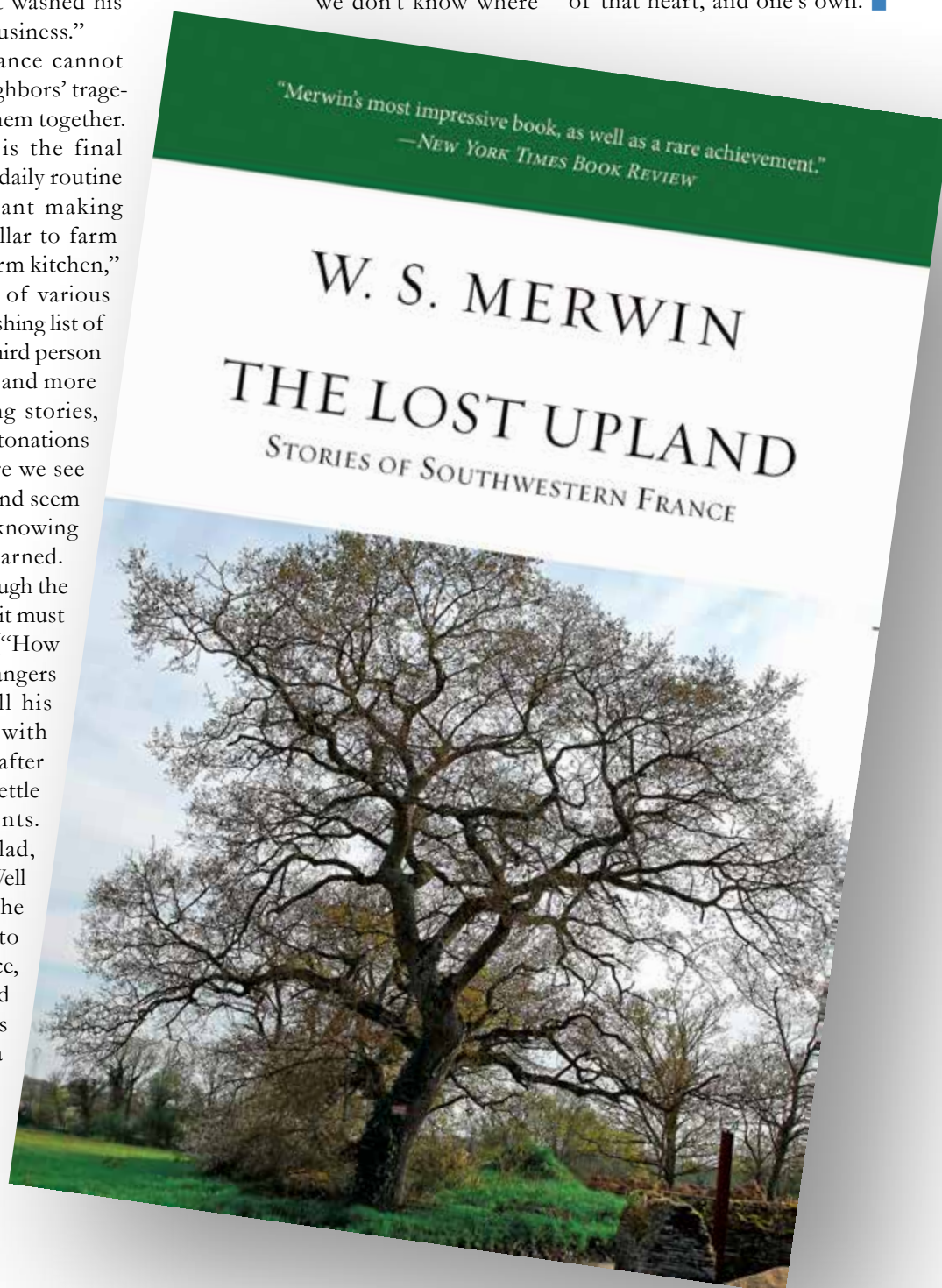
Despite our closeness to him, Blackbird knows things he's not telling us, treating us just like family. While he may let us keep him company on his rounds, we don't know where

they will end, or their real purpose.

Much like the secret trips to the healing spring, redolent of sulfur, where water is consumed "for the health" — really.

He reassures one reluctant pilgrim, "As for the taste, that's not what you'd drink it for. In any case I'm not a great appreciator of water, you know. In my calling."

Some readers return to their favorite books many times always to find different stories waiting for them. The names are the same, the places, the action perhaps — what they remember of it. But the story is different because the reader is different. The longevity of this one, so far as I can tell, is that it is a look into the heart of a gifted writer. The story evolves as one learns to recognize more of that heart, and one's own. ■



The Key Peninsula Has Become a Community of Focus

Health disparities combined with willing community partners have brought resources from the health department to the KP.

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

In 2017 the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department designated the Key Peninsula as a community of focus.

In 2015 the department conducted a health equity assessment of nine data points in each zip code in Pierce County. The data points were life expectancy, poverty, unemployment, high school graduation, frequency of mental distress, smoking, obesity, diabetes and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). They also identified those areas with the fewest opportunities to address poor outcomes.

Fourteen zip codes stood out.

“Vaughn, zip code 98394, was one of those zip codes,” Communities of Focus Coordinator Marcy Boulet said. “We recognized that the community suffered from health disparities compared to other parts of the county and that access to resources was limited.”

With a vision of equitable neighborhoods where all people who live, learn, work and play can thrive, the department created a team to support improvement in what they identified as communities of focus. In 2017 the Key Peninsula, East Tacoma and Springbrook became the first to join the effort. White River, South Tacoma and Parkland were added in 2018.

Boulet said that having community partners to work with was critical. The Key Peninsula Community Council and the Key Peninsula Partnership for a Health Community had recently completed a survey identifying local needs. “The community said that it was hard to access resources, that people had to go all the way to Tacoma for consultation and support,” Boulet said. “We focused on what folks wanted to work on. It’s part of building trust.”

The community council opened its office in the Key Center Corral in 2017 and the health department rented space, offering regular office hours for residents to talk directly to staff about permitting and other issues.

The pandemic put an end to office hours but having strong relationships in place simplified planning to bring resources to the area. “We could build on them in a time of need,” Boulet said. “The KP was the first location of a vaccine clinic. We worked with Dr. (William) Roes and the (Key Medical



TPCHD Communities of Focus Liaison Daniel Burdsall at the Key Peninsula Community Council Office calendar of events.

Lisa Bryan, KP News

Clinic), the fire department. We found out from trusted messengers where people would be comfortable.”

“We were able to go to The Mustard Seed Project to just talk to the people who went by,” said Daniel Burdsall, Communities of Focus liaison. “And I want to give a shout-out to the Long-branch Improvement Club. They were a proactive partner in reaching the south end of the KP. We offered healthy treats and Covid tests at Trunk or Treat.”

They also partnered with Virginia Mason/Franciscan to build raised beds at Key Peninsula Community Services to supplement the food bank there with fresh produce.

“The introduction of Communities of Focus has been a transformative force for Key Peninsula,” said Willow Eaton, executive director of KP Community Services. “It has fostered an increased awareness of our community’s unique needs and inspired a stronger sense of

unity and collaboration among local service organizations. We’ve witnessed a significant surge in attention and support from Pierce County, which has greatly uplifted our collective efforts and reduced feelings of isolation.”

With the end of the pandemic, the department shifted its focus back to how to best provide support.

Office hours resumed at the council office in Key Center, with county staff scheduled most Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to noon. They cover issues related to septic systems, drinking water, air quality, healthy housing, resources for Spanish speakers, and parenting.

Boulet said her team measures its impact based on qualitative information. “We know if communities are more engaged and have autonomy they report better wellbeing. We know there are kinds of services and programs that lead to conditions that will improve health outcomes. So we will encourage

policies that improve things like parks, walking paths and clean water.”

“The Key Peninsula is a ‘both-and’ story,” Boulet said. “Historically there are inequities, but there is a lot of strength and resilience. There is such a willingness to partner.”

“The community is what makes the Key Peninsula such a beautiful place,” Burdsall said. “People are passionate. People will share all their great ideas about how they want to improve the area and they will also tell you how you can do it better.”

The health department recently hired a new director and is in the process of hiring a new health officer. The current strategic plan, including Communities in Focus, has been extended for another 12 to 18 months and will be updated under the new leadership.

The schedule for the KP Community Council office is available at kpconnects.org. ■

‘Love for the Game’ Fuels 20 Years of Little League

Lee Miller steps up to the plate to make the Key Peninsula Little League possible for kids every year. He has no plans to stop.

EDDIE MACSALKA, KP NEWS

For nearly a quarter of a century, Lee Miller has been roaming the baselines and dugouts of the baseball fields at Volunteer Park, just south of Key Center.

The Key Peninsula Little League needed volunteer t-ball coaches. Miller’s 5-year-old nephew, Ian, did too. So Miller stepped up to the plate.

What began as helping his family for a season turned into helping hundreds of families over two decades.

Miller ended up coaching Ian’s KPLL teams through high school; players can play until they’re 16. When his own son Sam was old enough to play, Miller coached his teams, too. Later on, Miller signed up to be the league’s chief umpire, a thankless job of recruiting others to volunteer for a similar thankless position. Then, a few years before COVID-19 put a damper on things, he opted to run for league president, a position he holds today.

“This is just the best time of year,” Miller said before the KPLL kicked off baseball and girls softball March 30 with Opening Day ceremonies at Volunteer Park. “Baseball season is my favorite season.”

The KPLL was around long before Miller got involved, but other board volunteers credit him for its recent success and growth.

“He has helped build an incredible league out here that kids will be able to be a part of for years to come,” said Shelby Johnston, who helps operate the softball side of the KPLL and serves as board secretary. “He is well-respected from those in other leagues and you can see and hear his love for the game with every story he shares.”

There were times in the past when the league couldn’t muster enough players to fill multiple teams in t-ball, coach pitch, minor, major, intermediate, junior or senior divisions. Now Miller says they would see upwards of 250 kids come out for baseball, though this spring it’s down to about 200. “It’s a cyclical sport,” he said. “Some kids age out and aren’t allowed to play anymore. Some kids just come to realize that they don’t want to play baseball.”

He’s fine with the latter. Miller just wants to see more opportunities on the KP to keep kids active. Yes, KPLL’s purpose is to make good ball players, but Miller said it’s even more so “to make them good and decent citizens.”

“They get to meet different kids outside their own classroom and school,” he said. “I see players really expanding their friendship



Thanks to Key Peninsula Little League volunteers, thousands of KP kids have experienced moments like 6-year-old Jacob tagging his opponent out in 2023. *Tina McKail, KP News*

zone through playing a team sport like this.”

Miller is getting settled into his role as the league president and is appreciative of his corps of volunteers. Administrative tasks like ordering equipment, developing schedules, getting sponsors, and recruiting volunteers that were once the job of what seemed like only two or three people are now handled by a volunteer team of 12 who Miller said “tackle it with great enthusiasm and fresh ideas.” Not to mention a slew of volunteer coaches, umpires and parents who make the games go off without a hitch.

Melanie Russum, a recent addition to the KPLL board focusing on securing sponsorship and fundraising opportunities, noted

that despite Miller’s extensive behind-the-scenes responsibilities, he maintains the mindset of a coach.

“He’s down at the field on rainy days to see if they are in good condition for the players,” she said. “He randomly pops in at games just to check in with parents and coaches, and to watch a few outs.”

“I can tell the decisions and improvements (Miller) makes or pushes for the league are all in the best interest of the kids,” said Kit Larson, who serves in three roles for the KPLL: coach, vice president, and safety officer.

Under Miller’s watch, the league typically brings in as much as it spends every year, about \$20,000. Most of the revenue comes

from registration fees and sponsorships, and most of the big expenses are field rentals and uniforms. Any extra funds are reinvested by the board in equipment and preparation for next season. The league was the beneficiary of a \$14,500 donation from the Key Peninsula Logging Show last August, and KPLL will receive donations in September from Key IGA’s “Round Up at the Register” program.

Miller will be recognized for his service and accomplishments at the Opening Day ceremonies at Volunteer Park March 30.

Those wanting to get involved with KPLL as a sponsor, coach, or other volunteer opportunities can reach Miller at 253-225-9911 or AskKPLL@hotmail.com. ■

Rates Down, Bills Up, Levies Mostly Steady

Tax rates on the KP have dropped but assessed property values have raised taxes all over Pierce County.

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

It's that time of the year again. While the rate is lower on the KP, the price is higher.

Pierce County has the highest property taxes in Washington State, with an average effective rate of 1.28%, according to the Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer's Office. The average rate in the state is around 0.9%. The national average is 1.1%.

"Overall, the average residential 2024 tax bill countywide is \$5,579, a 5.1% increase over last year," according to the assessor's office.

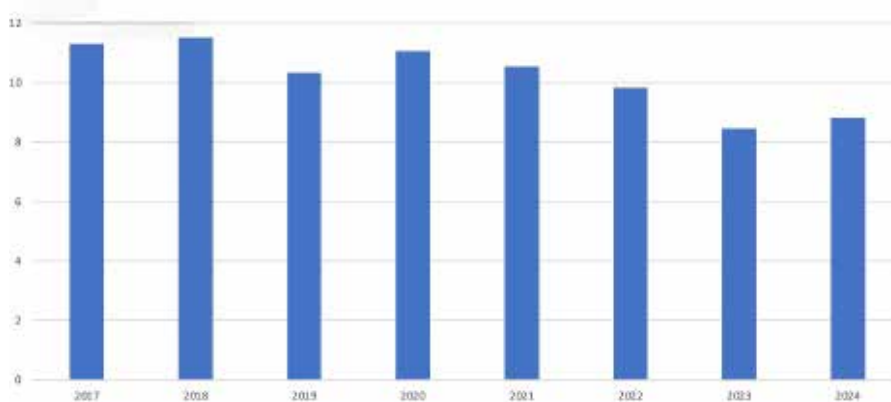
The state Constitution limits the total of all non-voter approved property tax rates to 1% of assessed value per year on a given property, plus tax resulting from any new construction on that property.

But there is no limit on voter-approved ballot levy taxes.

"The significant tax increases are in areas where voters approved new levies," Assessor-Treasurer Mike Lonergan stated on his office website. "This year, we see moderate tax increases in the Gig Harbor Peninsula, Fircrest and Key Peninsula."

The KP tax rate is lower than in recent years but is of little help to taxpayers whose assessed property value may have climbed anywhere from 30% to 50% over the last decade. The total county property value in 2014 was \$69 billion; in 2024 it's \$190 billion, according to the assessor's office.

The state and local levies for schools make up 58% of all property taxes in the county. The KP tax bill consists of about 25% of voter-approved levies, the total cost of which fluctuates about one percent up or down each year. The Peninsula School District and KP Fire District each get about 22% of the KP



Fluctuating millage rate for the KP over the last eight years, according to the Pierce County Assessor-Treasurer's Office. *KP News*

tax bill, while the state gets 26%. The rest is divided among the county to pay for roads, the port and libraries, with nominal fees for conservation, noxious weed control and surface water management added on top.

Property tax is a real estate ad valorem tax ("according to the value") considered to be regressive by many economists. It is determined by multiplying property value by the combined rate of all taxing districts where the property is located.

The amount of tax payable is expressed as a dollar amount of tax per \$1,000 of assessed value. That is called the mill rate or millage, a word that derives from the Latin word "millesimal," meaning "thousandth part" (1/1,000). One mill is \$0.001 of the amount to which it is applied.

Millage rates are listed as tax code area rates for individual properties on the assessor's website. To convert millage to dollars, divide the mill rate by 1,000 and multiply by the property's taxable value.

For example, a KP house assessed at \$500,000 has a 2024 mill rate of 8.816647 for taxes payable in 2024. This is the total of all government taxes and voter-approved levies per \$1,000 of

taxable value. Divide the mill rate by 1,000 to get 0.008816647. Multiply that by \$500,000 to get \$4,408.33. Add to that perhaps \$135 in fees for weed control, etc., and the result is an approximate effective tax rate of 0.9%.

The same can be done to find the cost of individual charges.

In 2023, taxpayers renewed a maintenance levy and approved a new security and technology levy for the Peninsula School District in addition to an existing \$198.5 million construction bond approved in 2019. The total 2024 school tax rate is \$1.82 per \$1,000 of assessed value, according to an estimate by PSD. For the hypothetical \$500,000 home, that would be 1.82 divided by 1,000 and multiplied by 500,000 for an annual cost of \$910, or \$75.84 per month.

Anyone can appeal their property tax assessment but an important change in 2024 is that homeowners over age 61, and those who are fully disabled at any age, may qualify for a significant property tax reduction if their household gross income is under \$64,000. For more information, go to www.co.pierce.wa.us. ■

KP Fire District Puts \$800K M&O Levy on August Ballot

The district is asking voters to renew the levy at an amount unchanged since 2012, meaning no increases to property taxes.

EDDIE MASCALKA, KP NEWS

The Key Peninsula Fire District board of commissioners voted at its Feb. 27 meeting to place a renewal of an \$800,000 annual maintenance and operations property tax measure on the Aug. 6 ballot. A voter-approved levy would continue for the next four years.

The commissioners discussed raising the request because of the rising costs of inflation but ultimately settled to renew the \$800,000 ask for the third time since the original M&O levy passed in 2012.

"I think a straight renewal is probably the right thing to do," Commission Chair Randy Takehara said. Commissioner Shawn Jensen agreed, saying the community is facing similar financial pressures as during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the last time the levy was on the ballot.

Commissioner Frank Grubaugh said not increasing the amount of the levy since 2012 is a good thing. "I think that speaks well for the overall financial responsibility of the board," said Grubaugh, who has been a commissioner since 2011.

In a video about the levy posted on the KP Fire District website, Fire Chief Nick Swinhart said the M&O levy funds staff, equipment and maintaining existing facilities. The fire district is primarily funded by three property tax levies: the fire levy, the emergency medical services levy, and the M&O levy. The M&O levy needs at least 60% approval to pass. The 2020 levy passed with 65% approval.

Swinhart is hosting a "Coffee with the Chief" on the first of each month from 9 to 10 a.m. at the Key Center headquarters (Station 46) to help educate the community about the M&O levy. Questions about it can also be emailed to NSwinhart@kpdf.org. ■

Evergreen Elementary School Teacher Put on Leave

STAFF REPORT

A teacher at Evergreen Elementary School was put on administrative leave by the Peninsula School District in early March after allegations of "misconduct toward students," according to a statement by Superintendent Krestin Bahr issued March 15.

"The allegations concern boundary invasions, verbal statements and potentially touching," she wrote. "I want to emphasize that these are allegations at this juncture."

The Pierce County Sheriff's Department is conducting an investigation. More details were not available at press time.

"I am sure that, like me, every alarm bell has gone off in your head," Bahr wrote.

"I want to assure you that the safety and well-being of our students is not just a priority; it is the foundation upon which our schools operate. If these allegations are found true, they stand in stark opposition to everything we stand for. We are working closely with the authorities to ensure a thorough investigation and will act decisively based on their findings." ■

Local Family Builds Shelters for Moroccan Earthquake Victims

A church-sponsored trip to Morocco led to decades of relief work in a country they grew to love. Their work focused on building earthquake-proof housing for those in greatest need.

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

In 1981, Willie and Gretchen Easley went to Morocco with their two young daughters. That trip, sponsored by their church, would lead to a love of place and culture culminating in decades of relief work spanning two generations.

Sarah Easley Erickson, the eldest of those daughters, was 3 when her family moved to Fes for a year. Her brother Joey was born in Fes before the family moved to Oujda, a city near the Algerian border. Willie ran an English bookstore, selling mostly to college students. Erickson went to the local school where she became fluent in Arabic. “It was home for me,” she said. “I



ABOVE: Ella and Norah Erickson in the doorway of a typical Moroccan village house 10 years ago.

BELOW: Hay stacking day. Joseph Easley in red shirt.
Joseph Easley



Roofing day. *Joseph Easley*

made lots of friends.”

The family returned intermittently to their home base on the Key Peninsula, where her grandfather had purchased 120 acres and built a house in 1964. “I felt home driving up Goldman Drive,” Erickson said. “The air was so fresh and clean.”

The family of five moved back in 1991, in part because of the impact of the Gulf War. Three more children were born after their return.

The Easleys held annual fundraisers with friends and family to raise money for projects in Morocco and in the early 2000s they established a nonprofit, Friends of the Rif. Rif refers to the region and the people in the Atlas Mountains.



Erickson married her husband Brent in 2001. “I told him that whoever I marry has to go to Morocco,” she said, “because you won’t fully understand me until you’ve seen the country I grew up in.” They spent two years, between 2003 and 2006, at a children’s home in Ain Leuh, a town in north central Morocco, where she taught English and he set up an agricultural program.

In late 2003 Willie and Gretchen returned to Morocco to deliver medical supplies. Soon after they arrived an earthquake struck Al Hoceima, a city of 50,000 located on the Mediterranean. The couple rerouted the supplies to Al Hoceima and settled in to help rebuild, this time with their three youngest children aged 10, 12 and 16.

By 2007 the eldest of those three, Daniel, had returned home to attend community college and the other two siblings were ready to follow.

Joey Erickson and wife Dani went with their 3-month-old to take over the relief work. Their plan to stay for one year stretched to 10, and three of their five children were born while there. “Morocco has a way of taking hold of you,” Joey said.

Their work focused on building earthquake-proof housing for those in greatest need, particularly widows and orphans. The houses were small, about 500 square feet, and they taught others in the villages how to build their own.

“In 2017 we had finished our relief work,” Joey said. “We built about 160 homes and ran out of people who were in need. We loved it and looked for other relief opportunities, but nothing really suited us or our skill sets.”

They returned to the Key Peninsula and purchased his grandparents’ home.

The original 120 acres now has at least 20 homes on 2.5-acre parcels, most owned by family members. “People call it Easleyville,” Sarah said. She and Brent live there as do nearly all of her siblings along with aunts, uncles and cousins. “It is fun, really fun. A bad day for my kids is not being able to see their cousins,” she said.

Over the years many family members have gone to Morocco to work on projects, Sarah said. Some have gone for weeks and others have gone for months.

A large earthquake hit Morocco last September in the high Atlas mountains, a region about 450 miles from Al Hoceima. Daniel, who was transitioning in work, left almost immediately to help. He was there for three weeks, teaming with others to build latrines.

Upon his return family and board members of Friends of the Rif met to plan their next steps. Joey, who speaks Arabic more fluently than Daniel, took the lead. In November, when he was able to take time off from his



Hauling a bucket of cement up to a roof. *Joseph Easley*



The Erickson and Easley families.

Tina McKail, KP News

roofing business, he went to the region to work on logistics.

“Our nonprofit didn’t have the funds to build the shelters,” Joe said. “But we were able to work with others like Samaritan’s Purse and Convoy of Hope. It was a perfect pairing, I knew the culture and could drop everything. They had the money but not the boots on the ground.”

He located a town in the foothills near the affected villages and worked with local leaders. The Quonset-style half-dome shelters were developed in Pakistan and Turkey in similar situations, and each can hold a family. They are insulated, inexpensive, can be built with locally sourced materials, and constructed on-site with easily available tools.

In the meantime, Daniel and his wife Elena made plans to work longer term to continue the relief work. They moved to Morocco



A typical feast in a new shelter, including mint tea, local olive oil, honey and butter.

Joseph Easley

with their five children, ages 1 through 9, in December. Sarah and her family traveled there for two weeks to help them settle in.

Daniel’s role is to acquire, transport and manage the building materials. Transportation is a major issue, Joey said, because the villages mostly depend on donkeys.

Daniel and his family plan to stay at least until shelter construction is complete or the funds run out. Friends of the Rif provides funding to support the family, estimated at just \$2,000 a month.

The hope, Joey said, is to do more once the needed shelters are completed. They would like to replicate the work in Al Hoceima, building permanent earthquake-proof homes for the neediest families and teaching others

how to build their own.

“There are definitely difficulties doing this work,” Joey said. “You miss family here. But it is not all sacrifice. The food is amazing. The people are extremely hospitable. It is a fun place to live.”

“One of the things we love about Morocco so much is that they are so family-oriented,” he said. “They love kids. I found personally that it was in many ways easier to raise kids in Morocco than here. It was normal for me to take even my young children to work. It made building relationships so easy.”

“We couldn’t do this work without all the support from everyone here,” Sarah said.

For more information go to Friends of the Rif is www.friendsoftherif.org ■

Build Your Garden Now! Now, I Say! It Can't Build Itself Even If It Wants To!

GEM LATERRE

It's April! The grass is growing. If the grass is growing you can grow lettuce! What a relief.

Every winter seems so long. Remember when it snowed on April Fool's Day? But now is the time to pull away the mulch on your vegetable garden and plant some seeds and starts. Warning! Wait for May and warm overnight temperatures before you think of planting seeds for beans, corn or squash, or setting out tomato plants.

Don't worry! You have a long list of delicious green vegetables and pretty flowers to choose from. The choosing is the biggest problem. Garden real estate is so valuable. Don't be careless and experimental. Choose your tried-and-true varieties. Leave a bit of space to try "new, improved" strains, too, of course.

When you choose seeds, some F1 hybrid varieties can be too good to pass up. This is especially true of lettuce. If the seed packet doesn't say F1 hybrid then you will know that the seeds are "open-pollinated." When you save the seeds and plant them next year they will "come true."

You don't have a vegetable garden ready to wake up for spring? Then let me tell you how to make a new vegetable garden. Find a spot with lots of sunshine and good drainage. Don't worry about proximity to water faucets. That's what hoses are for. Making a new vegetable garden will take heavy lifting, hand digging, and patience. You will enjoy it! Your new garden doesn't need to be large. A 5-foot square garden will be full of bounty. You can make a garden with paths and raised beds, too, or a combination, which is how we garden. If you choose raised beds don't fill them with potting soil. You have earth for the taking, full of everything a plant needs.

Digging grass out of a lawn is tough, but out of a field will be tougher. All the grass, weeds and roots must go. This will take time! If you have clay don't even touch it until it has dried up pretty well. While you are waiting you can scalp the grass and weeds and cover them with leaves or an old sheet of plywood or an old rug, something to keep the light out and stop growth. No plastics, please. We don't need plastic.

Your next step is to create tilth. With tilth, your plants will grow beautifully. Whether your soil is sandy or clay, all the organic matter added to it will fluff it up and make it sweet. Next fall you can use compost from your compost pile, leaves, seaweed and other bounties of the Earth when you put your new garden to rest for the winter.

But to begin this April you need soil condi-



Plant french radish seeds in April and experience the joy of a delicious uprising. *Gem Laterre*



tioners. Bring home composted organic chicken manure in bags. (I like the brand with the little red hen on it, Stutzman Farms.) Two bags for every 25 square feet of garden. Organic is necessary. This eliminates herbicides and pesticides. You can't grow big healthy plants when there are herbicides in your soil! While you are shopping buy a bottle of liquid fish fertilizer. You will fertilize all your vegetables all summer once a month with this.

Add the manure to your fresh dirt and you will have tilth. If you are strictly vegan, don't

try alfalfa on clay to replace chicken manure — it doesn't work. You will need to wait a year. Do all I have described above. Then put your earth to rest this spring for next spring. Pile your bed up with leaves, compost, seaweed, sawdust (not grass clippings), and anything else that sounds delicious. Leave it until next spring. Gardeners are patient.

Seeds to plant in April:

- Arugula
- Radish
- Peas
- Carrot
- Lettuce: Salanova and Ariadne stand up to heat. Plant lettuce starts from the garden shop, too, especially Buttercrunch.

With flower plants among the vegetables, your garden will be even healthier, and more

beautiful. Let them go to seed every year.

Plants to plant:

- Feverfew — everywhere, especially with artichokes to keep away ants.
- Nasturtium seeds, where the soil is light, that is, easy to work. If aphids come in August toss Nasturtium plants on the compost where they will keep blooming!
- Calendula anywhere — they self-seed beautifully.
- Borage — brings the bees to pollinate your vegetable flowers.

(Memo: there should be no neonicotinoids used on any plants you buy from the nursery. Neonicotinoids kill bees.)

- Sweet Alyssum seeds with lettuce.
- French marigolds — important for beans.
- Cosmos for bees and bouquets. ■



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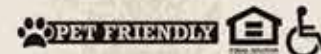
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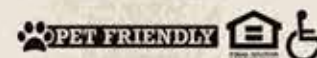
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What America Ate (Even Before It Could Spell, Punctuate or Conjugate)

BARBARA VAN BOGART

Just like a novel, reading cookbooks has been a lifelong love of mine. While my cookbook collection has diminished over the years, thanks in part to both the internet and a need to downsize, it is still fascinating to learn about different cultures and different foods while recognizing that cooks have found comfort in the art of creating meals throughout the ages.

Family recipes and cookbooks handed down from previous generations are a source of constant delight and amazement as to how meal preparation has changed, and yet how much remains the same. Inventions such as the electric oven, microwave, induction cooking and air fryer have changed how we cook, and some might argue not necessarily for the better.

The first recorded cookbook is said to be four clay tablets from 1700 BCE from ancient Mesopotamia. By 1300 CE, cookbooks were the norm for kings and queens, with the “Forme of Cury” (“The Rules of Cookery”) published for King Richard II. Once the printing press evolved, cookbooks became less bourgeois and more available to everyone.

The first known cookbook by an American is believed to be “American Cooke” by Amelia Simmons, published in 1796. Its full title is “American Cooke, Or The Art of Dressing Viands, Fish, Poultry and Vegetables and the Best Modes of Making Pastes, Puffs, Pies, Tarts, Puddings, Custards and Preserves, and All Kinds of Cakes, From the Imperial Plumb to Plain Cake.” To read this cookbook is to take a peek back at what began to shape American cooking and baking as we now know it.

Little is known about Simmons other than she was an orphan, apparently born in Albany, New York. She spent her early years under the care of several guardians, and it was said this shaped her character of opinion and determination. She earned her living as a maid and was a young woman of modest means. She eventually married and had six children. She is quoted as saying she “lacked an education sufficient to prepare for the work of the press.” Clearly, this did not prevent her from undertaking what amounted to her life’s work.

Simmons included her recipes for New England specialties such as Indian Pudding, johnnycake (formerly “Journey Cake”), and what is now known as pumpkin pie.



She also introduced pearl ash, a forerunner of baking soda, which revolutionized the baking of cakes. She also invented the cupcake, recommending using “small pans to bake cakes.”

While “American Cooke” featured recipes for preparing all manner of vegetables and meats such as stuffed goose, stuffed leg of veal, roast lamb and stews, the cake recipes contained within its pages epitomize what baking meant to this country in its very early days.

After a nod to England, the “Queen’s Cake” and its concoction of cream, sugar, flour, 10 eggs, a glass of wine (!), rose-water and spices, along with “Plumb Cake” and its 21 eggs, expensive fruits and nuts, wine and cream, Simmons turned her focus to recipes with ingredients more common in everyday kitchens. Simple things such as cornmeal (a New World staple of the early American diet), milk, flour, eggs and bacon grease were plain but bountiful building blocks for early American cooks and a turn away from English recipes that had been the standard of early colonial days.

“American Cooke” (now known as “American Cookery”) was printed and reprinted for over 30 years until it began to fall out of favor. However, the post-World War II era brought a resurgence of interest in this American classic and it is widely available once again. There are sections on how to select the best bean, as well as what to look for when choosing meat, poultry, butter, cheese, eggs and vegetables. It is a peek into how our ancestors made do with what was available to them, and how creatively they cooked.

Below are two recipes lifted from this incredible cookbook quoted in the vernacular of its time.

Christmas Cookey

To three pounds flour, sprinkle a tea cup of fine powdered coriander seed, rub in one pound butter, and one and a half pound sugar, dissolve three tea spoonfuls of pearl ash (note: this is what we now know as baking soda) in a tea cup of milk, kneed all together well, roll three quarters of an inch thick, and cut or stamp into

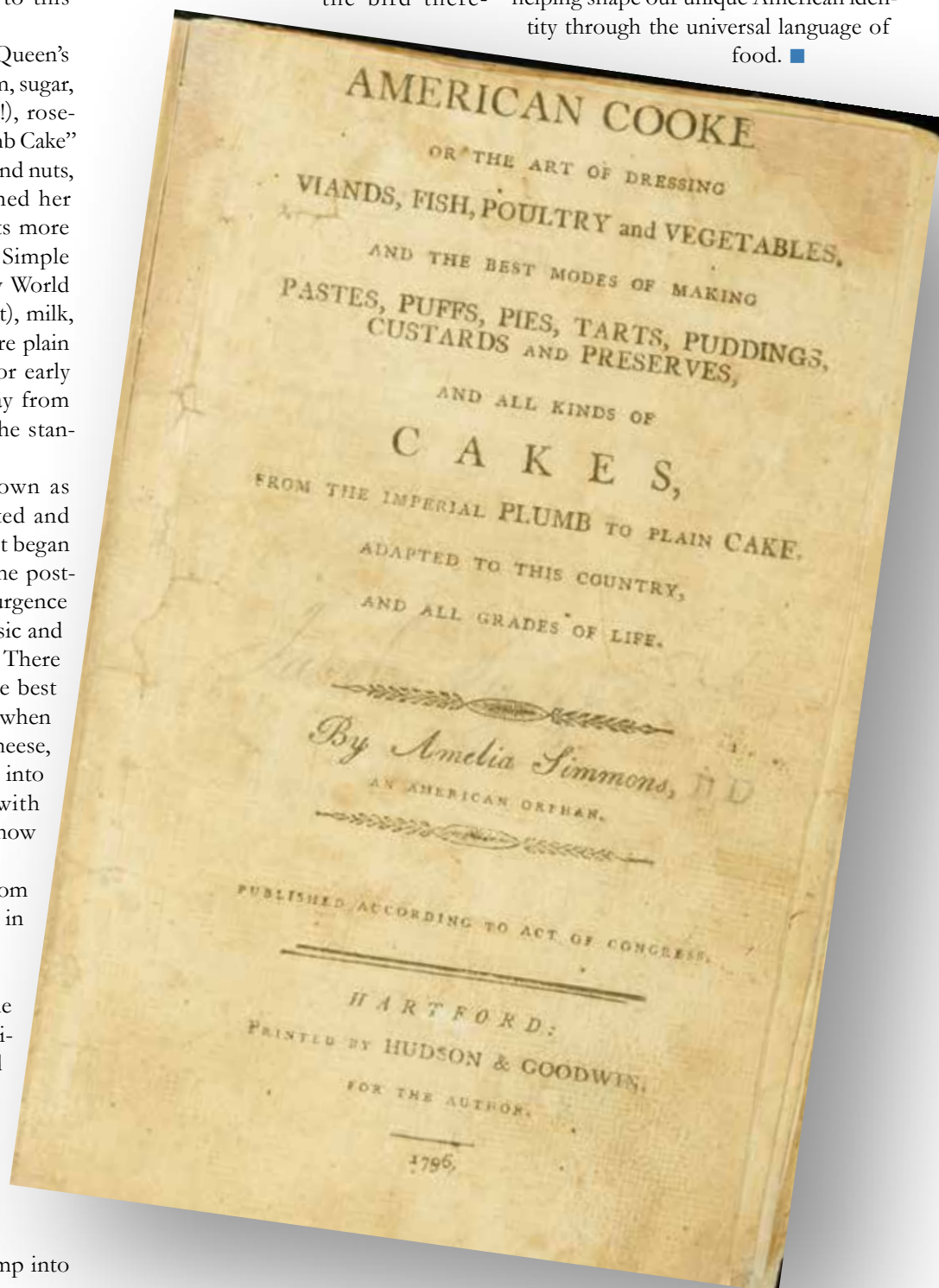
shape and size you please, bake slowly fifteen or twenty minutes; tho’ hard and dry at first, if put into an earthen pot, and dry cellar, or damp room, they will be finer, softer and better when six months old. (Note: while an interesting take on cookie baking back then, I wouldn’t recommend storing cookies for six months before consuming them.)

To Stuff and Roast a Turkey, or Fowl

One pound soft wheat bread, 3 ounces beef suet, 3 eggs, a little sweet thyme, sweet marjoram, pepper and salt, some add a gill (note: 1/4 pint) of wine; fill the bird there-

with and sew up, hang down to a steady solid fire, basting frequently with salt and water, and roast until steam emits from the breast, put one-third of a pound of butter into the gravy, dust flour over the bird and baste with the gravy, serve up with boiled onions and cranberry sauce, mangoes, pickles or celery.

This cookbook is a treasure trove of American cooking history, complete with units of measure no longer used, as well as differences in spelling and punctuation, all written by a young woman who left her mark in the culinary world while helping shape our unique American identity through the universal language of food. ■



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DIY Septic Certifications on the Way for KP Homeowners

Pierce County may someday teach you how to inspect your own septic system. The hope is to increase compliance by lowering costs.

VICKI BIGGS, KP NEWS

The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department plans to help homeowners.

Lakebay resident Bob Wilkins wants to do something most people find disgusting, and he wants other people to be able to do it too. He wants to be able to inspect his own septic system. Why and how would he want to do this?

As far back as 2000, Washington State finalized a law to codify septic inspection schedules and standard guidelines for septic safety. The Revised Code of Washington law 43.20.065 reads: “The Legislature finds that properly functioning on-site sewage systems are an important component of the state’s wastewater treatment infrastructure. In order to ensure that on-site sewage systems remain a wastewater treatment option that is economically accessible to a wide sector of the state’s population, it is the intent of the Legislature to ensure that only requirements that are reasonable, appropriately tailored, and necessary are imposed on the installation, operation, maintenance, or repair of on-site sewage systems.”

The health department adopted this legislation by reference. TPCHD septic rules state that the purpose of septic regulation is to eliminate or minimize the potential for public exposure to sewage from on-site sewage systems and to eliminate or minimize adverse effects to the public health that discharges from on-site sewage systems may have on ground and surface waters.

To carry out these intentions for public health, state law and local health departments require septic inspections every one to three years, depending on the type of system involved. This requirement usually involves a property owner engaging the services of a septic inspection and pumping company. Waterfront homes may require yearly inspection. Many other single dwellings, not on a sewer system, will be inspected every three years.

Pierce County has been sending letters to homeowners advising them of the inspection requirement, offering information for septic service companies, and the option for financial assistance for some time. “As more new homes are built and the population increases, some people may be getting notices that previously have not. Increased population density increases the need to have adequate septic,” said Robert Suggs, environmental health



Creative landscaping can help provide easy access for maintenance and inspections.

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Dept.

specialist for Pierce County. The inspection schedules are rolling out at different times around the county.

Inspection fees vary widely, from about \$350 up to \$700.

This is the point of contention for Bob Wilkins. “A single person with a three-bedroom home does not need to be inspected every three years. My last pumpout lasted 12 years. I would like to have the option of taking a class to get my own certification (for septic inspection). The class should be an option for those who want it.”

Kitsap County offers an 8-hour class, followed by a one-year probationary training period. There is also a one-time fee of \$445, a yearly renewal fee of \$145, and a filing fee of \$30.

In contrast, Thurston County offers an 8-hour class, with classroom time and fieldwork. Certifications are limited to four specific types of septic systems including conventional gravity, mound, pressure distributor, and Glendon Biofilters. Classes are offered twice a month.

“One of the things we like is the field portion of the training,” said Jane Mountjoy-Venning of the Thurston County Health Department. “We have a septic park where people can see and understand a septic system. It is located behind the building of the health department in Olympia and is available for anyone to visit.”

Thurston County is currently able to offer certificates without charge by using Washington State Department of Health

money, which is available to any county to use for public health concerns. Jane said that “several thousands of people have become certified over the years.”

Certificates can be revoked if the owner’s system fails to meet the criteria.

Pierce County Councilwoman Robyn Denson said, “I’ve heard from multiple Key Peninsula residents asking about whether the health department could start a self-inspection program for homeowners to be able to comply with the state law of inspections every three years in a more affordable way.”

“Our water quality and protection program is working to develop a septic self-inspection training and inspection program that would protect public health and align with our code,” said Kenny Via in a statement for TPCHD. “We are still in the early phases of development. Some of our important considerations include criteria for completing a self-inspection, funding, data entry, and proper tracking. We know many people in the community are eager for us to implement a program like this. We will continue to share more as we develop the program further.”

“Nothing lasts forever, everything needs maintenance. The cheapest system is the one you have right now,” he said. ■

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COMMUNITY CALENDAR

To add a listing for your event or find the latest details, visit www.keypennews.org/calendar

Apr 1 Brunch and Bingo 11:30 a.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Open to the community, \$5 for brunch and suggested donation of \$1 per game for bingo.

Apr 2 Gig Harbor Literary Society 6 p.m., Harbor History Museum. "Four Treasures of the Sky" by Jenny Tinghui Zhang.

Apr 3 KP Readers: An Hour of Coffee and Conversation 10:30 a.m., Key Center Library. "Homegoing" by Yaa Gyasi.

Apr 3 Veterans Assistance 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m., Key Peninsula Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Apr 3 Peninsula Community Health Services Mobile Clinic 1 p.m., Key Peninsula Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Apr 5 Senior Crafternoon - Garden Rocks 6 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. All supplies provided. Call 253-884-9814 to reserve your space.

Apr 5 Washington Old Time Fiddlers Association 3:30 – 6 p.m., Crandall Center. All fiddlers, banjos, mandolins, guitars, and string basses are welcome to play.

Apr 6 Bird Walks 8:30 a.m., rain or shine. Meet nature guide Chris Rurik at Gateway Park pavilion.

Apr 6 Longbranch Improvement Club Super Sale 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Castoffs & collectibles, tools & toys, deals & steals.

Apr 6 KPCC Crab Feed 4 – 7 p.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center. A night of delicious seafood and fun. Tickets available at the civic center website.

Apr 9 TacomaProBono Legal Aid 10 a.m. – 2 p.m., Key Peninsula Community Services. 1 – 3 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Free civil legal help.

Apr 9 MultiCare WIC Program 11 a.m. – 3 p.m., Gig Harbor Library. The WIC Clinic helps pregnant people, new and breastfeeding moms, and children under 5.

Apr 9 Maker Fun - Drop in Art and Science for Kids 3:30 – 5 p.m., Key Center Library. For elementary-aged children and their caretakers.

Apr 9 Open Mic Café 6:30 – 9:30 p.m., Longbranch Improvement Club. All ages welcome, performers need to be at least middle school age. Gnosh food truck on site.

Apr 10 PEP-C Meeting: No-License Radio 6 p.m., Round Table Pizza. Join the monthly meeting and learn about no-license radio.

Apr 11 Pierce County Social Services 11 a.m., Key Peninsula Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Apr 12 Mammogram Clinic 9 a.m. – 12 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Call Mardi Landry of Community Health Care at 253-722-1765 to set up an appointment.

Apr 13 KP Parks Craft Time 10 a.m., Key Pen Parks. Come to the Gateway Pavilion and help make gnomes for the Summer Solstice Gnome Hunt.

Apr 13 Friends of the Library Book Sale 11 a.m. – 5 p.m., Key Center Library. Purchase great books and more at great prices from the Friends of the Library.

Apr 16 Hootenanny 2 – 4 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Folksong sing and play along.

Apr 17 Wolves of the Northwest 3 – 4 p.m., Key Center Library. Learn about wolves that live in the Pacific Northwest from Wolf Haven International.

Apr 17 Cribbage Club 2 – 4 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Everyone is welcome - no experience required.

Apr 18 Community Forum: Animal Rescue During the War in Ukraine 1 – 2:30 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Hear from Tom Bates about his work in Ukraine.

Apr 18 KP Parks Movie Night 6 p.m., The Red Barn Youth Center. Showing the Super Mario Bros Movie, PG.

Apr 18 Teen Hangout 3 – 5 p.m., Key Center Library. Bring a friend to play board games or create art. Snacks provided.

Apr 18 Poetry in the Harbor 6 – 9 p.m., Tacoma Community College - Gig Harbor. Local poets Asha Berkes, Kathleen Byrd, Josie Emmons Turner, and Michael Haeflinger.

Apr 19 TGIF 5:30 p.m., Longbranch Improvement Club. For members and guests. BYOB.

Apr 20 Knives Out! Introduction to the Art of Scratchboard 10:00 a.m., Peninsula Art League. Tickets available at peninsulaartleague.org.

Apr 27 Wildside Walk 10 a.m., Skansie Park Pavilion. Presented by Harbor WildWatch. A guided half-hour walking tour ending at the Old Ferry Landing..

WEEKLY EVENTS

Monday Al-Anon Keys to Sanity 5 p.m., KP fire station. Family group.

Monday Yoga at the Civic Center 7 – 8 p.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center. Schedule classes online at the civic center website.

Monday REFIT Workout 7 p.m., WayPoint South, heartfitwp@gmail.com. Women's free fitness classes.

M-W Yoga at the Civic Center 9:30 – 10:30 a.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center. Schedule classes online at the civic center website.

M-W SAIL 4 p.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440. Flexibility and balance for those over 60.

M-W-F SAIL 10 a.m., The Mustard Seed Project, 253-884-9814. Stay Active and Independent for Life.

M-F Tai Ji Quan 11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project. Exercise training program for improving balance and preventing falls.

Tuesday Baby Story Time 10:15 – 11 a.m., Key Center Library. For children ages 0-2 and their caretakers. No Baby Story Time April 16.

Tuesday Pickleball and Board Games 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Longbranch Improvement Club. Open to the public. Coffee and games in the foyer.

Tuesday Beginning Tai Chi 10 a.m., The Mustard Seed Project, 253-884-9814.

Drop-ins welcome, \$5 a class.

Tuesday Women's Bible Study 12:30 p.m., WayPoint North Church. Precept Bible Study on Daniel every Tuesday through June 11.

Tuesday Friends of the Key Center Library Book Donations 1 – 3 p.m., Key Center Library.

T-W REFIT Workout Tue 6 p.m., Wed 5:30 p.m., WayPoint North, heartfitwp@gmail.com. Women's free fitness classes.

T-TH Tai Chi 9:45 a.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

T-TH Indoor Toddler Playground 9:30 – 11 a.m., KP Civic Center, 253-884-4440.

T-TH-SA SAIL 8:30 a.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440. Flexibility and balance for those over 60.

T-SA KP Historical Society & Museum 1 – 4 p.m. Open through November. keypeninsulamuseum.org

Wednesday Cards and Games 9:30 a.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Wednesday No Tears Tech Help 10 a.m. – 1 p.m., Not available Apr. 3. Key Center Library. Call the library to book an appointment, 253-548-3309.

Wednesday Open Pickleball 10:30 a.m. – 2 p.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center. Open to the public. Waiver required to play; donations accepted.

Wednesday Gentle Yoga for Older Adults 11:15 a.m., The Mustard Seed Project, 253-884-9814.

Wednesday Chair Yoga 1 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project, 253-884-9814.

Tuesday Family Story Time 10:30 – 11:30 a.m., Key Center Library. For children ages 0-6, Bring the family for a story. No Family Story Time April 11.

Thursday County Council District 7 Constituent Office Hours 11 a.m. – 2 p.m., Councilmember Robyn Denson and her staff. Contact 253-798-6654 for information.

Thursday Senior Bingo 12:30 p.m., first and third Thursdays. KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Thursday KP Toastmasters 8 a.m., WayPoint Church, 253-514-2836.

Friday Movie Screening 12:30 p.m., second and fourth Fridays, KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Friday Skate Night 6 – 9 p.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center, kindergarten-eighth grade. No Skate Night Apr. 19.

Saturday Amateur Radio Club of Burley 9 – 11 a.m., Located behind Burley Post Office at 14831 Burley Ave SE. <http://w7jq.org>

Sunday WayPoint Community Dinners 6 p.m. Free community dinners at WayPoint North and WayPoint South churches.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

26th LD Democrats First Thursdays, 6:30 p.m. Meeting locations vary, check 26d.org for monthly updates.

Baby Lounge Third Fridays, 12 p.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center. A gathering for connection with other parents.

Caregiver Support Group Third Mondays, 2 p.m., The Mustard Seed Project.

Friends of the Key Center Library Board Meeting Third Fridays, 10:30 a.m., Brones Room of the Key Center Library.

Key Peninsula Advisory Commission Fourth Thursdays, 5:30 p.m. piercescountywa.gov/5937

Key Peninsula Beekeepers First Thursdays, 7 p.m. Home fire station.

KP Business Association Luncheon. Third Fridays, noon at El Sombrero. kpbusinessassociation@gmail.com

KP Business Association Business meeting. Feb. 6 at 6:30 p.m. April location: Salon 302. kpbusinessassociation@gmail.com

KP Community Council Second Thursdays, 6:30 p.m. Key Center fire station, keypencouncil@gmail.com. Zoom link available on Key Peninsula Council Facebook page.

KP Civic Center Association Board meeting, second Thursdays, 7 – 8:30 p.m., Whitmore Room, KP Civic Center, 253-884-3456.

KP Democrats Third Mondays, 6:30 p.m., Home fire station. johnpatkelly@aol.com, 253-432-4256.

KP Emergency Prep Third Thursdays, 7 p.m., KP Civic Center. eprep@kpciviccenter.org

KP Fire Regular Board Meeting Second and fourth Tuesdays, 5 p.m. on Zoom, keypeninsulafire.org, 253-884-2222.

KP Historical Society First Tuesdays, 11 a.m. at museum. kphsmuseum@gmail.com

KP Lions Club First and third Wednesdays, 6 p.m. Potluck at Key Center fire station, 253-525-0802. keypeninsulalions@outlook.com

Key Free Clinic First and third Thursdays, 4:30 – 7 p.m. (check-in from 4:30 – 5 p.m.). KPC Office in the Key Center Corral.

Key Pen Parks Board of Commissioners Meeting Second Mondays, 7 p.m., Home fire station, 253-884-9240.

KP Veterans First and third Mondays, 7 – 8 p.m., KP Lutheran Church, 253-884-2626.

Lakebay Fuchsia Society First Thursdays, 7 p.m., KP Civic Center - Whitmore Room, 253-549-3015.

Longbranch Improvement Club Third Wednesdays, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m., Longbranch Improvement Club. 253-200-0308 or licweb.org.

Medicare Assistance Second Tuesdays, 12 – 2 p.m. KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Peninsula Emergency Preparedness Coalition Second Wednesdays, 6 p.m. Check pep-c.org for meeting location.

Peninsula School District Board Meeting First and fourth Tuesdays in April, 6 p.m. Swiftwater Elementary School.

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Tues and Thurs, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Key Center Corral. Call 253-432-4948 for the schedule; Air Quality, Triple P, COVID-19, General HD, Water/Wells, and Healthy Housing advice.



CRAB FEED
Saturday April 6 4-7 pm
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Saturday May 11 10 am-3 pm



Key Peninsula Civic Center, 17010 S. Vaughn Road 253/884-3456 www.kpciviccenter.org The Key Peninsula Civic Center Association, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, fosters and promotes the civic, social, cultural and general well-being of the Key Peninsula community.



April



Craft Time
April 13 - Help us make gnomes for our Summer Solstice Gnome Hunt!

Spring Movie Night
6pm, April 18 @ Red Barn Youth Center

May the 4th Fun Run
May 4 @ 360 Trails - come in your best Star Wars costume!

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Lakebay Community Church

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Bible Studies: Thursdays, 10 am and 6:30 p.m.
Harvest Share Food Ministry: Wednesdays, 1 p.m.
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Key Peninsula Middle School student art. Beginning with a sheet of black paper, students used chalk to explore positive and negative space. *Courtesy Richard Miller*