



PHOTO BY VINCENT BALANSAG, OF VINCE PHOTOGRAPHY

## Time to celebrate

Graduation formalities were finished and down came the balloons, floating over the 14 graduates at last Friday's ceremonies at the community gym -- in the school colors, of course. For more photos, see Page 7.

## Borough looks at options to use former hospital

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Sentinel writer*

Concerned with increasing cost estimates to repair and renovate the water-damaged 34-year-old public safety building, the borough assembly wants to explore a new option to see if it would be less expensive: Permanently move as many tenants as possible into the old hospital instead.

"I've been driving this," Mayor Steve Prysunka told the borough assembly at a workshop Tuesday evening.

He said the borough needs to figure out what it would cost to remodel the hospital into space for the police and fire departments, state courts, jail, federal Customs and Border Protection and other government offices.

Would it cost less to turn the hospital into a public safety building, the mayor asked, and maybe move other borough offices into the building, such as city hall staff and assembly chambers. And what would the borough do with the city hall and public safety properties if it moves out.

Another option would be to move offices into a remodeled hospital, while repairing enough of the public safety building to keep only the fire department there.

"There are a lot of moving parts," Assemblymember Anne Morrison said.

Fully occupying the hospital would also require extensive work, Wrangell Capital Facilities Director Amber Al-Haddad told assembly members. The hospital was originally built in 1967 and remodeled and expanded in 1974, 1988 and 1994.

The SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, which had been operating the hospital, turned back the building to the borough in April after SEARHC completed its move into its new Wrangell Medical Facility.

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## Legislators struggling to decide state budget, dividend

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Sentinel writer*

Alaska legislators are in the second week of a special session to finish work on the state budget for the fiscal year that starts in just five weeks, while also deciding the amount of this year's Permanent Fund dividend.

Lawmakers have held few committee

meetings and many have left Juneau, as private discussions involving House and Senate leaders, their colleagues and the governor's office generally dominate such negotiations.

The Legislature adjourned its regular session after 121 days on May 19, unable to agree on a state budget and the size of the dividend — the two issues that usually

divide the 60 lawmakers and the governor.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy called legislators into special session to start the next day to finish work on the budget and to consider his plan to put the dividend in the state constitution, splitting the annual draw of Permanent Fund earnings 50-50 between the PFD and state-funded public services.

While the governor's plan would gen-

erate a dividend of about \$2,400 per person for the next couple of years, it also would leave a \$1 billion shortfall in the state budget. Dunleavy is asking legislators to withdraw an additional \$3 billion from the Permanent Fund to buy more time to figure out how to match spending with revenues.

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## Assembly will return to in-person meetings

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Sentinel writer*

Zoom is a thing of the past for Wrangell borough assembly meetings. The next meeting June 8 will be in person, no more freeze frames, no more digital hassles.

The assembly voted unanimously Tuesday evening to repeal the resolution directing online meetings during the pandemic.

"Conducting meetings with the Zoom stuff is exhausting," Mayor Steve Prysunka said.

Borough Clerk Kim Lane recommended the assembly ap-

prove the return to in-person meetings. "Since we are trying to move forward and climb out of this pandemic," she said, it would be appropriate to go back to meeting in assembly chambers, with the public invited.

Assembly members can still call in to meetings if they are out of town or otherwise unable to attend in person, the mayor said.

The public also can call in to testify or present to the assembly if they would rather do that than attend in person, Lane said.

"I am very much in favor of coming off our war footing," As-

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## There's hope for more cruise ship visits this summer

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Sentinel writer*

Congressional action exempting large cruise ships from having to stop in Canada on their summer voyages to Alaska will provide a boost to heavily tourism-dependent Southeast communities. Although Wrangell was never on the itineraries of the largest ships, it's possible the town may see some additional visitors with the change in U.S. law.

Without the temporary exemption from a century-old U.S. maritime law, the foreign-registered ships would have been required to stop in Canada, which has not been possible since the country shut down its ports to cruise ship traffic in the early days of the pandemic last year.

Regardless of whether any more ships pull into Wrangell over the next few months, sev-

eral smaller tour boats and a couple of mid-size ships are scheduled to come to town, and the borough is making plans to accommodate the ships and their passengers under COVID-19 safety protocols.

The 49-passenger Baranof Dream is scheduled to call on Wrangell this Friday, the first of three boats operated by Sitka-based Alaska Dream Cruises to come to town this summer. The three boats are scheduled for a total of 29 port calls through mid-September, according to the borough's cruise ship calendar.

The 170-passenger American Constellation, operated by American Cruise Lines, is a U.S.-flagged vessel and its Southeast voyage was not jeopardized by Canada's decision to close its ports to cruise ship traffic. The 267-foot-long ship is scheduled to make the first of its five stops in Wrangell on June 5.

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## Birthdays & Anniversaries



The Sentinel extends its best wishes to the following people listed on the Wrangell Chamber of Commerce Community Scholarship Birthday Calendar.

**Thursday, May 27:** Tonia Ayers, Aaron Comstock, Austin Dow, Lance Hayes, Ida Howell, Amanda Johnson, Nola Walker.

**Friday, May 28:** Lucas Sterns, Debbie Torvend.

**Saturday, May 29:** Jeff Angerman, Robert Baremore, Dakota Holder, Wayne Kaer; Anniversary: Keene and Faye Kohrt.

**Sunday, May 30:** Timothy Garcia, Draven Golding; Anniversaries: Rob and Dena McChargue, Walter Moorhead and Carol Ross.

**Monday, May 31:** Michelle Beaghoff, Miles Brown, Tristan Byford, William Shilts, Rose Sundberg.

**Tuesday, June 1:** Hannah Castle, Deanne Cooper, Marc Gunderson, Jody Hammock, Jack Pino, Glen Pollow, Torin Schoonover.

**Wednesday, June 2:** Willie Bloom, Spencer Ocean, Janell Stutz.

**Thursday, June 3:** Matthew Covalt, Makena Hammer, Mike Jabush, Robyn Lane, Yuri McCloskey, Ryan Reeve, Gail Thomas; Anniversary: Scott and Lorri Angerman.

## Senior Center Meals Menu Delivery Only

**Friday, May 28**

Fiesta pork chops, sweet potato

**Monday, May 31**

Memorial Day: Closed

**Tuesday, June 1**

Pork chop suey, broccoli, rice, peach salad

**Wednesday, June 2**

Baked fish, peas and carrots, wheat bread

**Thursday, June 3**

Herbed chicken, vegetables, salsa, potatoes

Please call Wrangell Senior Center at 874-2066 by 10 a.m. for delivery.

Senior van also available to transport seniors to medical appointments reasonable errands like collecting mail, getting prescriptions at pharmacies or other essential need items.

## Ferry Schedule

### Northbound

**Friday, May 28**

Matanuska, 3:45 p.m.

**Friday, June 4**

Matanuska, 5:45 p.m.

**Friday, June 11**

Matanuska, 4:45 p.m.

**Friday, June 18**

Matanuska, 4 p.m.

**Friday, June 25**

Matanuska, 3:15 p.m.

### Southbound

**Monday, May 31**

Matanuska, 6:30 a.m.

**Monday, June 7**

Matanuska, 6:30 a.m.

**Monday, June 14**

Matanuska, 5:30 a.m.

**Monday, June 21**

Matanuska, 4:45 a.m.

**Monday, June 28**

Matanuska, 5 a.m.

All times listed are scheduled departure times.

Call the terminal at 874-2021 for information or call 874-3711 or 800-642-0066 for recorded information.



## TIDES May 27-June 2

	High Tides		Low Tides		AM	PM	Ft	Ft
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft				
May 27	01:38	19.8	02:40	16.3	08:08	-4.5	08:08	1.9
May 28	02:24	19.4	03:30	15.8	08:54	-4.1	08:55	2.7
May 29	03:10	18.5	04:21	15.1	09:43	-3.2	09:45	3.5
May 30	04:00	17.3	05:16	14.4	10:34	-2.0	10:42	4.4
May 31	04:54	15.8	16:16	13.9	11:29	-0.6	11:47	5.0
June 1	05:56	14.2	07:22	13.7	...	...	12:27	0.8
June 2	07:11	13.0	08:26	14.0	01:03	5.2	01:30	1.8

## Wrangell Roundup: Special Events

**CELEBRATION OF LIFE** for Sig Decker and Helen Decker this Friday-Sunday, with the main event a potluck at 6 p.m. Saturday at City Park, with music and spreading of the ashes later at the Wrangell Mariners' Memorial. For planning purposes, organizers ask that people who plan to bring food please post what they are bringing on the event's Facebook comments. There will be an unveiling of the new memorial to Sig and Helen and Ian Martin and Dennis Lord at noon Sunday at Banana Point on Mitkof Island.

**WRANGELL 4th of JULY KICKOFF** 6 p.m. Monday at the downtown pavilion. Meet the royalty candidates.

**WRANGELL PARKS & RECREATION** - All swims are cancelled June 1-5 due to the lifeguard and swim instructor course.

**WRANGELL PARKS & RECREATION** - Red Cross lifeguard course 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 1-4. Fee is \$150. Swim instructor course 1 to 5 p.m. June 4 and 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. June 5. There is a fee waiver for both courses for eligible individuals who commit to a minimum of six months of employment at the pool. Participants can register online: wrangllrec.com. Discount codes may be obtained through the course instructor. Courses are separate from one another, and participants may register for one or both. Instructor and contact information are available from Kate Thomas and Lucy Robinson at 874-2444 or via email at recreation@wrangell.com.

**IRENE INGLE PUBLIC LIBRARY** summer reading program now open for registration. Open to students entering kindergarten through ninth grade in the fall. Register at the library (open Wednesday through Saturday); the reading program runs June 2 through July 31. There will be drawings and a special prize for readers. Participants need to sanitize their hands as they enter the library to register and wear a mask while in the library, stay six feet apart from others who are not in their household, and limit visits to 30 minutes. Call 874-3535 for more information.

**WRANGELL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE** is looking for event and 4th of July committee volunteers. And if you are planning a food or game booth for the 4th of July, contact the chamber to secure a booth spot. Contact the chamber if you are interested in becoming a volunteer or to secure a booth spot. Call 874-3901, or stop by the chamber office.

**NOLAN CENTER THEATER** presents "Spirit Untamed," rated PG, June 4-6. Tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children under age 12, for the animation, adventure, family film, which runs one hour and 27 minutes. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

Want more attendance at your meeting or event? Send information for Roundup to wrgsent@gmail.com or call 874-2301. Or go to the Sentinel website, click on the Calendar tab, and submit your entry online.

## Continuing Events

PARKS and RECREATION www.wrangellrec.com

**Pool activities by appointment and reduced capacity, locker rooms are not available:**

Arthritis class, 8:30 - 9:30 a.m., Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Lap swim, 6 - 7:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Lap/tot swim, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., weekdays, 5:15 - 6:15 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, and 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday

Open swim, 5:30 - 7 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; 6:30 - 8 p.m. Friday; 1 - 2 p.m. Saturday

Swim Club, 3:15 - 5:15 p.m., weekdays

Water aerobics class, 10 - 11 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday

**Weight room available by appointment and at reduced capacity:**

6 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 - 7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 6 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 - 8:30 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Saturday

**AA Meetings:** North Star Group meets from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Fridays, St. Philips Episcopal Church.

## The Way We Were In the Sentinel 100, 75, 50 and 25 years ago.

**May 26, 1921**

That the Alaska Sanitary Packing Co. cannery in Wrangell will run this season is now a certainty, a cablegram having been received from O.A. Brown yesterday to that effect. It is not known how long the run will be, but it is expected that the season will be rather short. Last year's salmon harvest in southern Southeast was down more than one-third from 1918, with even lower returns expected this year. The cannery was built in 1918.

**May 24, 1946**

Ray Day, deputy collector of Customs in Wrangell, received the following wire this week from the International Pacific Halibut Commission: "Area 2 halibut landings to May 18, inclusive, are 9.6 million pounds compared to 7.3 million pounds at the same time last year." The catch limit this year in Area 2 is 24.5 million pounds. Area 2 includes waters through Southeast Alaska, British Columbia and the U.S. West Coast.

**May 28, 1971**

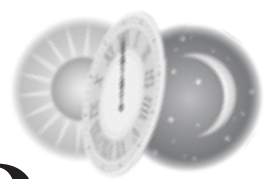
The state ferry Malaspina pulled into Wrangell 16 hours late Monday after playing the major role in rescuing passengers off the ill-fated tour ship Meteor.

The Malaspina was steaming north from Seattle in predawn darkness Saturday with 113 passengers aboard when she received a mayday distress call from the Meteor at 3:45 a.m. The Meteor was afire and had dead and injured aboard. The latest count from Vancouver, where the blackened Meteor finally tied up, was 21 crew members dead and 11 missing. All of the passengers were transferred to the Malaspina and none were hurt. Capt. Harold Payne of the Malaspina maneuvered the ferry to within 100 yards of the blazing Meteor, which had put its passengers in lifeboats and sent them to the Malaspina. The ferry lowered its boats into the water so that passengers could step into them, and the ferry's lifeboats were then hoisted back up to the Malaspina's deck.

**May 30, 1996**

The City of Wrangell officially took over the old Wrangell Institute buildings and land Tuesday morning during a short ceremony. Alaska's U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski handed over the deed to the old school, located on a prime piece of property overlooking Shoemaker Bay. Situated on 134 acres, the former Nore homestead was sold to the city,

which later gave it to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs to build a boarding school. The school opened in 1932 and closed in 1973. The Cook Inlet Region Inc. Native corporation obtained the land from the federal government in 1978, but later found asbestos in the buildings and spent about \$600,000 cleaning up the hazardous material before deciding to relinquish the property. Wrangell Mayor Doug Roberts said the city is "real excited about the potential that the site is going to have."



## Daylight Hours

Date	Sunrise	Sunset	Hours
May 27	4:13a	9:20p	17:07h
May 28	4:12a	9:22p	17:09h
May 29	4:11a	9:23p	17:12h
May 30	4:09a	9:25p	17:15h
May 31	4:08a	9:26p	17:17h
June 1	4:07a	9:28p	17:22h
June 2	4:06a	9:29p	17:24h

# Cruise ships return after Congress votes to waive required stop in Canada

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
AND SENTINEL STAFF

Norwegian Cruise Line was the first operator to resume ticket sales for voyages to Alaska after Congress passed a bill that could help save the state's annual summer pilgrimage of cruise ship visitors.

Norwegian's sailings will start the first week of August.

A few hours after the House approved the measure last Thursday, following earlier passage by the Senate, Carnival Corp. joined Norwegian on the calendar. Carnival's three largest cruise lines said they would run one ship each between Seattle and the bigger ports in Southeast Alaska starting late July:

- Holland America Cruise Line announced 10 sailings between Seattle and Alaska, with the first departing July 24.

- Princess Cruise Line also announced 10 sailings, July 25 through its last Seattle departure on Sept. 26.

- Carnival Cruise Line will run weekly sailings starting July 27, ending mid-September.

Then on Monday, shortly before President Joe Biden signed the measure into law, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines announced it will send two ships to Alaska this summer. Its first sailing out of Seattle is scheduled for July 19, according to its website.

If the six ships scheduled for Alaska cruises fill near capacity, they could bring close to 200,000 visitors north this summer, down from the industry's 1.3 million expected last year before the pandemic put a stop to cruising.

The Alaska Tourism Restoration Act, co-sponsored by the state's two U.S. senators, passed Congress unanimously and will temporarily allow large cruise ships to skip a required stop in a Canadian port while traveling between Seattle and Alaska.

Most large cruise ships visiting Alaska are registered in foreign countries. Federal law prohibits foreign-registered ships from sailing between U.S. ports without stopping at a foreign port along the way — and Canada has closed its ports to cruise ship traffic to protect against the spread of COVID-19.

The congressional action came too late to save the entire summer and also too late to pre-

vent cruise lines from redirecting many of their ships to the Caribbean and elsewhere to operate this year.

Separate from the maritime law, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is requiring that cruise ship operators submit plans for preventing and dealing with COVID-19 cases, and either run a test cruise to try out their protocols or require that 98% of the ship's crew and 95% of passengers be fully vaccinated.

Norwegian Cruise Line announced earlier this month that it will require passengers and crew to show proof of vaccination.

"We remain optimistic that by working with the CDC and local port and government authorities in the destinations we visit that we will be able to resume safe cruising in the U.S. this summer," a Norwegian Cruise Line spokesperson in an email to Anchorage TV station KTUU on May 18.

"This legislation is literally a lifeline for so many of Alaska's small businesses that were struggling, and it means jobs for more Alaskans this summer," said Sarah Leonard, president of the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

"While there is still work to be done, the cruise industry is one step closer to sailing in Alaska this year," said Laziza Lambert, a spokeswoman for an industry group, the Cruise Lines International Association.

Canada and the United States both stopped cruise travel last year during the COVID-19 pandemic, and while the U.S. has moved toward a resumption of cruise voyages, Canada has kept its ban in place.

Small cruise ships and vessels registered in the U.S. have not been affected by the hurdles, and several are already sailing.

Though the operators of some of the largest ships in the Alaska fleet are selling tickets and making plans to work at least a couple of months this summer, onshore tour operators report they need to see how many bookings they get before deciding how many employees they need to add and how quickly they need to get ready for the big ships.



The coaches and wrestlers share the victory moment in the halls at Chugiak High School after the state tournament (from left): Assistant coach Jack Carney, state champ Liana Carney, state champ Ryan Rooney and coach Jeff Rooney.

## Rooney, Carney win state wrestling titles

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

It had been about a dozen years since Wrangell High School wrestlers came home with two state title winners, and this year juniors Ryan Rooney and Liana Carney both took first place in their weight divisions at the state tournament in Anchorage last weekend.

Rooney wrestled in the 160 weight class; Carney in the 135 weight class. It was her second state title; she took first in 2019.

Wrangell racked up the highest score among all Southeast schools at the state meet last Friday and Saturday, regardless of school size, assistant coach Jack Carney reported Sunday evening after the wrestlers arrived back in town.

The girls team took first place in the 2A division (schools are divided into four divisions, based on enrollment, with the largest schools in 4A). The boys took home third-place honors in the 2A division.

Wrangell also took home the Sportsmanship Award in the girls tournament, the coach said.

Carney praised the entire contingent of Wrangell wrestlers and said he already is looking forward to next season, which he expects will start on schedule in October after the pandemic delayed the start of wrestling for this school year.

"We don't even have time to get out of shape," the coach said of the upcoming season this fall. A lot of the wrestlers will go to camps or summer tournaments to stay sharp and improve their skills, he said.

Other Wrangell wrestlers in the top six at state were:

Randy Churchill, a sophomore, placed fourth.

Rowen Wiederspohn, a junior, also placed fourth.

Jake Eastaugh, a junior, placed fifth.

Mia Wiederspohn, a freshman, placed sixth in her weight class.

Other Wrangell wrestlers who went to state were junior Jamie Early, freshman Lily Younce, sophomore Ethan Blatchley and sophomore Steven Bales.

Churchill, in particular, exceeded expectations at the tournament, his coach said. "That kid beat some really tough wrestlers."

Churchill had been wrestling during the season against teammates Rooney and James Shilts, listening and learning and improving his skills, and that made a big difference at state, Carney said. "He beat some kids he wouldn't have beat a month ago."

Eastaugh was ahead on points when he made a mistake and got caught on his back and was pinned, the coach said, otherwise he would have advanced to a higher finish.

Three of Wrangell's wrestlers lost in what's called the Blood Round, the final match before making it to the top six and championship play. "They call it the Blood Round ... because there's a lot of heart" as wrestlers strive to make it into the next round, Carney said.

Wiederspohn had the most pins in the least time among all the boys at the tournament: Four pins in 6 minutes, 59 seconds. Churchill was second, with four pins in 8:23.

"Our boys took fourth out of the tournament for pins with 13 pins in 29:57," the coach said. "Our girls took seventh in team pins with seven in 19:47."

## Assembly

Continued from page 1

The borough is looking at a cost of at least \$15 million to repair water damage and rot, update mechanical systems and rebuild structural components at the public safety building. It has no cost estimates yet for how much to reuse the hospital.

The municipality has been looking at using the empty hospital as temporary housing for public safety building tenants during the renovation project, but it would cost the borough about \$100,000 a year to keep the hospital heated, dry, insured and usable until it is needed. Al-Haddad said the public safety rebuild probably would be a 2022-2023 construction job.

The public safety building has needed major renovations for years, and though a rebuild would be expensive, the replacement cost has been pegged at double the

renovation.

The borough owns city hall, the public safety and hospital buildings and land.

"This is an important discussion for the community to have," the mayor said as he introduced the idea of pivoting to the old hospital as a new home for public safety and city offices.

The borough will work to get more information for the assembly, including an estimate of what it might cost for engineers to provide a complete view of what would be required to rehab and convert the hospital for a new use, Al-Haddad said.

In addition to costly asbestos removal, the building could require replacement or upgrades to its mechanical, electrical, plumbing, data and sprinkler systems, she said. Depending how much work would be required to accommodate the opera-

tional requirements of new occupants, particularly security needs, and redoing floor plans and walls, it could mean "basically gutting that building," Al-Haddad said.

Basic office space is not as much of an issue at the hospital as is more extensive remodeling for court, police and jail facilities, Borough Manager Lisa Von Barga said. "That's where the significant renovations will need to come," she said.

"It absolutely could house people right now," Al-Haddad said. After the borough determines operational, security and other needs of potential new occupants, the administration will get the information for the engineers to prepare an estimate for a more thorough analysis of the work required.

Von Barga said more detailed information on the condition of the hospital

building and the cost of converting it to a new use will help answer the question, "if the building is truly beyond its useful life" and needs to be demolished.

The contract engineering firm will look at several options for public safety building tenants and use of one or both buildings and report back to the borough.

Wrangell could find itself with property to sell, depending whether the public safety building is abandoned, totally rebuilt, or only partially rebuilt and used; depending whether the hospital is converted or becomes surplus property; and depending whether staff move out of city hall to a remodeled hospital.

Whatever isn't used should be sold, Morrison said.

"This is going to be a major, major project for the community," the mayor said.

# FROM THE PUBLISHER

## Postal Service needs to get back its ZIP

By LARRY PERSILY  
Publisher

I know things change and I too sit around with friends and bemoan how it used to be, how we miss the old days, how much better things were then.

Good thing I went online to complain to friends instead of writing a letter. Who knows when it would have arrived.

Though the U.S. Postal Service motto says “neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night” will delay the mail, that has not protected it from politics, poor management at the top and lack of congressional action.

I admit that impatience is one of my many character flaws, but a couple of recent examples struck home — after they arrived.

The Sentinel this year printed its Wrangell visitor guide in Seattle. When the printer finished the job, he delivered 2,600 pounds of guides to the Alaska Marine Lines terminal on the Seattle waterfront for the barge ride to town. That same day, he put 10 copies of the guide into a Priority Mail envelope so that I would see them in Juneau sooner — we thought.

Two days after the barge arrived in Wrangell, the Priority Mail arrived in Juneau.

My compliments to AML for easily defeating the Pony Express.

Then last week, I sent a Priority Mail envelope to my sister in San Francisco. It arrived six days later. The Postal Service website advertises three-day service for the \$7.95 cost, but with the footnote: “The expected delivery data does not come with a money-back guarantee.” Wise decision.

Benjamin Franklin was named the country’s first postmaster general in 1775, and though the service has a long history of moving incredible volumes of mail with efficiency and speed, the ZIP is leaking out of the system in its third cen-

tury.

The postmaster general appointed during the Trump administration — a multimillion-dollar Republican Party donor — came up with a plan to “save” the system. The guy’s austerity plan was to raise rates, cut post office hours, close sorting centers and lengthen the timelines for delivery of the mail.

Sounds similar to Gov. Mike Dunleavy’s plan to “save” the state ferry system by cutting service, selling off ships and raising rates. And we know how well that is working out.

There is no question the Postal Service has a lot of problems. People and businesses don’t send letters nearly as much as they did, and that is cutting deeply into the agency’s revenues. But treating the patient by making the illness worse sure seems unhealthy.

Thankfully, some in Congress got the message, or the letter, whichever arrived first. A bipartisan group of U.S. senators last week introduced legislation to help solve some of the system’s financial problems. An identical bill already has won House approval.

One feature of the legislation would direct the Postal Service to develop a public online mail delivery performance dashboard where customers could view the agency’s on-time delivery metrics by ZIP code each week.

The Senate bill started with 10 Republican cosponsors, giving it enough bipartisan support to defeat a filibuster attempt if all 50 Senate Democrats line up in support.

The legislation, along with President Joe Biden’s efforts to replace Trump appointees on the postal governing board, might be enough to turn the agency in a better direction, or at least get the mail back on schedule.

If so, everyone should buy a stamp and mail “thank you” cards to Congress. The post office could use the money.

# EDITORIAL

## COVID is still here, especially for unvaccinated

Just a couple weeks ago, Ketchikan reported 20 new COVID-19 cases in a single day and had more than 100 active cases in the borough. A week ago, the community still had more than 80 active cases and four people in the hospital.

About 20% of all the cases reported in Ketchikan since the pandemic infected and inflicted its misery on the world more than a year ago have occurred in just the past few weeks. Many of the recent cases are people who did not choose to get vaccinated. Almost 40% of Ketchikan Borough residents 16 and older had not received even their first vaccine dose as of last weekend, according to the state health department.

It’s been a similarly bad month in Fairbanks, which saw a painful spike in cases starting late April. The rise in cases was driven by younger, unvaccinated residents, pushing the hospital to a near crisis.

At one point earlier this month, the state reported that more than 25% of patients in the Interior were hospitalized for COVID-19, five times the percentage for the rest of the state.

“The demographic that we’re seeing now are people who have not been vaccinated,” a Fairbanks hospital official said. “Some of those are people who just haven’t gotten around to get the vaccine. But some are individuals who don’t believe in the vaccine, don’t want to get it. They let our staff know.”

And now, state officials report they are seeing a sharp increase in Alaskans with a more contagious and potentially more deadly strain of the coronavirus first seen in Britain that has spread worldwide. Alaska health officials are urging people to get vaccinated, emphasizing that the shots are effective against the U.K. strain.

That’s a healthy message. Roll up your sleeve — right or left, it doesn’t matter which arm or political persuasion — and say ouch for your community.

And for your community’s economy. Just because Alaska considers itself open for business, as Gov. Mike Dunleavy says, the rest of the world may not. Some cruise companies say they will bypass Ketchikan entirely if it can’t get its numbers under control. That’s a huge blow for a town still reeling from last year’s cruise-less summer.

Overall, Alaska’s COVID-19 case count is declining, as almost 55% of Alaskans age 16 and older had received at least one vaccine dose as of last Friday, according to the state health department.

Wrangell was at 59% with at least one shot in the arm as of last week.

But the vaccination rate in Fairbanks was only 45%, and the tally was even lower in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, at 37%.

Of the dozen COVID-19 deaths reported in Alaska over the past three weeks, state health officials said, seven lived in Fairbanks and five in the Mat-Su Borough.

A vaccination shot could have prevented those deaths.

— The Wrangell Sentinel

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## We need to preserve the biggest of the kings

Tyee is a Native word that has several meanings. The Big One is the one that describes a 30-pound or bigger king salmon.

At the south end of Wrangell Island, there are five rivers that at one time had a lot of big kings, like the one that derby winner Gary Smart caught in 2017. Not all kings are created equal, the genetic strain is what makes the big ones so special. If we lose this genetic strain, it will be lost forever.

More than 70 years ago, the sportsmen in Ketchikan saw this coming and started the first salmon hatchery in Alaska at Carroll Inlet. You can learn more about this from the history online and from a report written by the late Pat Roppel, copies of which are now at the Sitka museum. It will help people under-

stand more about king salmon, its history and hatcheries. I wish I had kept her writings, for I have always enjoyed reading all that she wrote. Her research was fantastic.

The Carroll Inlet hatchery acquired brood stock from the Unuk River, with the genetic strain that still returns to the Ketchikan area to this day, at 35 to 40 pounds. It is also a favorite for tourists, who watch them jump the falls.

We have a choice here in Wrangell. We can wipe out the genetic strain or try and save it for generations to come like they do in Ketchikan. We just need everybody to confront the state and come up with a plan to do so. Would you rather fish cookie cutters at Anita Bay or big Tyees at Earl West?

Salmon with the genetic strain of these fish were released at Earl West some time ago. Most people don’t know about

this, and it doesn’t get much attention, probably because the Stikine run was still strong.

The state of Alaska will not enhance wild stocks with hatchery fish because they are afraid what it would do to the health of wild runs. But that is a different story. Maybe we can get a better strain penned up at Earl West again. But it is going to take time and cooperation from everyone.

Jim Colier

## Cell tower should be built away from people

The installation of a third communication tower would benefit our community, but I question at what cost to the health of the individuals living nearby.

A cell tower will emit a potential threat of radio frequency radiation and not just to the im-

mediate properties.

This cell tower will initially serve Verizon, but in the future three additional carriers could be accommodated on this same pole, producing still more radiation.

Personally, I find it ludicrous to trust the safety-distance information given by those intending to build this tower.

The general populace living in the area appear unaware and uninformed as to what is being considered, and I blame the city of Wrangell for that.

I am NOT against cell towers, but I propose a more remote lo-

cation, away from people, and I feel this is a reasonable request.

Rosemary Ruoff

## House and Senate work to resolve budget differences

On May 10, the Alaska House passed a state budget. On May 19, the Senate passed its version. Now, it is time for the two bodies to come together during a conference committee to negotiate the differences.

The House budget includes

Continued on page 5

Oldest continuously published paper in Alaska



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# Special session

Continued from page 1

The governor has consistently opposed new taxes without public approval at the ballot box.

The House and Senate are not that far apart on much of the budget for the year that starts July 1, though there are differences and a six-member conference committee — three each from the House and Senate — was named to negotiate compromises acceptable to enough members to win passage.

The largest difference between the House and Senate versions of the budget passed in the final days of the regular session was the dividend:

The Senate voted to spend \$1.5 billion, almost one-quarter of the entire state general fund budget, to pay a PFD of between \$2,300 and \$2,400 — about double the average of the past 10 years. It matches the 50-50 split proposed by the governor

The House budget did not appropriate any money for the dividend — not because a majority of members don't want a dividend; they just couldn't agree on an amount or how to pay for it. Much of the House is reluctant to take a bigger withdrawal from the Permanent Fund, as proposed by the governor and voted

by the Senate.

One of the larger issues between the two versions of the budget is a Senate provision to pay a one-time \$1,200 bonus to unemployed Alaskans who go back to work full time. The bonus would be \$600 for Alaskans who find part-time jobs.

The governor this month added Alaska to the growing list of states that is stopping an additional \$300 a week in federally funded unemployment benefits during the pandemic, claiming that the expanded jobless aid is dissuading people from going back to work.

Anchorage Sen. Bill Wielechowski, on the final night of budget deliberations in the Senate, convinced his colleagues to approve the additional assistance of a one-time payment, in lieu of the reduced weekly benefits. It would be paid after the person has completed four weeks of work.

The governor has not publicly announced a position on the employment bonus, should it remain in the budget after House-Senate negotiations.

If the Legislature fails to reach a budget compromise acceptable to the governor before June 1, the state is contractually re-

quired to send notices to many of its employees, warning of possible layoffs if the budget is not adopted by the July 1 start of the fiscal year.

Legislative leaders have said they hope to reach a deal and finish their work before the Memorial Day weekend, though that was looking less likely by mid-week.

Senate Finance Committee Co-Chair Bert Stedman said he did not believe a weekend adjournment is realistic. "I don't think to get a compromise on the dividend and the (Permanent Fund) earnings overdraw is going to be very easy," the Sitka lawmaker said in a meeting with reporters Tuesday.

The governor also has called lawmakers back to a second special session starting Aug. 2 to work on two more constitutional amendments and to decide how to spend from the pot of \$1 billion in federal pandemic relief aid coming to Alaska this year and next.

Under the federal aid formula, Alaska could spend half of the \$1 billion this year and use half in the next budget.

Dunleavy's proposed constitutional amendments would impose a spending limit on the



AP PHOTO/BECKY BOHRER

**House Speaker Louise Stutes speaks to reporters before the start of the special session of the Legislature last Thursday. Gov. Mike Dunleavy called lawmakers back to work to finish the state budget and settle on an amount for this year's Alaska Permanent Fund dividend.**

state budget and would prohibit any new taxes from taking effect without voter approval. His plan also would allow legislators to override a citizens' initiative on taxes, and make it harder for lawmakers to raise the rate of any existing taxes.

It requires a two-thirds majority of each the House and Sen-

ate to place a constitutional amendment before voters — a steep hurdle in the Legislature that is divided over taxes, spending, the size of the dividend, how to pay for the PFD, and whether it is wise to draw more money from the Permanent Fund to pay a larger dividend.

# Wrangell ship visits

Continued from page 1

The Constellation also is scheduled to be in town for the start of the Fourth of July holiday, July 1-2.

The Silver Muse, operated by Silversea Cruises, is on the calendar for three stops in Wrangell in August, with capacity for almost 600 passengers.

Borough staff has heard that the 735-foot Seven Seas Explorer, with capacity to carry 750 passengers and a crew of 550, "may call on Wrangell, and possibly a couple of other cruise lines, but have received no formal notices from Cruise Line Agency of Alaska," Carol

Rushmore, Wrangell's economic development director, advised the borough assembly for its Tuesday evening meeting.

The borough will update its cruise ship schedule as it confirms company plans, she said.

American Cruise Lines and Alaska Dream Cruises have both provided a copy of their safety and health plans to the borough for review, Rushmore wrote. "Alaska Dream Cruises is requiring all crew and passengers to be vaccinated. American Cruise Line has same requirement through end of June

and, according to their plan, will then reevaluate."

Borough staff met last Friday with local tour operators that use the city dock and summer floats during the visitor season for the annual pre-season meeting "to discuss needs, issues, dock and summer float traffic and requirements," Rushmore advised the assembly.

Items discussed included the need to have face masks and hand sanitizer for tour operators, and hydrostatic cleaners for tour vessels and buses.

Rushmore said the borough has con-

firmed with the Wrangell Medical Center that it is prepared to receive COVID-positive patients from a ship "should the need arise," and the borough plans to retain its leased isolation site at the old Sourdough Lodge through the end of September.

"The isolation site provides a location for visitors who may test COVID positive to isolate safely so they can disembark from a cruise ship in Wrangell if necessary," Rushmore advised in her memo to the assembly. The borough is using federal funds to cover the lease payments.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Continued from page 4**  
\$5 million in funding for pre-K grants, an Office of Children's Services position in Wrangell, and funding for Juneau's DIPAC and Petersburg's Crystal Lake salmon hatcheries. The Senate version does not include these items.

Unlike the House budget, the Senate version of the budget includes about a \$2,300 dividend for each Alaskan.

Both budgets include 18 months of forward funding for the Alaska Marine Highway System, 100% of local school bond debt reimbursement, funding for public broadcast-

ing, and money to reopen the Department of Fish & Game Wrangell office.

Both budgets also include a slight increase for the University of Alaska over the cuts proposed by the governor's compact, in hopes of offsetting revenues lost during COVID-19.

The budget process was delayed this year because the Legislature was waiting to learn guidelines for how the state can spend federal COVID relief funds. Both versions of the budget rely heavily on federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act. Those funds will be directed to communities to help avoid local tax hikes, to the visitor industry to help summer businesses stay afloat, and to small businesses and nonprofits to help offset lost revenue.

The Legislature on May 20 started a special session to finish work on the budget and the PFD. We still have a lot of work to do to address our state's structural deficit and figure out how exactly to pay for both an appropriate level of state serv-

ices and a fair dividend. If you have any questions or suggestions on the budget, contact me at [Rep.Dan.Ortiz@AKLeg.gov](mailto:Rep.Dan.Ortiz@AKLeg.gov) or call 907-465-3824.

*Rep. Dan Ortiz*

### Thank you for support

The children of the late Dan Nore wish to express their deep appreciation to those who have offered support and messages of sympathy.

We especially wish to thank the American Legion Post 6 and Legion Auxiliary, Diana and Iver Nore and family, Dana VanSlyke, the Wrangell Volunteer Fire Department, Dr. Sanoe Harrison and the staff at Wrangell Medical Center, Kem and Susan Haggard, the Hospice of Wrangell loan closet, and the many people who prepared meals for our family, sent flowers, and brought food for our father's memorial service.

Your kindness and support have brought us comfort in our time of sorrow.

*Kristy Woodbury, Staci Dilg,  
Dan Nore and  
Lynda Nore*

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# Wrangell drops face mask policy for fully vaccinated

By Larry Persily  
Sentinel writer

Following new federal guidelines, the Wrangell borough has decided that people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 are no longer required to wear face masks in borough facilities, programs and activities.

Individual businesses can set their own policy.

The borough issued the change in guidelines on May 18. As of last week, almost 60% of Wrangell residents age 16 and older had received at least one dose of a vaccine.

"It's the honor system," Mayor Steve Prysunka said last Friday of the mask-free policy that applies only to vaccinated individuals.

Wrangell has joined Anchor-

age, Juneau, Soldotna and other Alaska cities that shed their face-covering policies for vaccinated individuals after the federal guidelines changed. The Fairbanks North Star Borough will drop its face mask requirement in public buildings for vaccinated people as of June 1.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continues to recommend that unvaccinated people wear face masks when indoors or in groups of people.

"Unvaccinated individuals are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in all borough facilities, programs and activities," the May 18 Wrangell borough notice said.

"If you choose not to wear a mask and not get vaccinated,

that's on you," Prysunka said.

Though fully vaccinated residents are no longer required to have a negative result from a recent COVID-19 test or take a test on arrival at the Wrangell airport, unvaccinated travelers arriving from out of state are required to test at the airport. The borough assembly voted to continue the testing requirement for interstate travelers at its meeting Tuesday evening. The ordinance will expire June 30.

Unvaccinated Alaska residents may choose to quarantine 14 days in lieu of taking a COVID test.

"Identifying positive cases through testing upon arrival from outside the state is still one of the most effective ways to keep the community safe

from the virus being brought into town," Borough Manager Lisa Von Bargen advised the assembly in presenting the ordinance.

The borough has not reported a positive COVID case in town since May 6.

The free testing at the airport is scheduled to run through the end of June. The borough is discussing with the SouthEast Regional Health Consortium, which provides the testing, if it would be willing to continue the airport service if the state does not renew its contract that expires June 30, Von Bargen told the assembly on Tuesday.

The borough could use some of its pandemic grant funds to pay for the testing if the state stops covering the expense, the manager said.

## Alaskans will be able to see vaccination records on mobile app

ANCHORAGE (AP) - Alaskans could soon access their vaccination records through their phones and other devices.

The state health department is working to adopt technology that would give residents easy access to immunization records, which could also provide proof of COVID-19 vaccinations.

The state plans to use the consumer-access portal MyIR Mobile. The technology is already available in Arizona, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Dakota, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Registration will be required. There will be no charge.

"I would really like people to think of MyIR Mobile as your old yellow vaccination card, and that is what it is," said Matt Bobo, of the state health department.

After validating their identity, users can get their vaccination records from the state to show on their phone. The system also could alert residents when it's their time for a vaccine booster shot.

There is no timeline on when the MyIR Mobile service will be operational in Alaska, Bobo said.

Officials are working with the state's information technology department to make sure the program is secure. Just this week, the health department took its website offline to investigate what it said was a malware attack.

"There are many health and safety reasons that encourage us to be responsible pet owners," the department's website says. "Dog poop can host a plethora of bacteria and diseases, leading to illnesses in your pets and harmful side effects to humans. Dog poop is not a fertilizer, it does not break down quickly or easily, and it is against municipal law to leave dog poop behind in public spaces."

Both Thomas and Sargent said community awareness seems to have improved of late. "Kudos to those who are helping out," Sargent said.

# School board, teachers agree on 3-year contract

By Sentinel staff

The Wrangell teachers union and school board have agreed on a new three-year contract that starts this summer and includes a 1% raise each year and higher out-of-pocket deductibles for teachers enrolled in the district's insurance plan.

The contract also includes an optional insurance plan with even higher deductibles that would reduce the share of premiums paid by the Wrangell Teachers' Association.

Employers have been increasingly switching in recent years to high-deductible plans in an effort to stem the rising cost of health insurance.

The three years of a 1% raise will cost the district about \$54,000, while the higher-deductible insurance plans will save the district about \$40,000 over the term of the contract, Leeann Wiggins, district business manager, reported Monday.

Under the contract's pay scale for extracurricular activity coaches and advisers, the new agreement adds a swim team coach, at \$4,420 for a school year, and an assistant cross country coach, at \$1,530.

The school board approved the contract at its May 17 meeting. The agreement takes effect July 1 and runs through June 30, 2024.

The contract boosts the annual deductible for the district's standard health in-

surance plan for teachers from \$500 for an individual and \$1,500 for a family to \$1,000 and \$3,000.

The optional high-deductible plan is set at \$3,000 a year for an individual and \$6,000 for a family. Teachers who select the optional plan will be excused from contributing to the district's health insurance premium costs.

The contract's 1% annual raise in the pay scale is in addition to any increase a teacher may earn based on years of experience or additional college credits.

Most of the contract is the same as the previous three-year agreement between the school district and teachers.

## Swimming pool needs lifeguards

By SENTINEL STAFF

The community swimming pool has had to cancel a couple of sessions due to a lifeguard shortage, but a training class is scheduled for June 1-4 and it's still open for sign-up.

"This year we really haven't been able to recruit," said Parks and Recreation Director Kate Thomas. It usually takes about 20 part-timers to staff the pool, some working just a few hours.

Many of the lifeguards are high school students or retirees working limited hours, Thomas said, and it takes a lot of juggling to fill all the slots to keep the pool in operation six days a week. "The more we have, the more we can plug and play."

The lifeguard work pays \$11 to \$13 an hour, depending on experience.

Anyone interested in taking the lifeguard class can sign up as late as the morning of the first class, Thomas said. Call Parks and Recreation at 874-2444 for more information.

## Dogs not to blame for waste piles at park

By Larry Persily  
Sentinel writer

The weeks of cleaning up after others and asking pet owners to pick up what their dogs leave behind looks to have made a difference at Volunteer Park.

Volunteer picker-upper Joan Sargent was at the park last Friday and said, "It's so much better. ... Right now I'm feeling pretty positive."

Sargent, who serves on the Parks and Recreation advisory board, estimates she collected more than 100 pounds of dog waste at the park this spring. "It was solid. You couldn't walk across the entry area without tiptoeing."

She had written the borough assembly last month, recommending that the community "reestablish a quality reputation for this beautiful area."

Parks and Recreation has been working to make people more aware of the problem, asking the public to help out by

cleaning up after their dogs.

The entry area to the park leads to the nature trail, volleyball and tennis courts and baseball fields, said Kate Thomas, Parks and Recreation director. "You have to walk through land mines, for lack of a better term," she said.

Thomas believes the inconsiderate behavior of some dog owners is infectious: If people see one waste pile, they figure it's OK to add another.

The work of Parks and Recreation's limited staff is not sufficient to continually clean up the area, she said. Staff remove trash and clean the bathrooms daily, and go after the dog waste on a weekly basis — along with all their other maintenance, cleanup and upkeep of park areas at Shoemaker Bay, Heritage Harbor, Mt. Dewey, petroglyph beach and the city cemetery.

In addition to dog waste at the entrance to Volunteer Park, it's also a problem on the trail,

Thomas said. Pet owners may think the waste is "camouflaged" if their dog runs off and finds a spot on the trail.

"We're a very leashless-friendly community," and it would help if dog owners paid attention to where their dogs go while on the trail, she said. "All of a sudden, your dog takes a poop and you don't even notice it." But other hikers can just as easily step into it.

"Overall, I think awareness has improved," Thomas said. But she worries about people sliding back into bad habits, particularly people who drive up to the parking lot at the entrance and let out their dogs for a bathroom break — without cleaning up the mess. There is a stand with plastic dog waste bags for people to use, she said.

If it gets too messy again, the department has the option of temporarily closing the entrance to clean up the waste and bring more attention to the problem, the parks director said.

## Salvation Army offers summer lunches, snacks for kids

By SENTINEL STAFF

The Salvation Army has rounded up enough community donations to provide free lunches for 50 children a week during June and July. Separate donations are funding snacks for 75.

"People have donated specifically to make sure kids in Wrangell have food this summer," said Lt. Jon Tollerud, of the Wrangell Salvation Army.

The program is limited and kids will be enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis, so

Tollerud advises parents to call the Army at 874-3753 as soon as possible to sign up their children.

The meals and snacks will start next Monday and run to the end of July. Kids will need to come to the church on Zimovia Highway between 11 a.m. and noon each weekday to pick up their certificate for that day's lunch.

Same for the snacks — come in each day between 11 a.m. and noon for a snack bag, with three helpings handed out on Friday to cover the weekend, Tollerud said.

Volunteers will be there to distribute the lunch certificates and snacks.

Children will have a choice in the lunch program: They can either receive a certificate good for a slice of pizza and a juice box at Nic's Place, or a certificate for that day's menu selection and a juice box at J&W's.

The program will have 25 certificates for each lunch option every day, Tollerud said, and kids must use them during the lunch hour that day — no saving them for dinner or to redeem several in one day.



The graduates have their diplomas in hand and in tradition — and in unison — turn the tassels on their mortarboards as Schools Superintendent Debbe Lancaster shares the fun at the podium.



Co-valedictorians Bruce Smith and Terra Hoyt shared the podium at the high school graduation.



Salutatorian Jade Balasang was among the speakers at last Friday's high school graduation.

PHOTOS BY  
VINCENT BALANSAG,  
OF VINCE PHOTOGRAPHY

## Changes to ferry system advisory board await governor's decision

By Larry Persily  
*Sentinel writer*

Not a single legislator voted against the bill to reconfigure the public advisory board for the Alaska Marine Highway System, taking away from governors the power to appoint half the members.

The Senate president and House speaker would each appoint two of the nine board members, with the governor naming the other five to the panel that would advise the Department of Transportation on operations and long-term planning for the ferry system.

The final decision on the change in state law rests with the governor, who will have until next month to sign or veto the measure. Final legislative passage came May 19 in the Senate, on the last day of the regular legislative session. Gov. Mike Dunleavy's office

in the past has questioned the constitutionality of legislators appointing members to an executive branch board. Dunleavy earlier in the session offered his own proposal to change the 18-year-old law that established the advisory board, retaining for governors the exclusive authority to appoint and remove members.

Dunleavy in his first year in office imposed deep budget cuts on the ferry system, reducing service and leaving some coastal communities without any ferry stops for several months that winter.

The system has always operated with state funding to cover what isn't paid with passenger and vehicle fare revenues, though the state subsidy as a percentage of the total budget had been increasing.

If signed into law by Dunleavy, the new Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board — renamed from an advisory board, but still only with advisory authority — would develop short-term and long-term plans for the ferry system and present them to the Department of Transportation for consideration.

The short-term plan would include budget recommendations; the long-term plan would include a vessel maintenance and replacement plan.

Most of the new board's members would be required to have experience in marine operations, financial management, marketing or other work relevant to managing a ferry system.

In addition to cuts in state funding, the ferry system has been hit by declining ridership and revenues, even before the

COVID-19 pandemic shut down a lot of travel plans last year.

"Restoring reliable and consistent ferry service has been my top priority since I was sent to Juneau, and my seventh year here has proven to be the lucky charm," House Speaker Louise Stutes, who sponsored the bill, said in a prepared statement.

"The marine highway touches virtually every aspect of life in my district," Ketchikan Rep. Dan Ortiz said in the same statement released by the House majority caucus. "Having long-time marine highway expertise helps guide decision-making for the ferries and can only benefit the system and the many Alaskans who rely on it."

A series of choices by prior governors for the design of

new ferries eventually led to costly decisions to sell the system's two unused fast ferries earlier this year to a Spanish tour operator for less than 8 cents on the dollar. The ships, less than 20 years old, cost the state about \$68 million to build, and earned about \$5 million at sale.

Two other ferries, the Tazlina and Hubbard, built just a few years ago to the state's specifications at a combined cost of about \$120 million, each required expensive modifications to install side-loading doors so that the ships could call at smaller ports.

"They will have great influence, if this is done right," Kodiak Sen. Gary Stevens, speaking of the new advisory board, told the Anchorage Daily News last week. "It may not be the entire answer, but it takes us forward."

# Wrangell 1 of 4 cities selected for survey on pandemic hit to tourism

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

Wrangell is one of four Southeast communities selected for a joint U.S. Forest Service and University of Alaska Southeast project to learn more about how the pandemic has affected the tourism industry in the region and what it means for the economy longer term.

The other communities selected for the survey and report are Skagway, Hoonah and Angoon.

"Each one is very unique," said Robert Venables, executive director of the Southeast Conference, which is helping to publicize the online survey.

"Take a look at Skagway, the biggest small port you can get," Venables said of the northernmost community in Southeast which, before the pandemic shut down cruise ship traffic last year, would see close to a million passengers a year in a town of less than 1,000 year-round residents.

Hoonah, population about 800, has been steadily developing its tourism attractions and facilities, with two cruise ship docks and a few hundred thousand summer visitors pre-pandemic.

Angoon, with about 500 residents, "barely has a tourism impact," Venables said.

The Forest Service is helping to fund the project, which is being managed by the university.

"The data will be used by the Southeast Conference and other regional organizations that are working together to understand how these communities and households have been affected by the pandemic and also how to improve conditions in the future," the conference explains on its website.

"The goals of the one-year study (which began last October) are to explore the social and economic effects of COVID-19 on the Southeast Alaska region in general and focusing on four communities," Carol Rushmore, Wrangell's economic development director, said in a report for the borough assembly this week.

The study also intends to "develop an understanding of how communities have adapted to these changes through policy, programs, initiatives or governance structures," Rushmore said.

The online survey is seeking responses on "economic impacts to families from the loss of the summer tourism season," she said.

People can go to the Southeast Conference website for the link to the survey: [www.seconference.org](http://www.seconference.org). Survey participants will be entered in a drawing for a \$100 gift card.

"The survey should take no more than 10 minutes of your time," the organization's website says. "All responses are anonymous and will not be linked to your name or your business name. ... The final report will summarize data from the community at large, not from individual respondents."



PHOTOS BY LARRY PERSILY/ WRANGELL SENTINEL

## Young gardeners at work

Evergreen Elementary School students last week exercised their green thumbs at the school's annual plant and seed sale and garden cleanup and prep for the summer. Fourth grader Brogan Booker spreads fresh dirt in the raised bed as Jacoby Hunt keeps adding to the pile on May 18. Students were busy filling the beds for next year, mixing in coffee grounds and eggshells, said Jenn Miller-



Yancey, lead teacher and assistant principal at Evergreen Elementary. They also were harvesting the last of this year's kale crop, with more harvest work expected before school ends this week, she said. In addition to kale, the garden grows rhubarb, strawberries, potatoes, garlic and tulips. Last week's plant, flower and seed sale included seed-covered pine cones for birds and spider plants, though second grader Sophie Andrews was quick to explain as she peered through the tulips: "We have spider plants but spiders don't actually grow on them."

## OBITUARY

### Joanne Roberts 'lived a colorful life'

Joanne J. Roberts, a 27-year Wrangell resident, died May 13 at the SouthEast Regional Health Consortium's Mt. Edgumbe Medical Center. She was 74, and died of pulmonary disease, her family said.

"Wrangell was her style," her family said. Roberts moved to Alaska with the U.S. Army in 1976 and later, when she grew tired of big cities, left Fairbanks and moved to Wrangell, where she tended bar, worked aboard commercial fishing boats and hunted. "She lived a colorful life."



Joanne Roberts

"She was married five times, and outlived every single husband but one," her family said.

Roberts was born Aug. 9, 1946, in New Hampton, Iowa, to Russell and Adela Springmier. She served 10 years in the Army and was a member of the Elks and American Legion Auxiliary.

She is survived by sons James Pietan, of Juneau, and Michael Pietan, of Iowa, and daughter Julie Wetzell, of Oregon.

A memorial will be held June 12 in Wrangell, with details to follow. Burial will be in Iowa.

## Lawmakers pass low number of bills

By SENTINEL STAFF

While the Alaska Legislature continues to work in special session this week on the state budget and deciding the amount of this year's Permanent Fund dividend, lawmakers managed to pass 34 bills before the regular session ended last week — among the lowest number since statehood.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy will have at least until sometime next month to decide whether to sign or veto the bills, depending on when the Legislature sends the documents to the governor's office.

Among the bills approved by lawmakers:

A measure sponsored by Juneau Rep. Sara Hannan will increase the land within Funter Bay State Marine Park near Juneau to include a cemetery holding the graves of 30 to 40 Aleuts who died there during World War II. The measure would prevent the land from being sold or developed. The federal government forcibly moved In-

igenous residents of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea to Southeast in 1942, holding them in inadequate housing. Many died and are buried at the site at the northern end of Admiralty Island.

Juneau Rep. Andi Story's bill is intended to simplify the Department of Natural Resources' lease renewal process for aquatic farms that raise oysters, other shellfish and kelp. The bill makes the aquatic farm lease renewal process consistent with other lease renewals at the department, cutting the time in half to 90 days, Story said.

Legislation sponsored by Juneau Sen. Jesse Kiehl will reduce the time a property owner has to wait before taking possession of a vehicle abandoned on the property. Current law makes a property owner wait six months; the bill would shorten that to 30 days. The Alaska Municipal League supported the bill, noting: "Abandoned vehicles plague local governments."



# Alaska adds jobs, still down from a year ago

JUNEAU (AP) - Alaska had 19,100 more jobs in April than it did the same month in 2020, but the numbers still lagged what they were before the pandemic, the state labor department reported last Friday.

There were an estimated 297,200 nonfarm jobs in Alaska last month, compared to 278,100 in April 2020 but down from 322,400 in April 2019, the report shows.

The unemployment rate in Alaska was 6.7% in April versus the national rate of 6.1%.

The unemployment rate in Wrangell was 7.6%, a big improvement from 12.9% a year ago.

The report provides a comparison to April 2020, the first month in which huge job losses hit as pandemic fears prompted business closures and restrictions. The department said industries that recovered the largest numbers of jobs last month were those that took the biggest hits last spring, such as leisure and hospitality, which last month had 6,300 more jobs than a year earlier.

Retail gained 3,400 jobs, and education and health care had 4,600 more jobs last month than in April 2020, the report said.

On the other end, the oil and gas sector had 2,600 fewer jobs last month than in April 2020, and mining and logging had 1,800 fewer workers.

The health care sector has recovered to pre-pandemic, the report states.

State Labor Commissioner Tamika L. Ledbetter last week said the economy is showing positive signs as she announced the state will stop participating next month in a federal program that provides an extra \$300 a week in unemployment aid. Ledbetter said there were more job openings than applicants.

Some legislators have raised concerns with the decision. The state Senate last week included in its version of the budget \$10 million for one-time bonuses of \$1,200 to residents with an unemployment insurance claim as of May 19 who later accept full-time work in Alaska, with the intent that such bonuses would be paid after four weeks of work.

The proposal also calls for one-time bonuses of \$600 for those who take part-time work, with the same conditions.

The Senate and the House passed different versions of the budget last week and are working to reconcile and come up with a single spending plan acceptable to a majority of legislators.



The Southeast Division 2A second-place Wrangell High School cheer squad (top row, from left): Aaliyah Messmer, Cassady Cowan, Lily Younce, Sierra Ely, Savannah Smith, Grace Miller and Mercedes Morgan; (bottom row, from left) coach Stephanie Cartwright, Brodie Gardner and Alisha Armstrong.

## Cheer squad takes second in Southeast

By SENTINEL STAFF

The Wrangell High School cheer squad placed second in Division 2A in this year's virtual Southeast regional competition, and now they have the plaque and medals to prove it.

The squad sent in videos of their four routines to the judges back in March, and the awards just arrived last week, said coach Stephanie Cartwright.

In addition to the team award, Wrangell squad members Aaliyah Messmer and Brodie Gardner were named to the 15-member all-conference

squad, Cartwright said.

Schools were required to submit four videos in the competition: A sideline cheer, a timeout, a structured cheer and a halftime performance of 2½ minutes, the coach said.

Squad members were Messmer, Gardner, Cassady Cowan, Lily Younce, Sierra Ely, Savannah Smith, Grace Miller, Mercedes Morgan and Alisha Armstrong.

Cartwright said it's been a few years since Wrangell won the second place trophy. Haines won first among the smaller schools this year.

# State health department website offline after malware attack

JUNEAU (AP) - The state health department website was the target of a malware attack, officials said, weeks after a similar attack affected the state's court system.

The department in a statement May 18 said its website was taken offline the day before,

when an investigation started. The statement did not say when the cyberattack was discovered.

The department's website was still offline as of Tuesday.

Investigators were trying to determine if any personal or confidential information was compromised.

The state's online COVID-19 vaccine appointment scheduling and data dashboards were not affected; they are hosted by outside sources and still can be accessed through covid19.alaska.gov, the department said.

Health officials said they did

not know who was behind the attack, why the department was targeted, and whether it was related to any other recent cyberattacks.

The chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court said earlier this month that a cybersecurity attack that resulted in the court

system disconnecting its online services was first detected April 29 and that there was no ransom demand. The court system has been coming back online, announcing last week that the public could again access an online court case and records system and pay fines and fees online.

## Police make drug bust at post office

By SENTINEL STAFF

Wrangell police, assisted by several other law enforcement agencies, arrested Wilson Taylor Boon, 32, on a felony drug charge at the post office May 19.

Boon was being held at the Wrangell jail as of Monday on a \$10,000 cash bail.

He was arrested in possession of 84 grams of methamphetamine, almost three ounces, said Wrangell Police Lt. Bruce Smith.

"U.S. Postal Service employees in Wrangell

intercepted a suspicious package. A search of the package revealed it contained a controlled substance," according to a press release from the city. Boon was arrested when he picked up the package.

The investigation is ongoing.

Wrangell is part of the Southeast Alaska Cities Against Drugs task force, along with Petersburg and Juneau, which assisted with the arrest, as did personnel from the U.S. Postal Service and FBI.

## SEAPA still reviewing fire damage

The Southeast Alaska Power Agency continues to review damage and repair costs after a fire at its Zimovia Highway

warehouse and office building May 13.

The fire did not affect electrical service to the community.

The Sentinel last week incorrectly reported the fire caused "minimal damage." The news report should have said SEAPA was "appreciative of the rapid response of the Wrangell Volunteer Fire Department, which minimized damage to the structure and its contents."

## Police report

Monday, May 17

Citizen assist.

Suspicious noise.

Reckless driving complaint.

Tuesday, May 18

Violation of conditions of release.

Disabled vehicle.

Agency assist: Search and rescue.

Agency assist: Public Works Department.

Found property.

Wednesday, May 19

Agency assist: Harbor Department.

Motor vehicle accident:

Driving under the influence.

Drug interdiction arrest for misconduct involving a controlled substance.

Noise complaint.

Thursday, May 20

Special-events permit.

Dog complaint.

Hazardous play.

Deer complaint.

Friday, May 21

Agency assist: Ambulance.

Suspicious activity.

Traffic stop: Citation issued for driving while license cancelled.

Agency assist: U.S. Forest Service.

Saturday, May 22

Agency assist: Vehicle unlock.

Citizen complaint.

Parking complaint.

Sunday, May 23

Suspicious vehicle.

Theft: Unfounded.

Agency assist: Ambulance.

Traffic stop.

Disorderly conduct:

Warning for loud music.

During this reporting period there were nine agency assists for the Hoonah Police Department and five subpoenas served.

## PUBLIC NOTICES ARE IMPORTANT

These notices are published for public information and are designed to keep you informed on current issues and actions of the courts and local, state and federal governments. Please take time to read them.

# Alaska Fish Factor

By LAINE WELCH Fisheries columnist

## Recycled fishing nets turned into fiber to make outerwear

Grundens is using recycled plastics from old fishing gear for a new line of rugged casual wear, and the first batch contains contributions from Cordova.

Grundens, whose motto is "We are fishing," is the go-to brand for outerwear and foul-weather gear for mariners around the world. The company, which originated in Sweden in 1911, debuted its NetSource Collection this spring. The men's shorts and women's leggings use ECONYL, a regenerated nylon fabric that uses recycled fishing nets as the raw material.

The company connected with the Copper River Watershed Project, which collects the fishing nets and gets prepares them for shipping to Europe, where they are recycled into plastic pellets or, in this case, fibers.

"We believe it's really important to use our brand voice to help protect and maintain healthy marine environments and to lend a hand where we can," said Mat Jackson, Grundens' chief marketing officer. "At some point, you've got to just start doing it. And Cordova seemed like a tangible opportunity."

"Cordova is moving full steam ahead," said Nicole Baker, of Net Your Problem, who helped make the Grundens connection. Baker, a former Bering Sea fisheries observer, has helped jump-

start fishing gear recycling programs in Alaska since 2017.

"The gill net fleet is pretty dialed in and seines are made out of the same type of plastic, so those two gear types can be recycled together," she said.

"Right now, it's just a small part of our overall collection, but we seek to expand it to other items, including foul-weather gear. It's something we really believe in," said Grundens spokesman Corey Lowe.

"We're aware of the amount of ghost nets and plastics in the ocean, so whether we're doing it or our competitors, we want more of it to end up in the recycling supply chain. We see it as a rising tide lifts all boats kind of thing and positive for the industry overall," Lowe said.

He added, "Hopefully, when fishermen buy something from us later on, it's kind of cool to think hey, my net is now hanging off my shoulders as a jacket or something."

Grundens also is now using 100% biodegradable packaging called PLA whose raw material is glucose from corn starch. It fully decomposes in less than one year. By June, all products will be shipped in compostable eco-packaging. "Grundens encourages other brands to follow suit and increase the rate at which plastic poly bags are eliminated from the apparel supply chain," a press report said.

### Recycling road trip

Grundens also has its eye on old fishing gear from Bristol Bay, where the borough will discuss a funding request from Net Your Problem at its June 7 meeting.

Founder Nicole Baker said she had "tentative commitments" from the Regional Seafood Development Association, the Bristol Bay Economic Development Council and Grundens to help pay for the first year of recycling there.

"If that gets approved, cross our fingers, we will be able to start in 2022," Baker said.

She and team members also will be in Cordova on June 8 and in Homer in mid-June to talk with people about getting a program going in those communities. They will head to Dutch Harbor on June 18.

In Southeast Alaska, Friends of Recycling in Haines is collecting fishing nets and RecycleWorks in Juneau is doing the same at Aurora Harbor. Kodiak is accepting trawl nets and "things are in the works" for other gears, Baker said.

The Dillingham program is defunct, Baker said, and the landfill there doesn't accept fishing nets.

"I'm hoping that those two forces will encourage fishermen and other businesses to work with us to get something going again," she said.

Baker is doing a survey to estimate the amount of fishing gear available for recycling in

Alaska, and said "every single fisherman with the exception of one has said they think recycling is a better option for their gear than the landfill."

The problem, she said, is "how do we pay for it?" She added, "Do our values and morals align with what budgets we have and other alternatives costs?"

Much of it falls to human behavior.

### Dutch does it again

Dutch Harbor easily held on to the title of the nation's top fishing port, Naknek laid claim to No. 2 in terms of dollars crossing the docks, and salmon toppled lobster as America's most valuable fish.

Those are a few takeaways from the Fisheries of the U.S. report by NOAA Fisheries for 2019. It also covers trade, mariculture and more for nearly every fish in the sea.

Dutch Harbor was the leading port for fish landings for the 23rd year running with 763 million pounds worth \$190 million.

The Aleutian Islands, home to North America's largest processing plant at Akutan, ranked second (589 million pounds), and Kodiak placed third for landings (397 million pounds).

For value, New Bedford, Massachusetts, held on to the top spot for the 20th year at

\$451 million, due to landings of pricey scallops.

Naknek ranked second for catch value at \$289 million for 206 million pounds, followed by the Aleutians (\$149 million), Bristol Bay (\$129 million) and Kodiak (\$120 million).

Of all the seafood species caught by U.S. fishermen, Pacific salmon had the highest value at \$707 million for 840 million pounds. Alaska accounted for 99% of the total U.S. salmon catch.

The average salmon price to Alaska fishermen was 81 cents a pound in 2019, down from 99 cents in 2018.

Alaska pollock was tops for fish processed into fillets and other forms (1.6 billion pounds, worth \$2.2 billion). Second was sockeye salmon (211 million pounds, at \$1 billion).

In all, U.S. fisheries produced 9.3 billion pounds in 2019 worth \$5.5 billion, on par with 2018. Alaska fisheries generated 60% of the U.S. catch by volume and 33% of the value.

The U.S. imported 6 billion pounds of seafood (\$22.2 billion) and exported 2.8 billion pounds (\$5.2 billion) for a trade deficit of \$17 billion.

### Salmon watch

At Copper River's second opener on May 20, New Peter Pan Seafood paid \$12.60 per pound for sockeyes and \$19.60 for kings, an all-time high.

## CLASSIFIED/LEGALS

### FREE

**SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS**, two Ubiquiti ceiling-mounted video cameras and network video recorder. No cables. Free. Available at the Sentinel office. Call 874-2301, ask for Amber.

### RUMMAGE SALE

**HUMONGOUS** sale at St. Philips 9 to 11 a.m. Saturday. Pay what you want.

### FOR SALE

**READ ALL ABOUT IT!** Four different autographed books regarding our history: Stikine River, Anan, petroglyphs, Wrangell. Purchase them at your local stores or call 874-3665.

### HELP WANTED

**WRANGELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS** is accepting applications for the following position: Assistant Maintenance Director: This is a full-time, year-round classified position with benefits earning \$19.97 to \$30.23 an hour. The Assistant Maintenance Director assists the Director in maintaining school buildings and grounds to ensure full and productive use of district facilities. The position requires a high school diploma or equivalent, experience in building and

**Alaskan**  
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907-772-4000  
ALASKABROKER.COM

### HELP WANTED

**ROBERTS CONSTRUCTION** is looking for carpenters and laborers. Pay DOE \$25-\$45 an hour. Call Doug at 425-785-9283.

### HELP WANTED

**OBI Seafoods** in Petersburg is looking for employees for summer salmon season. We have some early spots as well. Call Lori or Martha at 907-772-4294 for details.

### FOR RENT

**3-BEDROOM**, 1½-bath townhouse in Wrangell, quiet neighborhood. \$1,200 per month plus tax, 1-year lease. Call 907-738-6639.

### CITY & BOROUGH OF WRANGELL PUBLIC NOTICE

Wrangell Municipal Light & Power will be switching to diesel generation for the annual Tyee Lake maintenance and transmission line work.

The diesel run is scheduled to start at 8 a.m. Tuesday, June 1, and is scheduled to end 8 a.m. Wednesday, June 9.

We are kindly asking the community to conserve electricity as much as possible during the annual diesel run. If you have any questions or concerns, call the WMLP office at (907) 874-3602.

Dominique O'Connor, Electric Dispatch Secretary  
City & Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish May 27, 2021

### CITY & BOROUGH OF WRANGELL INVITATION TO BID Creosote-Treated Timber Piles

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, is accepting sealed bids for the procurement of Creosote-Treated Timber Piles. Work consists of all activities necessary to provide the materials and deliver them to the designated FOB point.

Sealed bids will be accepted until 10 a.m. prevailing time on June 3, 2021, and publicly opened and read at that time. The Contract Documents are available in electronic format and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website ([www.wrangell.com](http://www.wrangell.com)) under the Bids and RFPs Section.

Lisa Von Barga, Borough Manager  
City and Borough of Wrangell

Publish May 27, 2021

### WRANGELL COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION MAINTENANCE FACILITY PRE-ENGINEERED METAL BUILDING SUPPLY CONTRACT

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT** the Wrangell Cooperative Association (WCA) is soliciting bids for supplying a pre-engineered steel metal building. The lump-sum bid shall include all materials, structural steel, secondary steel such as purlins and girts, insulated metal panels, door framing, mechanical openings and misc. metal fabrications as shown on the drawings. Installation of the metal building is not a part of the bid.

**To receive the Invitation for Bid (IFB)**, please contact: 907-874-3077 office of Bill Willard. Each firm must register with WCA by sending an email to: [wwillard@wca-t.com](mailto:wwillard@wca-t.com) to receive the IFB documents. The IFB documents will also be posted on The Plans Room. **Bids from unregistered bidders will not be accepted.** The required email must include the firm name, address and telephone number. No faxed or oral bids will be allowed.

**Bid Submission Deadline:** To be considered, bids must be emailed to Bill Willard, Wrangell Cooperative Association, at [wwillard@wca-t.com](mailto:wwillard@wca-t.com) by **2 p.m. local time, on JUNE 4, 2021.**  
**Publish: May 6, 13, 20 and 27, 2021**

# Village needs to raise \$1.86 million to buy back ancestral land

By STEWART HUNTINGTON  
Special to  
Indian Country Today

TAZLINA — Catholic missionaries first started venturing into Alaskan territory in the late 19th century, not long after Russia sold the land to the United States for two cents per acre.

The Catholic Church built missions and churches and, in the 1950s, bought land in the Copper River Valley from the U.S. government at \$1.25 an acre for a mission school largely serving Native students.

Now, 50 years after the once-thriving school was shuttered, the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau wants to sell the 462-acre property back to its Indigenous inhabitants for more than \$4,000 an acre — or put it up for sale on the open market.

And that has the citizens of the tiny Native Village of Tazlina — a federally recognized tribe — scrambling to raise the \$1.86 million asking price so they can regain stewardship of their ancestral lands.

“It’s the Copper River. It’s where we’ve always fished traditionally ... for thousands and thousands of years,” said Gloria Stickwan, president of the Tazlina Village Council.

“I would like to see that land back for our tribal members because ... if that land is sold (to outsiders) our fishing sites could be taken away and that concerns me for tribal members not to be able to fish. It’s how they provide for their families.”

By all accounts, the village and the church share a warm relationship, and the church reached out to the village about the sale. It is less clear how readily the church could sell the property on the open market or how it arrived at its asking price.

Congress placed restrictions on the property in 1953 when it authorized the sale of the land. The law required that the land is to be used for a “mission school” and that “the coal and other mineral deposits in the land” shall remain the property of the federal government. When the church tried once before to sell the land in 1976, those restrictions scuttled the deal. A subsequent effort to get Congress to rewrite the 1953 law stalled and the same restrictions that torpedoed the 1976 sale remain in force today.

Further, the deed to the property issued in 1956 states that the church’s rights to the property do not supercede preexisting fishing rights “as may be recognized and acknowledged by the local customs.”

“The title to that property is clouded,” said Matt Newman, a staff attorney with the Native American Rights Fund’s Anchorage office. “This just isn’t a viable commercial property. ... It could not be available for purchase in any way besides to the people who have historical use of the land.”

Church officials declined to comment on the proposed sale.

“The Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau does not discuss details of its business transactions,” Chancellor John Harmon wrote in an email to Indian Country Today. “The Archdiocese has established a very good working relationship with the Village of



JOHN TIERNEY/INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY VIA AP

The spring thaw starts to appear along the Tazlina River in this April photo. The Catholic Church wants to sell 462 acres that once housed the Copper Valley mission school to the Native Village of Tazlina. The tribe is scrambling to raise the nearly \$1.9 million asking price so it can regain stewardship of its ancestral land.

Tazlina and looks forward to the sale of the property.”

The Copper River drains off the Wrangell and Chugach mountains in Southcentral Alaska, east of Anchorage, feeding once-abundant salmon fisheries as it coursed through major points of the territory’s history.

Ahtna Athabaskan hunters discovered the copper deposits in the river valley that featured prominently in ancient regional trade routes.

Russian fur seekers ventured up the valley in the 18th century, initiating some of Alaska’s first Indigenous-colonial contacts. And the trans-Alaska oil pipeline — which transformed the state’s economy in the 1970s — is still visible along stretches of the Richardson Highway that parallel the river.

By the 1940s, Jesuit Priest John Buchanan was pushing for development of a school for Native youth. In 1953, Congress agreed, authorizing the Department of the Interior to sell the acreage to the church for the purpose of establishing a mission school.

The priest opened the Copper Valley School a couple of years later with a combined staff and student body of about 70 people. Enrollment peaked at more than 150 in the mid-1960s, as Native and some non-Native students were brought in from around the state. It was one of 367 Indian boarding schools across the country established in the 19th and 20th centuries.

A 2005 survey by the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska Anchorage documented the impact of boarding schools in the state.

“The history of formal schooling for Alaska Natives, from the time of the U.S. acquisition of Alaska in 1867 to the present, is a troubled one,” the survey concluded. “The goal of many educators at the time of mandatory boarding schools was to assimilate people of different cultures and ethnicities into the dominant culture. This cost many students not only the loss of their language, but also their culture and identity. These practices had lasting effects on individual stu-

Continued on page 12



JOHN TIERNEY/INDIAN COUNTRY TODAY VIA AP

The Native Village of Tazlina, a federally recognized tribe, is trying to raise money so it can buy 460 acres of ancestral lands from the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau. The land once held a mission school. Tazlina had 270 residents in 2019, according to the state.

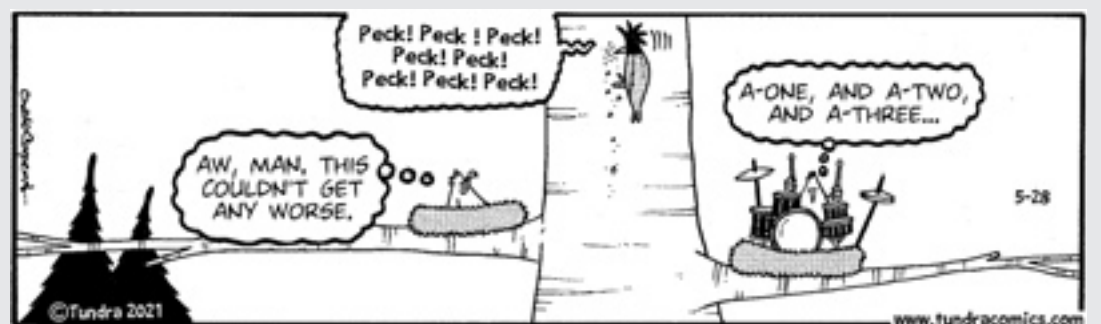




PHOTO BY LARRY PERSILY/ WRANGELL SENTINEL

## The new way to take pictures

Elevate USA finished flying its drone over Wrangell last week, taking photos and gathering digital data of the terrain from a pulsing laser aimed at the ground, known as LiDAR. The company was in town to finish the aerial work on its borough contract, which covers almost 1,400 acres from the north end of Wrangell Island to south and east of Heritage Harbor. Andy Dietrick (above) preps the drone for another flight May 19. He and Cole Smith, owner of the Portland-based company, were on their second trip to Wrangell to fly the drone, which has about a four-foot wingspan and weighs 20 pounds before they hang the 2½-pound camera and laser unit on the underside. The remote-controlled drone can stay airborne for 25 to 30 minutes on rechargeable batteries, and flies at just under 14 mph when collecting data, Smith said. The drone constantly checks in with satellites to verify its position as it flies a grid over the area.

## Tribal land

Continued from page 11

dents, their families, and communities.”

The Copper Valley School shut down in 1971 when the state of Alaska — after numerous lawsuits — agreed to build schools in communities throughout the state rather than continue a mandatory boarding school policy for Native students.

In 1976, the structure was destroyed by fire and the church made its first effort to sell the land.

That year, construction of the oil pipeline was in full swing. Large quantities of high-quality gravel and sand were needed for the work, and yards of it lay right near the surface along the Richardson Highway on the boarding school property. The church seized a business opportunity and sold the property to a group called One-Eleven Associates that planned to sell the gravel and build housing to provide shelter for workers along the pipeline route.

But One-Eleven ran into roadblocks. Officials realized they didn't own the rights to the gravel on the property, and the restrictions in the deed prevented “the use of the land by owners for housing, or purposes other than a mission school,” according to congressional documents.

The company, unable to get financing, lobbied Congress to remove the “mission school” reference and amend the mineral rights language from the 1953 act authorizing the sale of the property.

The bill with the amended language sailed through a Senate committee but ran into headwinds when Interior Secretary John Kyl balked at relinquishing the rights to the sand and gravel under the property.

That “would appear to be a generous gift of large quantities

of mineral materials to the Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska or a purchaser from him,” Kyl wrote in June 1976 to the chairman of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs.

“The value of the material was not included in the price paid for the land and the conveyance to One-Eleven Associates did not include title to the minerals,” he wrote. “We know of no basis or justification of giving the Catholic Bishop or One-Eleven Associates this extra benefit and therefore oppose the enactment of this provision.”

The bill died and the church resumed ownership of the property from One-Eleven Associates, with the original restrictions on the property intact.

Legal issues surfaced again in a claim brought in 2014 against the church for a portion of the Copper River property. The case was argued in state court by Newman, of the Native American Rights Fund, who represented the family of Stickwan in an effort to regain possession of a family fishing site.

For generations, family members had operated a fish wheel on the banks of the Copper River. The wheel, fitted with baskets, harnesses a river's current to spin and scoop up salmon as they travel to spawning grounds upstream. It is a traditional fishing apparatus ubiquitous in Alaska that often plays a central role for families and communities.

“It wasn't just fishing at fish camp,” said Tazlina Village citizen Donna Renard, who was not a party to the lawsuit but who has fished her entire life in the region. “We learned our life lessons down there. That ground is where generations of my family walked, so everywhere I walk at fish camp I'm walking in their footprints.”

In 2015, the Stickwan family prevailed and won possession of its 1.3-acre fish wheel site on the river and a legal right of way to it over other church property. Many other Tazlina families could bring similar claims, according to Newman, though none has come forward.

“Individuals have a very strong claim to large swaths of that church land,” he said, noting that any potential buyer of the property would surely weigh the possibility of future litigation.

Stickwan remains puzzled that her family is alone in asserting claims to fishing sites.

“I tried to talk to other families that were using that area, tribal members, but they did not get involved,” she said. “And I couldn't force them to. I couldn't speak up for them because it's their responsibility to talk for themselves and they wouldn't.”

The reluctance may be rooted in the general atmosphere of comity that pervades the relationship between the Catholic Church and Tazlina.

Although the school has been closed for generations of students, an active alumni association still exists and holds reunions every August in the village.

“We get about 50 every year,” said Copper Valley School Association President Stephen Gemmel. “One year we had more than 300. It was RVs and tents for as far as you could see.”

And it persists despite sometimes strained relations.

After the school burned in 1976, the site fell into ruin and became a dumping ground. For decades, villagers complained of the eyesore and environmental dangers at the site.

Eventually, federal regulators stepped in. In 2013, Environmental Protection Agency investigators identified asbestos

contamination and ordered the archdiocese to clean up the 30-acre school site. The church complied and the work was completed later that year, EPA records show.

The cleanup costs apparently factored into the calculations behind the church's asking price for the school land. Villagers said church officials told them the church set the price for the property at \$1.86 million — which comes to \$4,025 per acre — because the church has to recoup the money it spent on the cleanup.

“At that price (the property) would have to have some substantial improvements,” said James W. Riley, a real estate agent in Willow. There are no structures on the property.

Nonetheless, Tazlina villagers are pressing ahead with fundraising.

The terms of the original contract the village signed with the archdiocese gave the villagers until October 2021 to raise the money. Last year, because of the pandemic, the church extended the deadline to October 2022.

“Before the church put the land on the open market, they did reach out to Tazlina because of the great partnership we've had over the years,” said Marce Simeon, village administrator and a tribal citizen.

“We're especially grateful and thankful that the church was able to provide that one-year extension for us. It definitely makes it more of a possible goal,” she said.

The Village's GoFundMe page had raised \$97,885 as of May 14 and the Great Land Trust of Southeastern Alaska has pledged about \$600,000 to purchase a portion of the property to put in a conservation easement.

“We have a long way to go,” said Kristin Carpenter, an outside consultant hired by the village to

## No more Zoom

Continued from page 1

semblymember Ryan Howe said, in support of the resolution making the change.

The resolution repealed an emergency ordinance that amended municipal code for online meetings.

As Lane explained in her presentation for the assembly, face coverings will not be required for fully vaccinated individuals at in-person meetings. However, following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, “unvaccinated individuals are strongly encouraged to wear face coverings in City Hall and the borough assembly chambers.”

The change back to in-person meetings recognizes “updated COVID-19 health guidelines, advisories and policies of the CDC and the state ... and recognize(s) the level of vaccination in the community,” Lane told the assembly.

Assembly members Tuesday evening also approved spending up to \$60,000 in federal disaster funds to continue the borough's lease of the Sourdough Lodge from Harding Rentals for use as an alternate isolation site if needed to house COVID-positive individuals.

The assembly approved a lease extension for July through September. The borough has used federal funds to lease the property since last June.

Borough Manager Lisa Von Barga pointed to the resumption of cruise ship traffic to town, along with an influx of summer visitors and workers, as reasons to maintain an alternate isolation site for emergency use.

The lease cost will depend on whether an infected individual is housed at the facility. The rate is \$5,000 a month for standby availability, and \$15,000 a month if occupied.

Borough officials “see extending the alternate isolation site lease through September as a way to support economic recovery in Wrangell. The site provides the necessary safety net for visitors to Wrangell in the case of a positive test result,” Von Barga told the assembly in her presentation for the funding request.

The borough surveyed bed and breakfast operators in town to determine if any could serve as a lower-cost alternative isolation site. “Thankfully, booking levels are VERY positive” ... (and) none of them have capacity to address the isolation needs of a guest who might test positive,” Von Barga said.

assist in fundraising. “But we're optimistic.”

And hopeful.

Villagers are also driven to reclaim the land as the salmon runs appear to be dwindling.

“There have been several years now that the fish run has been low,” Stickwan said. “We have not been able to catch what we usually catch. ... The run is not healthy.”