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Developers present plan to turn old hospital property into high-end senior living

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

The borough has been trying to get the old hospital property off its hands for the better part of a year. After a \$360,000 price cut and months of languishing on a public surplus website, the property has attracted its first potential investors.

Jim Freeman, chief development officer of California-based restaurant chain Jimboy's Tacos, his associate California-based business consultant Kevin Jones and Jimboy's Chief Financial Officer Erik Freeman shared their vision with borough officials and committees at the Jan. 12 Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

Their proposed use for the site? A high-end senior living center that could attract out-of-state residents.

"An independent senior living center is not a nursing home," Erik Freeman told commissioners. "These are independent individuals, they don't need assistance on a daily basis to live."

The target customer is a middle to upper-middle class retiree who is "looking

to leave the state that they're in" for the small-town feel and recreational opportunities Wrangell offers, he continued. They'd be marketing to "a very niche type of individual."

The 33,000-square-foot former hospital building, which has been unused since SEARHC moved out two years ago, has 14 patient rooms and 12 exam rooms. He suggested retrofitting the building to accommodate 20 to 37 guests in apartment-style rooms. The concept photos he shared with commissioners depicted high ceilings and mountain lodge decor.

The site's proximity to town, the airport and the golf course make it an attractive candidate for this kind of development, explained Jim Freeman.

Jones and the Freemans have offered to pay \$350,000 for the land and building — \$120,000 less than the reduced asking price of \$470,000, which covers only the cost of the land. At its Dec. 20 meeting, the assembly gave the borough permission to accept offers lower than the asking price if buyers intended

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School district draft budget draws down fund balance to cover revenue shortage

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

If not for drawing on its fund balance, the Wrangell School District's 2023-2024 budget would come up short.

However, by drawing \$112,000 from its general fund balance, the first draft of the budget matches revenues with expenditures.

Tammy Stromberg, the district's business manager, presented the draft to the school board in a work session on Jan. 16. In the draft budget, total expected revenues for the 2023-2024 school year are \$5,036,098, whereas expenditures total \$5,148,136, a difference of \$112,038. Drawing on savings covers the gap.

"We are projecting expenses in excess of revenue, but we're not in the danger zone," Stromberg told the board. "Our fund balance is healthy. We're not in danger of running out of fund balance. We're at a good spot."

The proposed draw would bring down the fund balance to an estimated \$632,550 as of June 2024, slightly more than half of the \$1.181 million balance in June 2021.

The district has been drawing down its fund balance in recent years as it tries to manage its finances with less state assistance and inflation. State funding is based on student count, and Wrangell's enroll-

ment is down from before the pandemic.

However, Stromberg questioned the budget's sustainability beyond 2024 due to various factors such as the end of the state's hold-harmless benefits that gradually ease the revenue loss for districts with declining enrollment, grant funds used for principals' salaries expiring and the uncertainty whether the Legislature will approve any increase in the per-student funding formula.

There has not been an increase in the base student allocation since 2017 other than a 0.5% raise for this year.

"I believe a 20% to 25% increase (in the state funding formula) would allow district funding to 'catch up' to the effects of inflation over the years and ease pressure placed on municipalities who are also dealing with decreased support from state programs," Stromberg said.

Wrangell's enrollment is around 265 students this year and is projected to be about the same next school year. It was over 300 the year before the COVID-19 pandemic drove more parents toward homeschooling or correspondence programs for their children.

Payroll takes the biggest chunk of the budget at a little more than \$4 million, or 78%

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WORD PLAY



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Jessica Stewart smiles after winning her first game at the inaugural Scrabble group last Thursday at St. Philip's Episcopal Church parish hall. The group plans to meet regularly and hopes to add more players to its ranks.

Friends wrangle words in new community Scrabble group

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

Wordsmiths, fans of crossword puzzles, word nerds and casual spellers alike now have a place to test their knowledge and battle it out with friendly competition.

A new community Scrabble group started playing the popular tile letter game last Thursday in the St. Philip's Episcopal Church parish hall.

The group began when teacher Tracey Martin decided to gauge the town's interest since she missed playing. She posted in the Wrangell Community Group Facebook page and the post exploded with responses, among which was one from Kimberly Powell, who works at the school district.

"Kim got on there and said she was very interested, so I messaged her and said, 'If you really are, let's start something.' She said OK, so we did," Martin said.

Martin used to play Scrabble with a group of retired schoolteacher friends in Wasilla. She had

to give up her board when she and her husband moved to the Lower 48 for a couple years, since they were saving on space.

"I had a big, huge deluxe Scrabble game," she said. "There's a deluxe one that has quadruple-word scores. We tried playing it once and because there are so many letters, it took us four hours to play a game with seven letters. So, we upped it to 14 letters and it was perfect because you could make all sorts of really big words. Once you play that, you never want to go back. You could make such huge words."

Martin, like many Scrabble players, likes crossword puzzles, which is how the game was invented around 90 years ago.

In 1931, Alfred Mosher Butts, an out-of-work architect, started working on a game that combined anagrams and crossword puzzles. He called the game Lexico but later changed it to Criss Cross Words. He tried marketing his invention to established game manufacturers, only to be rejected.

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Congress makes Wrangell eligible for more pandemic aid

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Last September, the borough was excluded from the final round of federal pandemic aid, which distributed \$27 million to Alaska communities through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. However, recent legislation will make funding available to communities that were previously ineligible — including Wrangell.

The provision, which was included in the appropriations bill signed by the president on Dec. 29, allows states, tribes and local governments additional flexibility in their allocation of federal funds. The provision was part of a much larger bill with a much

wordier name: the State, Local, Tribal and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act.

While \$1 million was allocated for Petersburg and \$621,000 for Haines last year, Wrangell was left off the list until congressional action to fix the omission.

"This bipartisan effort will benefit many of Alaska's unified municipalities, who unfortunately were left out on relief funding intended to help address the economic impacts of the pandemic," said Sen. Lisa Murkowski in an official statement on the bill. "This legislation resolves the errors that made it harder for those communities to access and use those funds."

Most of the municipalities that were left off the initial aid list were incorporated as "city and borough," leading Alaska Municipal League Executive Director Nils Andreassen to suspect that the Treasury Department was confused about Alaska's unique "borough" designation.

However, municipalities nationwide were also affected. The Alaska Municipal League joined with organizations like the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities and other local governments to advocate for the changes.

The process involved notifying Alaska's congressional delegation of the issue, assessing the

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Birthdays & Anniversaries

The Sentinel extends its best wishes to everyone listed in the chamber of commerce community birthday calendar.

Wednesday, Jan. 25: Ruth Stough.

Thursday, Jan. 26: Bryson Stough.

Friday, Jan. 27: Anniversary: Wayne and Marty Kaer.

Saturday, Jan. 28: None.

Sunday, Jan. 29: McKinley Angerman-Kellog, Ronan Rooney, Jeff Villarma.

Monday, Jan. 30: None.

Tuesday, Jan. 31: None.

Wednesday, Feb. 1: Christy Harris Good; Anniversary: Gordon and Emily McCloskey.

Wrangell Roundup: Special Events

YOUTH DANCE CLASS registration is open for 3-4, 5-7 and 8-10 year olds to be held on Saturdays at various times. Program runs from Jan. 28 to April 29 with instructor Tory Houser at the community center gym. Capacity is limited. For more information and to register online visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

MENS GAME DINNER, doors open at 3 p.m. and dinner served at 4 p.m. on Feb. 5, at the Harbor Light Assembly of God Church. Free dinner, door prices and raffle items. For more information call 907-874-2244.

KINGDOM WORSHIP CONFERENCE Feb. 3-5, to train local musicians, worship leaders and producers to be grounded in the Word of God, skilled in the craft of production and music, at the Harbor Light Church. Dinner will be provided. \$65 registration fee through Feb. 3. Late registration fee is \$75. Register online at <https://bit.ly/3VZ2heJ>. For more information call 907-470-4070.

NOLAN CENTER THEATER "The Whale," tentatively scheduled as of the Sentinel's printing deadline on Monday. Rated R, planned for 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Jan. 27-28. The drama film runs 1 hours and 57 minutes, and tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children under age 12. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

COMMUNITY MARKET will return after its January break on Saturday, Feb. 4. The monthly market, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Nolan Center, will feature locally made goods.

SWIMMING POOL is closed for maintenance; reopening in March (pending no further setbacks). The weight room and cardio equipment will be open for continued use, although there will be one week where the entire facility is closed while carpet cleaning. The locker rooms will be off-limits when the tile floors are being grouted. For more information visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

Want more attendance at your meeting or event? Send information for Roundup to wrgsent@gmail.com or call 907-874-2301.

Senior Center Menu

Open for in-person dining. Must be fully vaccinated.

Thursday, Jan. 26

Porcupine moose meat balls, mixed veggie, cabbage pear raisin salad

Friday, Jan. 27

Chef salad, potato soup, fruit salad

Monday, Jan. 30

Beef and vegetable soup, tomato and cheese sandwich, sunshine salad

Tuesday, Jan. 31

Sweet and sour pork, carrots, tossed salad, rice

Wednesday, Feb. 1

Pineapple lemon chicken, steamed broccoli, fruit slaw, rice

Call the senior center at 907-874-2066 24 hours in advance to reserve a seat at lunch or to request delivery. The senior van is available to take seniors to medical appointments, errands such as collecting mail, getting prescriptions or other essential items.

Continuing Events

PARKS and RECREATION www.wrangellrec.com

Weight room: 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. Philip's Episcopal Church.

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

Jan. 25, 1923

The cost per capita of schools in incorporated towns and school districts in the territory last year was \$97.31, and of schools outside of such towns and districts was \$103.14 according to a recent statement made by Commissioner of Education L. D. Henderson. "Alaska boasts of a teaching force," according to Mr. Henderson, "which is more highly trained and experienced than that of any state in the union. The average teaching experience of Alaska teachers is eight years." A total of 67 schools were maintained, 17 in incorporated towns and districts, and 50 outside. In the latter, 60 teachers were employed and there was a total enrollment of 1,133 students. The total cost of operation for Wrangell was 138 students enrolled for a cost of \$13,189, at \$95.58 per capita.

Jan. 23, 1948

Members of the Wrangell

Chamber of Commerce and the Junior Chamber of Commerce met at the Fire Hall last Friday at 8 p.m. to discuss and organize one commercial club for the town. The meeting was presided over by Junior Chamber President Fred Cunningham, with about 20 members of both organizations present. Neither organization had elected officers for the coming year pending the outcome of this meeting. There was much discussion, both for and against the merger, but on a motion by Z. M. Bradford, seconded by Peter McCormack, those present voted unanimously to merge. Thor Hofstad made the motion that the organization adopt the name of the Wrangell Chamber of Commerce, Lew Williams Jr. seconding.

Jan. 26, 1973

Wrangell wrestlers recorded two first places and five seconds in the first Wrangell Takedown Tournament last Friday and Saturday. Sixty-five Southeast Alaska high school wrestlers took part in the competition, during which points were awarded on the basis of takedowns. Winning in their weight classes from Wrangell were Richard Kagee (134) and Dan Gross (187). Second places were recorded by Wrangellites Conrad Purvis (100), Frank Johansen (114), Richard Gile (157), Iver Nore (169) and Dale Rasler (heavy-weight). Wrangell wrestling coach Terry Crenshaw said the tournament will be held

here annually, and expressed optimism at the showing of the Wrangell wrestlers.

Jan. 29, 1998

The scene was familiar: The honky-tonk music filled the air as miners, prospectors and powdered women laughed and danced amid a full array of feathered gowns, silk ties, cigars and fancy hats. The saloons during the Stikine gold rush were lively. Once again, these sounds and sights are soon to be reenacted in Wrangell, as it has been for 16 years at the Shady Ladies Fancy Dress Ball. Held during Tent City Days each February, this annual ball brings back to life the bawdy, glittering gold rush spirit of the 1800s. The Brig Bar traditionally hosts the dance, with era dresses, entertainment, contests and a crowning at the end of the evening of the Shady Lady Queen and her court. Sylvia Bahovec, creator of the ball, recalls how the idea was conceived in October 1981. "It was winter, and cold, and I was trying to think of an idea to get out of our T-shirts and jeans and dress up. At 3 a.m. one morning I turned on the television and saw a Western with dance hall girls, fancy dresses, and I got the idea to put on a ball similar to the famous Hooker's Ball in San Francisco." In January of the next year she put an ad in the paper for "women, shady or otherwise" to get their costumes ready for the first annual Shady Ladies Fancy Dress Ball.

Ferry Schedule

Northbound

Friday, Feb. 17
Columbia, 6:45 p.m.
Friday, Feb. 24
Columbia, 3:15 p.m.
Friday, March 3
Columbia, 8:30 p.m.
Tuesday, March 7
Columbia, 12:15 p.m.

Southbound

Monday, Feb. 20
Columbia, 6 a.m.
Monday, Feb. 27
Columbia, 5:15 a.m.
Monday, March 6
Columbia, 2:30 p.m.
Friday, March 10
Columbia, 7:45 a.m.

All times listed are scheduled departure times. Call the terminal at 907-874-2021 for information or call 907-874-3711 or 800-642-0066 for recorded information.

Tides

High Tides

Low Tides

	AM		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Jan. 25	03:20	17.1	03:19	17.0	09:08	1.2	09:31	-1.5
Jan. 26	04:02	16.9	04:10	15.4	10:00	1.4	10:14	0.1
Jan. 27	04:48	16.4	05:07	13.6	10:56	1.8	10:59	1.9
Jan. 28	05:38	15.7	06:17	12.0	11:58	2.3	11:50	3.6
Jan. 29	06:36	15.1	07:39	11.2	01:10	2.5
Jan. 30	07:42	14.7	09:01	11.1	00:50	5.0	02:30	2.4
Jan. 31	08:48	14.6	10:11	11.7	02:05	5.9	03:46	1.8

Daylight Hours

Date	Sunrise	Sunset	Hours
Jan. 25	7:58a	4:05p	08:06h
Jan. 26	7:57a	4:07p	08:10h
Jan. 27	7:55a	4:09p	08:14h
Jan. 28	7:53a	4:11p	08:18h
Jan. 29	7:51a	4:14p	08:22h
Jan. 30	7:49a	4:16p	08:26h
Jan. 31	7:48a	4:18p	08:30h

Business manager and IT director resign from school district

BY MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

The Wrangell school district's business manager and information technology director have both resigned from their positions.

Bob Russell, the IT director, will finish out his contract and leave the district at the end of the school year. Tammy Stromberg, the business manager, will leave at the end of February, though her last official day is the end of March.

"Staffing changes in administrative positions are always difficult," said Schools Superintendent Bill Burr. "Finding people to come to a small district or work with a small district is harder. Our pay is not as competitive as some districts can do."

Stromberg was hired at the end of 2021 from an applicant pool of about 10 people, taking the job because it allowed her to work remotely from her home in Anchorage. She has been instrumental in upgrading the school's accounting software and seeing it through a couple of fiscal years.

"I was heavily recruited by the North Slope Borough School District," Stromberg said. "I need my high three years for retirement."

Public-employee retirements in Alaska are based on an average of workers' three highest years of wages over their career, and the North Slope district pays higher wages. (The state abolished the retirement system for municipal, state and school district employees hired after July 2006 to save on employer retirement system costs.)

Deciding to accept the North Slope job wasn't easy for Stromberg.

"It wasn't an easy decision," she said. "I've invested a lot of time and energy in Wrangell and really like the community. I bought a house here, so I will definitely be seen on the streets of Wrangell in the future."

Stromberg said she's most proud of her work to provide the community with good financial information and modernizing the accounting system to operate more efficiently and to be less time-consuming for district staff.

Russell opted not to renew his contract

for next school year. He began with the district in July of 2021.

When he started with the district, the IT and software systems were varied, and "sometimes they were competing with each other and he made it much more universal," Burr said. "It was more of, 'This is how the network is going to operate. This is how the wireless is going to be run.' More of the standardization."

Burr added that Russell also expanded the district's streaming capabilities and how Chromebooks connect with Apple technology that's been in use for longer. "A lot of it is taking a lot of ideas and making one pathway, which is difficult. I give him credit for that."

Russell came from an educational background, which is a hard thing to find in the IT world, Burr said.

"Alaska used to have a big advantage in that most of the tech departments were teachers or had been teachers and moved into instructional technology," Burr said. "That isn't happening as much. The tech demand is high. It's harder to find (those with educational technology backgrounds)

due to pay, experience and the differences between business IT and educational IT."

"My wife and I are returning to Tennessee to be closer to family," Russell said. "I have really enjoyed living in Wrangell and will miss seeing the beautiful scenery every day. I particularly enjoy taking our dog down to Pats Lake for exercise and driving along the shoreline. The people of Wrangell have been great and really are a positive for anyone thinking of moving here to work."

Russell said he will continue to work in the information technology field after relocating.

Burr said they began recruiting efforts for both positions after the resignations were submitted. Along with the two administrative positions, the district also has two open jobs for paraprofessionals.

"The process to find somebody, which we started right away, is more difficult, and the ability to find somebody full time on-site that isn't already here is very difficult," Burr said. He added that the district will look at remote positions as it did when hiring Stromberg. "That's today's work life."

New podcast episode tells the morbid tale of Deadmans Island

BY CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

When podcaster and historian Ronan Rooney came home from college in the summer, he got a job guiding tourists around Wrangell, showing them the island's sights and sharing its stories. When they'd pass Deadmans Island, a small tree-covered piece of land a half mile offshore from the airport, he'd tell his audience about the Chinese cannery workers who were supposedly buried there in the 19th and 20th centuries.

According to Wrangell lore, workers' bodies were preserved in barrels of salt brine and stored on the island until they could be sent back to their homeland.

The most recent episode of Rooney's "Wrangell History Unlocked" podcast explores the fraught history of Deadmans Island, the possible origins of its name and the stories, true or false, that circulate about its past.

"It's something that a lot of us, myself included, firmly believe as part of Wrangell's local lore," he said. However, as he researched this story, he was unable to find any solid evidence to confirm it.

In the mid-1800s, American demand for industrial labor attracted Chinese immigrant workers to the Pacific Northwest. Many were drawn in by tales of "Gold Mountain Men" who'd rocketed to prosperity in the region, but most found themselves working in dangerous conditions for little pay. The conditions in the Alaska Packers Association Cannery, which dominated Wrangell's economy in those days, were no exception.

Many workers died stateside, but had arranged to have their remains sent back to the family cemetery in China, in accordance with traditional burial practices. Bodies were sometimes buried and then exhumed and may have been preserved in salt for shipment.

Rooney did not find any record of cannery worker deaths in Wrangell, but they "may well have happened."

The job was dangerous and the workers "didn't have protections in place," he added. "They were truly at the mercy of their employer, who was responsible for housing and feeding them."

This lack of concrete evidence doesn't mean there's no truth to the story, or that no evidence will be unearthed in the future. "It takes a lot of brass to say, 'absolutely no way this could have ever happened,'" Rooney said. "Wrangell is full of dusty shoeboxes sitting on the top of closets ... photos that would just blow my mind."

He sees the episode as one contribution in a long, ongoing conversation about Wrangell history, not as a definitive statement on the veracity of the community's long-held beliefs. "I hope this gets people talking," he said. "When they see grandpa, they ask him about Deadmans Island."

By sharing and recording their stories, community members can participate in Wrangell's rich historical tradition. Local historians like Bonnie Demerjian, Patricia A. Neal and the late Pat Roppel "carried the ball down the field," he said, but "there's still a lot to be discovered here."

"I take this more as an invitation for those who know this legend to ask, 'where did we hear it? Why do we think it's true,'" he said.

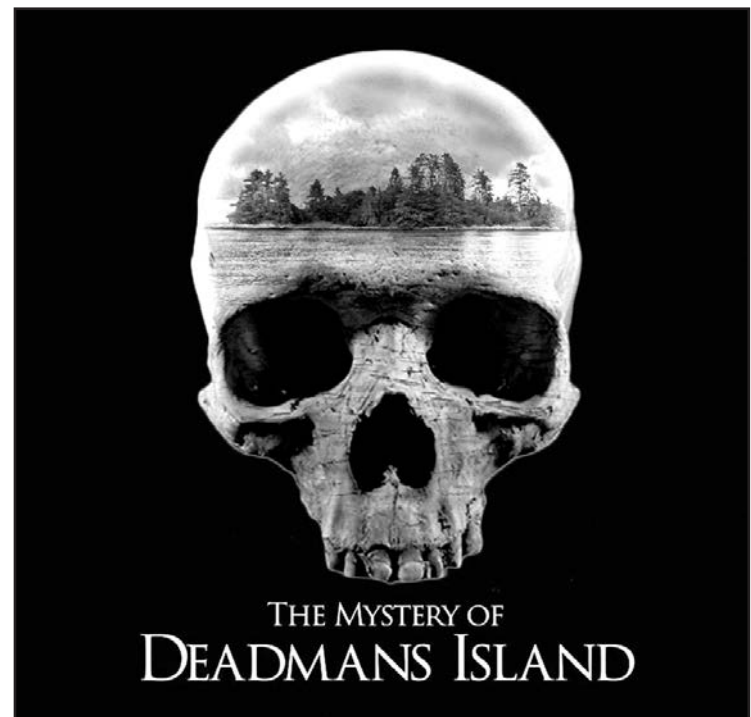
The mystery of Deadmans Island remains, for the most part, intact. But Rooney was able to determine one thing for sure — long before the rumors about Chinese cannery workers got started, the island was a Tlingit burial site. The carved grizzly bear that sits there was commissioned for the grave of an R. Shadesty, a rich Tlingit man who died in 1903 at the age of 61.

Rooney's podcast may have started as a pandemic project, but he has no intention of stop-

ping, even as COVID-19 integrates itself into the catalog of regular seasonal illnesses. "I would love to continue doing this," he said. "It's good for me to always have a project that I'm working on and have a few on the back burner."

In the future, he plans to delve into the founding of the Wrangell Institute and Wrangell's cultural landscape in the 1870s, which was the area's first decade under United States control. "I could do this for the rest of my life and never run out of interesting topics in Wrangell history," he said. "Tlingit culture, Russian emperors, the Hudson Bay Company in Britain, the United States, Asian immigrant communities — it's a very international historical landscape."

Rooney takes pride in tackling difficult historical topics, from the community's mistreatment of immigrant workers to its suppression of Tlingit culture. Only one time period is completely off-limits — the present day. "It's much easier



to write about people when they're dead," he quipped. "They can't come after me." The episode is available on KSTK, YouTube, the Apple Podcast app, streaming services like Spotify and Pandora and wrangellhistoryunlocked.com.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

School finances need long-term answer

By LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

The staff, faculty and students at Wrangell's three public schools work hard and believe in the importance of education.

Parents help out with volunteer work, and the overall community pitches in, too.

The borough this year is contributing the maximum amount of funding to the school district operating budget allowed under state law. During budget deliberations last May, the assembly boosted the local contribution by more than \$300,000 to reach the max for the 2022-2023 school year.

And while that local support is enough for this year and probably next, it's not enough on its own for the years ahead to keep all the staff, classes and programs that students need to prepare them for life and jobs after graduation.

Wrangell schools, same as many other districts around the state, face an uncertain and dangerous long-term financial future. The solution will require more state funding and serious discussions and decisions in the community.

Enrollment is down at Wrangell schools by about 50 students from before the pandemic, about 15%. The student count is just over half what it was 30 years ago, as the loss of timber industry jobs and a decline in new families with children moving to town has seriously reduced the school-age population.

State funding, which covers more than 60% of the district's operating budget, is based almost entirely on enrollment numbers. As such, state aid was down even before the pandemic further cut into enrollment as parents turned to homeschooling or correspondence, or just left town.

Meanwhile, the state has sat on its hands — and its checkbook — adding just 0.5% to the per-student funding formula over the past six years as inflation climbed almost 20% during that period.

With lethargic state funding, the borough

at the max and enrollment down, the school district's financial savior has been federal pandemic relief grants totaling about \$1 million, but that money will run out the next school year.

Only by taking \$112,000 from the district's fund balance — its reserves — does the draft budget for the 2023-2024 school year balance. That would leave about \$632,000 in the reserves as of June 2024, getting a little tight for a district with an annual general fund operating budget almost nine times that dollar amount.

The state Legislature this year says it will give serious consideration to raising the per-student funding formula, as it should. How much of a raise is unknown, though it probably will not be sufficient to completely solve Wrangell's long-term school finances. The political pull to pay a big Permanent Fund dividend, and dissatisfaction among some elected state officials over low student test scores present sizable hurdles to winning enough votes for a large boost in state aid to schools.

Meanwhile, the fixed costs of operating and maintaining Wrangell's elementary, middle and high school buildings, staff and faculty salaries, insurance, utilities and everything else will continue to rise, regardless of the student count. And if enrollment heads back down after a couple of stable years, the budget numbers will look even worse.

It's a serious problem the community needs to publicly and honestly discuss. None of the money-saving options are attractive: Eliminating programs, moving from in-class teachers to remote instructors, consolidating the three schools into one. All would hurt students.

Though the school board makes the final decisions, the options are serious enough that the entire community needs to take an interest. There is time to figure this out, but only if people pay attention and think about what they want for Wrangell's future and how to pay for it.

“Wrangell schools, same as many other districts around the state, face an uncertain and dangerous long-term financial future. The solution will require more state funding and serious discussions and decisions in the community.”

Hospital property

Continued from page 1

to use the property for economic development purposes.

The offer also stipulates that the buyers would have 180-day due diligence period to complete feasibility studies and decide whether they plan to follow through on their offer.

The group's initial construction cost estimates for the center come to \$3.26 million.

The full development plan, however, encompasses more than just the hospital property. Converting the building into a senior living center is the first of five phases in the group's proposal. Subsequent phases include developing townhouses in the area behind the hospital, establishing greenhouses around the island that could sell produce to local stores, exporting seafood to retail outlets in the Lower 48 and building a processing plant that would convert seafood waste into fertilizer for export to farms throughout the nation.

Townhomes could alleviate the community's housing short-

age and attract young families to the island, Erik Freeman suggested, though "it's going to cost a lot to develop it to get the image we feel is marketable for families to relocate," he said. The estimated cost of Phase 2, the proposed housing development behind the hospital, is in the \$6 million range.

Greenhouses around the island would provide "a great opportunity for Wrangell to grow some of its own produce," he said, and he anticipates high demand for Wrangell seafood among restaurants in the Lower 48.

Jim Freeman has long-established ties to Wrangell. He's visited regularly since 1980 and his son works here as a fisherman. "We're not trying to change this area," he said. "What we're trying to do is fill a need." His investment proposal was informed by the community's needs for housing and job creation, he explained.

Phase 1, the senior center, would bring an estimated 11 to 15 jobs to the community, four of which would be full time and salaried.

The project timeline is not fixed, but Erik Freeman sug-

gested that with the borough's cooperation, "Phase 1 and 2 (senior housing and townhomes) could be developed certainly within five years."

The presentations offered committee members and borough officials the opportunity to share "feedback, concerns, questions and ideas" before Jones and the Freemans submit a formal proposal to the borough, Economic Development Director Carol Rushmore explained to Economic Development Committee members in an email Jan. 9.

After the Jan. 12 presentation, Rushmore expressed concern that there might be inadequate parking for townhome and senior center residents and staff. She suggested that the group would have to seek a variance from the community's strict parking requirements to make their design possible.

Planning Commissioner Don McConachie asked if the group's seafood export plans would compete with local fishermen. Freeman suggested that they would not—"we're looking at a different type of process than they're dealing with," he said.

EDITORIAL

There is hope for redeveloping hospital property

A group of developers has offered the borough \$350,000 for the former hospital property, which is \$120,000 less than the new asking price and \$480,000 less than the old asking price of last year.

But what's really new is that anyone is offering anything for the 1.94-acre property and the more than 30,000-square-foot building, much of which was built 45 years ago. The borough has been looking for buyers for almost a year, and this is the first real offer.

The lack of serious interest is an indication that the original price was too high, that asbestos removal is a financial deterrent for taking over and reusing the building, as is the cost of remodeling the hospital and its small rooms into something that makes economic sense.

Meanwhile, the borough is now in its second year of paying to heat and insure the empty building, money that could be better spent maintaining all the other borough facilities in need of attention.

The question for the borough assembly is not whether \$350,000 is a fair price — it is the only price, and at least it's higher than zero — but whether the developers' proposal can succeed.

The three men who shared their proposal with borough officials — two of whom are executives in a California-based taco business with multiple locations and franchises — propose to turn the former hospital into a high-end senior citizen independent living center, attracting people to move here for the lifestyle and recreational opportunities.

The second phase of their plan includes building townhouses — anything with the word "houses" is great news for Wrangell, which is so short of available housing that employers frequently cite it as a problem in attracting and retaining new workers.

The developers estimate the senior apartments at \$3.26 million and the second phase at about \$6 million. If it happens, that's quite an investment in the town's economy, jobs, sales and property tax revenues. All the more reason not to quibble over the \$350,000 offer.

But first, before the developers write a check to the borough, they would have 180 days to really pick over the property, complete their feasibility studies, look at their cost estimates and potential revenues, and decide whether they want to follow through on their offer.

Borough officials certainly will assist the trio in conducting their due diligence of the property, answering questions and providing information on the building, zoning and anything else they can provide to help with the decision.

The community will hope that the developers like what they see during their review process and follow through with the \$350,000 offer, and that the borough assembly votes to accept it. The town needs some good economic news.

— Wrangell Sentinel

Scrabble

Continued from page 1

Around the end of the '40s, Butts met James Brunot, a British entrepreneur, and they began to revamp the game, eventually coming up with the name Scrabble. In the beginning, the games were made by hand, churning out 12 sets an hour and stamping the letter tiles by hand.

The game lost money in the first year they produced it. Not until the president of Macy's discovered the game and started selling it through the department store in the early 1950s did its popularity ascend like a triple-word score using the word QUIXOTIC (78, for those playing at home).

Scrabble tournaments started being held about 50 years ago with much more stringent rules, using timers and disallowing dictionaries.

"I played in a tournament once in Juneau," Martin recalled. "The library hosted a big Scrabble event. You have a timer. ... There's only so much time on it and you hit it when you're done (with your move). It was so nerve-racking. You couldn't look up words, but you could challenge people."

Martin said she had a player get upset with her because she challenged him, and she was

right. Under that tournament's rules, Martin was granted her opponent's points for winning the challenge. "We don't play that way (here). We play the easy way with a dictionary," she said.

Three others joined Martin on the inaugural night at St. Philip's. Although the game can be played with two to four players, the four in attendance played one on one.

Jessica Stewart, who brought her own board, said she enjoys the game but is "horrible" at it. She plays a lot of Words With Friends, a popular Scrabble-like game app. "I cheat, I'll be honest," she said with a laugh.

Martin said they will hold Scrabble night every few weeks on Thursdays from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. so that people can pop in and out as they want depending on their schedules. If that time and day don't work for those that want to participate, they will change it depending on what works best.

Posts will be made on the Wrangell Community Group page for the next game night, or those interested can text Martin at 907-209-4097 to find out more.

By the way, Stewart won against her opponent with a score of 246.

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Teens use project to help preserve cultural heritage

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

Five benches on Shakes Island that have been there possibly more than 50 years are showing signs of their age. Thanks to two Wrangell teens, the benches will soon be replaced with all new ones.

Steven Bales, 17, and Randy Churchill, 18, will build new benches out of yellow cedar as part of their senior project. It's a small way in which they can help preserve their Tlingit heritage and give back to the community.

Originally, Churchill was going to help with Wolfpack Wrestling — for elementary-age kids — since his younger brother joined it. Bales was going to work on the bench project on his own. Since Churchill joined the basketball team, it kept him from being involved with the junior wrestling squad.

"Then I asked him if he wanted to help me with my project," Bales said. "I said, 'We can do it at your house.'"

"That was the perfect fit," Churchill said.

"Especially since I'm always over there," Bales added.

"He's always there anyway," Churchill confirmed.

The two have been building woodshop projects for about six years when they first collaborated on a gun case in Churchill's dad's workshop, the same workshop they'll be building the benches.

"My dad likes making anything to do with anything," Churchill said. "One time, we were watching my dad build cupboards for my grandma, so we decided we wanted to build something too. We made a gun case. It took us four hours?"

"I really want to burn that gun case," Bales said with a laugh.

Since the lamentable gun case, the two have built



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Seniors Steven Bales, left, and Randy Churchill gather around an old bench on Shakes Island. They will build new benches as part of their senior project to replace the worn-out pieces.

other items together and on their own, like nightstands and other projects using reclaimed wood from a U.S. Forest Service building. Churchill also worked with classmate Jacen Hay on a hexagonal table that is now used at the middle school.

Both Bales and Churchill have been active within the tribe since their youth. Churchill was involved with JOM (Johnson-O'Malley, a Bureau of Indian Education program for public schools) until he focused more on wrestling, bringing home a state champion-

ship this year.

They realized they would need to build new benches when they went down to Shakes Island to inspect the old ones. They knew it would be too much work to try refurbishing the hold, mossy and rotted benches, so they decided to go with new benches that allow for water to drain off them.

"Plus, we're both of Native heritage and we'd be giving back to our Native culture at the same time," Churchill said.

The Wrangell Cooperative Association has discussed doing something about the benches for a while, said tribal administrator Esther Reese. With the boys volunteering their time, she said it's a benefit for the tribe and the students.

"I'm very happy that young adults from the tribe are wanting involvement via senior projects," she said. "I think it's going to be a valuable project for them."

She likened it to past generations handing down their knowledge to bolster the Tlingit culture.

"Our ancestors were there, raising their descendants up to be leaders, and now we are raising up the next generation," Reese said. "It's very gratifying to hear about the next generation wanting to be involved in their culture to make it a vibrant, alive thing for all of us."

After graduating, Churchill plans to get certified in plumbing and heating. Then he wants to pursue a professional career in mixed martial arts. "I want to go to Colorado because I like the coaches I've seen there. I like their coaching style, but I have to earn my way there first," he said.

Bales doesn't have as ambitious a plan as his friend. "I'm pretty undecided," he said. "I want to travel a little bit. That's all I have on the agenda so far. I mostly want to figure things out."

School budget

Continued from page 1

of the overall budget for 2023-2024. The high school/middle school and elementary school principals' salaries have been covered by federal pandemic aid grant funds, but those grants expire next year and the salaries will be added to the general fund expenditures of the 2024-2025 budget.

Other increased costs are attributed to insurance, fuel and heating and maintaining unused classroom space, Stromberg said.

"The costs to operate empty classrooms siphons dollars away from the

educational program," she said. "I see the district's and borough's financial challenge as two-pronged: District costs to operate unused classroom space and state foundation funding that hasn't kept pace with inflation."

Total general fund expenditures in the 2023-2024 draft budget are \$5.148 million, whereas the total revenues are \$5.036, before the transfer from savings.

State funding covers more than 60% of the district's general fund budget. Municipal money is No. 2, with federal funding the smallest of the three sources. Burr said the district would ask the borough for \$1.6 million in local funding.

"We're asking what we were given last year," he said. "This was just the first draft, and as we're adjusting things, we'll be looking at it."

A formula in state law sets a minimum and maximum for local contributions to school budgets, and the Wrangell borough's \$1.6 million for the 2022-2023 was the maximum allowed. The formula is based on assessed property value in the borough, which changes every year.

During normal years, state law limits school district fund balances to no more than 10% of their annual operating expenses — otherwise they must return any excess funds to the state. The pandemic

caused what Stromberg called "financial oddities," and the state put a moratorium on the 10% requirement. That moratorium will go away in the 2025 budget cycle and the 10% requirement will return.

"Think of (the general fund balance) as a savings account," Schools Superintendent Bill Burr said in an interview last Friday. "The fund balance, that savings account, we know money is coming and the state will send a check, but there are a number of things that could happen, and it allows us to pay expenses ahead of time. ... There are always things that come up; an unexpected expense, that's what the fund balance can help with."

Pandemic aid

Continued from page 1

definitions of eligible communities and "thinking about how the census bureau defines consolidated government," Andreassen explained. The organizations also met with the treasury to help identify a legislative fix.

Murkowski called the act "common sense legislation" and "a simple fix that will make a difference for communities across Alaska." Andreassen described it as "good progress."

This last round of federal pandemic aid has fewer strings attached than previous pandemic aid payments, which often focused on controlling the pandemic's spread and impact. "Under this program, recipients have broad discretion on uses of funds, similar to the ways in which they may use funds generated from their own revenue sources," the U.S. Treasury Department website reads.

Andreassen is not certain how long it will take for another round of applications to open and for previously overlooked communities to start receiving aid. The deadline to apply for the first round of awards is Jan. 31. "Given (the Treasury's) capacity," he said, "they might be focused on doing that first." After the initial round is processed, he estimated that there would be a 60- to 90-day wait before newly eligible communities could apply.

"We're just kind of in this waiting period as they work through their process," he added.

On the initial list, the Kenai Peninsula Borough was allocated \$6 million, Ketchikan Gateway Borough \$4.1 million, Kodiak Borough \$2.4 million and Petersburg Borough \$1 million.

Communities with "Municipality" or "City and Borough" designations, like Juneau, Sitka, Anchorage and Wrangell, were

not included, with the exception of the City and Borough of Yakutat, which received \$211,000.

Andreassen does not anticipate that Kenai, Ketchikan and others will receive less funding once unfunded communities apply. "The total amount of funding available for all cities and counties was \$1.5 billion,"

he said. "For these four jurisdictions, we're talking \$10 million. ... I could imagine that there's at least that much that doesn't get taken up by other jurisdictions."

Borough Manager Jeff Good is working to set up a meeting with the Treasury and Alaska Municipal League to

determine how much funding could be available for Wrangell. The money could be used for any government purpose except lobbying.

"We're all interested in seeing what this will look like," said Andreassen. "And hopefully it does good things for our communities."

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SENTINEL SPORTS

Wrangell nets more wins than losses in Petersburg homecoming weekend

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

It may have been Petersburg's homecoming weekend but two of Wrangell High School's basketball teams were the ones coming home with wins.

In two days of tough competition last Friday and Saturday, Wrangell's varsity girls and boys junior varsity teams beat the Vikings in two games each. The boys varsity team was beaten by the Vikings in their two games. The girls junior varsity team didn't travel.

Junior varsity

From the start, the JV boys faced tough competition from the Petersburg team. The two squads were equally matched and kept up the pressure on one another.

Friday's game was tight as each team took the lead throughout. Halfway through the third period, Petersburg took the lead, but Wrangell took it right back and added two more points at the buzzer. A series of free throws, a three-pointer and other buckets gave the Wolves an additional 14 points in the fourth period and the win, 46-38.

Petersburg was hungry for the win in Saturday's JV game, as it scored within seconds of the tipoff. Wrangell wouldn't score until just over two minutes into the game with a three-point basket to take the lead, but Petersburg took it back within 10 seconds.

The teams traded the lead throughout the first period, but Wrangell came out ahead, 10-8. The Wolves increased their lead, easily staying 10 points ahead of the Vikings throughout the second and third periods. It looked like the Wolves would take an easy win. But the Vikings refused to let it happen. Petersburg came surging back, closing the gap with a series of basket-and-foul combinations which tied the game 25-25 at the buzzer, sending it into overtime.

With four minutes on the clock, it was easily the most frenetic playing on the part of both teams. Wrangell took a one-point lead with a free throw, which Petersburg answered with a steal, a drive downcourt and a basket to take the lead. With 33 seconds left, Wrangell retook the lead. Petersburg still had a chance to win with possession of the ball, keeping tight control of it. With two seconds left, Wrangell blocked a pass, knocking the ball out of bounds. Petersburg threw it in, but a last-second scramble gave the ball to the Wolves at the buzzer. Wrangell won 29-27.



Freshman Christina Johnson, left, thwarts junior Bryana Ratliff's attempt at a steal during Saturday's homecoming basketball game in Petersburg.

Varsity boys

It looked like Wrangell's varsity boys were going to make quick work of the Petersburg team on Friday, with Jacen Hay sinking a three-pointer for the first score of the game. Petersburg answered with back-to-back two-pointers, giving them the lead.

Both teams were strong on defense, making it difficult to score. Eventually, Wrangell took the lead, ending the first period ahead 13-11.

Though Wrangell started to pull ahead with scoring by Devlyn Campbell, Ethan Blatchley and Hay, Petersburg's Kyle Biggers, Kieran Cabral and Hunter Conn among others didn't make it easy. Biggers especially made it difficult for the Wolves to score at the post with his blocking. That didn't matter to Hay with a fade-away jump on the outside for another three-pointer. The second period ended 23-19 for Wrangell.

The game remained tight for the final two periods, keeping the two teams within a few points. Despite Wrangell leading for the first three periods, Petersburg found their footing and took advantage, capitalizing on two-pointers and free throws as both teams racked up the fouls. The Vikings retook the lead in the fourth period, increasing it

to 18 points at one time. A series of failed shots from the Wolves kept them from catching up and Petersburg won 53-40.

Having had a chance to get a feel for their opponents, Saturday's game was more the same. Wrangell took an early lead in the first period despite Petersburg's hounding defense. Throughout the game, both teams traded leads, with Wrangell ahead in the first and third quarters. Petersburg led by five points in the second quarter.

With the game on the line in the fourth period, Wrangell struggled to find the hoop. Hay tied up the game with a three-pointer, 46-46, but that would be as close as Wrangell got. At the end, the Vikings had their second win over the Wolves, 56-51.

Varsity girls

With the exception of team captain Kiara Harrison's height of more than 6 feet, the Lady Wolves and Lady Vikings are fairly matched for their height. Petersburg's tallest player comes in at 5-foot-8, giving Wrangell a strong blocking and rebounding advantage. And they used it.

Harrison made the first basket in Friday's game, with Addy Andrews coming in low and fast for the second basket. Petersburg didn't get any points on the board until about halfway through the first period, with Harrison answering the shot with her own basket. The first period ended with Wrangell in the lead, 12-5.



PHOTOS BY CHRIS BASINGER/PETERSBURG PILOT
Sophomore Kyan Stead, left, drives the lane while keeping a Viking player at bay during Saturday's game in Petersburg.

Varsity boys stats

Overall: 2-5 (29% wins)

Conference: 1-1

Standing: Third in 2A Southeast

Home

Away

Neutral

0-0

1-5

1-0

Personal fouls

Personal assists

Streak

313

338

2L

Varsity girls stats

Overall: 2-2 (50% wins)

Conference: 0-2

Standing: Fifth in 2A Southeast

Home

Away

Neutral

0-0

2-2

0-0

Personal fouls

Personal assists

Streak

152

134

2W

A series of plays between Andrews and Harrison, who used their height, kept the Lady Vikings from getting close. Andrews would drive the ball, passing to Harrison from the outside. Then Andrews would weave through the defense to the post so Harrison could return the ball back to her for the shot. It was a strategy that paid off multiple times throughout both days. The second period ended with Wrangell miles ahead at 23-9.

"We just ask them to play specific roles," head coach Christina Good said. "We gave them a job and they got it done. It's confidence in every game. They build more and more."

Defense on the part of both teams kept the scoring to a minimum in the third period and Petersburg kept up the full-court pressure. Wrangell only added six points to the board, while Petersburg added four. The third period ended 29-13.

No one scored until just over halfway through the fourth period, with Harrison sinking a two-point basket then getting fouled and adding a point. Christina Johnson added three points from the outside. The Lady Wolves held Petersburg scoreless until the last 10 seconds of play when the Vikings made a two-point basket. Final score 39-15 for Wrangell.

There would be more of the same on Saturday, with both teams putting in maximum defense. It worked for much of the first period, with neither team

scoring until freshman Shailyn Nelson made a basket at 4:20 into the game. Harrison would add two points, giving the Lady Wolves a 4-0 lead at the buzzer.

Once again, Nelson made the first basket in the period at nearly two minutes into the second period. It would be almost three minutes until Petersburg finally scored with a two-point shot. A series of shots and free throws from Harrison and a solid shot from Della Churchill gave Wrangell a 10-point lead. Petersburg wouldn't score again in the second period, which ended 14-2 for Wrangell.

The Lady Wolves surged ahead in the third period, adding six more points early on. Despite Wrangell's coverage, Petersburg was able to add 10 points during the period. With back-to-back three-pointers from Johnson, Wrangell added another 14 to their baskets. The third period ended 28-12.

In the fourth period, Wrangell continued to dominate in offense and defense, adding another 14 points. Petersburg was only able to add six, with the final two points coming at the buzzer and Wrangell winning 42-18.

"The second night, they all scored," Good said. "That was the goal. They all got in the books. Christina (Johnson), Shay (Nelson) and Miranda (Ridgeway), all three really stepped up."

This weekend, Wrangell's teams are scheduled to face off against Metlakatla in Wrangell.

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Ferry system says it has enough crew to run summer schedule

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Other than still needing crew if it is to put the Hubbard into service for the first time since it was built a few years ago, the Alaska Marine Highway System believes it has enough staff to operate the confirmed runs of its proposed summer schedule this year.

The state ferry system has been plagued by staffing shortages the past couple of years due to retirements, resignations and hiring efforts coming up short, temporarily sidelining vessels on occasion.

"We're still really pushing hard on recruitment," Shannon McCarthy, communications director at the Department of Transportation commissioner's office, said last Friday.

Turnover, however, continues to hamper staffing levels. Between June and the end of November 2022, the ferry system hired 42 new crew members, mostly entry-level, but lost 32 in the same job categories, McCarthy said.

The department about a year ago contracted with an Anchorage-based search firm to help find new hires for ferry jobs. The contract focused on recruiting people to fill jobs as junior engineers, oilers, able-bodied sea-

men and several management positions. The contract paid \$5,000 per recruit, not to exceed a total of \$250,000. The contract is being extended and expanded past the \$250,000 limit, McCarthy said.

The department wants the contractor, Alaska Executive Search, to help recruit for lower-level crew workers too, such as stewards, who are covered by the Inland-boatmen's Union, she said.

Coast Guard licensing is required for all crew aboard the ships.

In addition to paying a search firm and advertising on its own in Alaska and nationwide, McCarthy said the department will continue to offer \$5,000 signing bonuses for new stewards and other crew who stick around through their probationary period.

If enough crew can be hired, licensed and trained in time — 75 new hires would be needed — the Hubbard would join the LeConte in Lynn Canal under this summer's proposed draft schedule. The \$60 million Hubbard, just a few years old, has never been put into service.

The state would need to know sometime this spring if it is going to succeed with adding that many new crew members in order to ensure they are all licensed and trained, allowing the marine highway to start accepting

summer reservations for travel aboard the Hubbard.

In 2021, the ferry system was short about 125 workers from the staffing level needed to keep its fleet fully operational and accommodate sick leave and other vacancies without excessive overtime. However, service cutbacks, due to COVID-weakened passenger counts, allowed the marine highway to operate fewer vessels, reducing the need for as many crew members.

Transportation Department officials acknowledged the hiring challenges during 2021 and 2022, briefing legislators several times about worker shortages.

Cutbacks in ferry service the past few years have reduced work hours for crew, adding to the exodus of staff. The ferry system from 2019 through early 2022 lost 155 more employees than it had hired, the department told legislators a year ago.

The Alaska Marine Highway talked of bringing its largest ship, the Columbia, back to service last summer, but never found enough crew to staff the vessel, which has been out of service to save money since fall 2019.

However, the Columbia now is scheduled to rejoin the operating fleet next month to take over the Southeast run while the Matanuska is out of service indefinitely for extensive steel work. Much of the Matanuska's crew will move over to the Columbia.

NOAA work says fishing nets pose risk to Wrangell area porpoises

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

There are at least two distinct populations of harbor porpoises in Southeast Alaska waters, and one of them — which swims around Zarembo and Wrangell islands — appears to be particularly vulnerable to deaths from entanglements in commercial fishing gear, according to newly released information from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration scientists.

The breakdown of Southeast Alaska's porpoises into separate northern and southern populations contrasts with current management, which treats the region's porpoises as a single population.

The more precise population definition, which is based on DNA analysis and other information, could affect management of Southeast's commercial gillnet salmon fisheries.

At issue, said Alex Zerbini, lead author of both the NOAA report on genetics and related information and a recent study on population size, is bycatch — the accidental drownings of porpoises tangled in fishing nets.

"Either they're going for the fish or sometimes they're just traveling, and they can't see the nets," said Zerbini, who is with NOAA's Alaska Fisheries Science Center and the University of Washington. "They hit the nets and they die."

NOAA manages porpoises under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and human activities like fishing are regulated according to that act's conservation requirements.

The northern population, estimated at 1,619 animals swimming in Glacier Bay, Icy Strait and Cross Sound, appears to be resilient to current levels of bycatch, a term describing when fishers catch species other than those they're targeting. But the southern population, swimming around Zarembo Island and Wrangell and estimated at 890 animals, might be already subjected to more bycatch than it can absorb.

The study by Zerbini and his colleagues, published in the journal *Frontiers in Marine Science*, quantified population estimates and "potential biological removal," or the levels of bycatch deaths that each group could withstand. That came out to losses of 12 animals a year for the northern population and 6.1 animals a year for the southern population.

Current bycatch-caused deaths for the southern popu-

lation were calculated at 7.4 animals per year, beyond the danger threshold. The estimated losses happening in the northern population, however, came out to only 5.6 animals a year, below that threshold.

Exactly how much bycatch of porpoises is currently happening is unclear. A five-year NOAA report released in August documented only two cases from 2016 to 2020.

However, documented reports could miss actual cases. The gillnet harvests are not monitored through any mandatory observer program. A pilot program conducted by NOAA in 2012 and 2013, the Alaska Marine Mammal Observer Pro-

gram, was able to monitor numerous interactions between the fleet and porpoises.

It's possible that fishing crews do not even see dead porpoises caught in nets, Zerbini said.

The idea is that the porpoises in northern and southern waters of Southeast Alaska emerged from varying population trends, he said. If it were a single population, the trends would be similar, he said.

DNA analysis to confirm the difference was difficult. Typically, DNA analysis of marine mammals is done through analysis of tissue samples. But porpoises are so elusive that scientists turned to "environmental DNA" —

samples of water into which the porpoises are frequently shedding small bits of skin, Zerbini said.

Meanwhile, there appears to be a third, completely different population of porpoises swimming in the outer waters around Yakutat. Much less is known about those animals, Zerbini said. "It is very likely that there are multiple different stocks within that unit, but we just don't have the data to demonstrate that," he said.

The emerging demographic pattern for Southeast Alaska fits with demographic patterns for porpoise elsewhere, where populations tend to range in

small areas, he said. There are multiple defined population stocks in waters off California, for example.

Any formal determination separating northern and southern Southeast Alaska porpoise population stocks would be done through NOAA's stock assessment review process. A draft assessment is pending, and there will be a public comment period before any final assessment is released, said Maggie Mooney-Seus of NOAA's Alaska Fisheries Science Center.

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Anan bears photographer wins national award for work

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Juneau photographer Mark Kelley has been to Anan Wildlife Observatory 13 times, which turned out to be a lucky number for his portfolio of bear photos. A collection of his 10 favorite Anan photos took first place in the portfolio category of the National Wildlife Federation annual contest.

"He captures something magical and mystical about the place," Lisa Moore, editorial director of the National Wildlife magazine, said last Friday.

After so many years watching the bears, "he knows their behavior" and has the patience to wait for the photograph that will help tell the story of Anan, she said.

Kelley "really wants the public to connect" with Alaska and its wildlife, Moore said. "He's very passionate about Alaska, Alaska wildlife and their habitat."

Kelley's winning portfolio features the story of bears at Anan Creek, about 30 miles south of Wrangell on the mainland. The site has gained in popularity over the years, with visitors coming from around the world to see bears feed on abundant pink salmon — one of few locations where black and brown bears dine so close to each other.

"It's a real honor," Kelley said. "I was blown away — I think for a wildlife photographer it's the world's highest compliment."

The 2022 competition drew more than 30,000 photos from 3,100 photographers around the world.

In addition to the story the photos tell, Moore said judges also look at technical skills, lighting and composition of the images.

Kelley is no stranger to award-winning shots — he's won dozens over the decades he has lived and worked as a



PHOTO BY CLARISE LARSON/JUNEAU EMPIRE

Juneau-based photographer Mark Kelley has been taking pictures in Southeast for 43 years, but it was the photos he took on his 13 visits to Anan Creek that brought him honors for the best portfolio in the 2022 National Wildlife magazine photo contest.

photographer in Southeast Alaska. The Wrangell Sentinel's annual visitor guide has featured his Anan photos on the cover the past two years.

Although he's originally from Buffalo, New York, Kelley said he considers himself a "Southeast guy."

He always thought his love for photography growing up was just a hobby, not something he could turn into a career. That changed when he began taking photography classes at the University of Alaska Fairbanks after leaving the Lower 48 and coming to Alaska in 1974.

"I left for Alaska with a pickup truck and a couple of thousand dollars with no great plan," he said.

After graduating, Kelley was able to land a photographer job at the Juneau Empire newspaper. After moving there in 1979, he never looked back. In addition to producing an annual calendar of his photographs, he sells photo note cards and books of his work.

"I fell in love with Juneau," he said.

Kelley said he was drawn to Anan Creek because the location is distinctly Southeast Alaska. He said each photo depicts the constant rain, towering trees and flourishing green of the forest that makes the region unlike other parts of Alaska. But, beyond the location, he said what brings the area to life is the abundant range of wildlife that lives among



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK KELLEY

All of Kelley's winning photographs focus on the bears at the Anan Wildlife Observatory, including this one enjoying a meal of fresh salmon.

the torrential rainforest.

"I go to Anan because it's so much fun — forget the picture — it's so much fun watching these bears and how they interact with each other, they show all the emotions of a human being. I just never wanted to miss anything," he said.

For those 13 years he spent capturing photos at the location, Kelley estimated that for each one of the 10 photos he chose for the contest he took thousands to find those exact moments. Along with that, each time he visited the area, he spent three to four days standing on a viewing platform for eight to 10 hours with no food in hopes to catch those special moments.

"I learned to be really patient," he said.

Kelley's winning photos can be viewed on the National Wildlife Federation website at: [Pulse of the Planet \(nwf.org\)](https://www.pulseoftheplanet.org)

This news story includes reporting by Clarise Larson of the Juneau Empire.

Library digital project will put Sentinels in online database

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Armchair historians and amateur genealogists rejoice — the entire Sentinel archive will be digitized and easily searchable online.

The Friends of the Library has received a \$17,000 Rasmuson Foundation grant, which, combined with community donations, should cover the estimated \$24,000 project.

The Irene Ingle Public Library is partnering with Alaska Resources Library & Information Services (ARLIS) at the University of Alaska Anchorage to digitize, assemble and upload the entire catalog of Sentinels going back to its founding in 1902, and even many of Wrangell's earlier newspapers of the 1890s.

"Right now, in order to access any of this information, you have to physically look in our machine," explained Assistant Librarian Sarah Scambler. "It can be really challenging and it's very time-consuming."

The archives are on microfilm, meaning that the librarians must scroll through rolls of tiny, unsearchable text to locate information. Patrons "call us and they want to know about their cousin, Joe Brown," said Library Director Margaret Villarma. "Sometimes," added Scambler, "we can't find it because they don't have a specific date."

Not only is scanning through rolls of microfilm tough on the eyes, it's inaccessible for remote researchers. Once the digitization project is complete, "they'll be able to access this information anywhere online, anywhere in the world," said Villarma.

ARLIS will manage the project to convert the microfilm to a different format which can be more easily transformed into a digital file and uploaded online. Users will be able to enter a keyword and search the entire data-

base for articles.

Issues from 1956 and earlier are currently available on Chronicling America, an open-source newspaper database produced by the United States National Digital Newspaper Program. The site, however, can be difficult to navigate. Villarma and Scambler hope to compile all the paper's back issues into a single, Sentinel-specific database.

Expanded online records could be helpful to researchers, Scambler explained. Oregon-based Wrangell historian Ronan Rooney refers to the archive frequently while researching his podcast, "Wrangell History Unlocked." Because of its longstanding newspaper, "Wrangell has one of the deepest benches of knowledge," he said. "It's a well-documented place."

The Sentinel is the oldest continuously published newspaper in Alaska, having never missed a scheduled edition.

Rooney hopes his podcast encourages listeners to explore the archives and discover the Wrangell of years past. "There's nothing you can't research," he said. "There's so many sources available and they're digital right now."

Historians aren't the only people who will benefit from an expanded digital archive. Many seek out past Sentinels not to track Wrangell's economic ups and downs since the turn of the century, but to learn more about their loved ones. The library gets requests for "a lot of obituaries," said Scambler. "People are looking for their family history."

The exact timeline for the digitization project has not yet been established. The completion deadline under the Rasmuson Foundation grant is Nov. 30, but Villarma anticipates some flexibility. "If for some reason we can't get it completed by that time, we will try to get an extension," she said.

WCA needs cultural dancers and storytellers for 2023 tourism season

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

The steady drumbeat and voices singing in unison, mixed with formline artwork regalia are unmistakable as Tlingit storytellers and dancers share their Native culture while curious visitors look on. It's a way to share the past and keep tribal traditions alive.

But it needs help.

The Wrangell Cooperative Association, which manages tribal affairs on the island, is looking for people to participate in its dancing and storytelling during the tourism season, which runs from about April to September, depending on the cruise ship schedule.

"This is open to all (tribal citizens or not), and we'd be willing to train those who needed some assistance," said Esther Reese, the WCA tribal administrator. "For storytelling, it's ideal to have two people minimum. For dancing, it's beneficial to have five or six people minimum."

Storytellers and dancers would share the Tlingit culture in performances at Shakes Island

throughout the tourism season; the days and times would depend on when cruise ships are in town. Reese said it's a little harder to get people who otherwise want to participate but have to work full-time.

"I think in some ways it's a matter of logistics," she said. "If it's through the day, younger people are working. If they're retired, it's a little easier for them to come and do this."

No shows were held during the 2020 season due to the pandemic, then resumed on a limited basis in 2021, Reese said. Things returned to normal for 2022 and are on track for more of the same in 2023 except for the lack of participants.

"We have a couple of people interested from last year, we're just trying to build a bigger base of people to come participate," Reese said.

People interested in joining can call the WCA office for more information at 907-874-4304.

"I think it would be a good opportunity for tribal and non-tribal citizens to learn about the culture and increase involvement with the tribe," Reese said.

Governor names Sitka judge to Alaska Supreme Court

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

Gov. Mike Dunleavy has appointed Jude Pate of Sitka to the Alaska Supreme Court, making him the first justice to come directly from someplace other than Juneau, Anchorage or Fairbanks since 1960.

Before Pate, the last justice who met those standards was Walter Hodge, who came from Nome and served on the court in 1959 and 1960.

Dunleavy announced the appointment by email Jan. 20.

Pate was appointed to fill a vacancy created this month by the retirement of Justice Daniel Winfree, who is reaching the constitutionally mandated retirement age of 70.

In December, the Alaska Judicial Council nominated four experienced attorneys as options for the vacancy. Un-

der the state constitution, the council examines the qualifications of applicants for a vacancy and selects a list of nominees based on merit, not political affiliation.

The other three nominees were Anchorage Superior Court Judge Dani Crosby, Department of Law attorney Kate Demarest and Fairbanks attorney Aimee Oravec.

If Dunleavy had picked any of those three, it would have put three women on the five-person high court, creating the first majority-female Alaska Supreme Court in state history.

In addition to being the first rural member from outside of the three largest cities in decades, Pate is also the first member of the court to come from Southeast Alaska since the retirement in 2013 of Judge Bud Carpeneti, of Juneau.

Born in Germany to a military family, Pate has extensive legal experience as a judge, tribal attorney and public defender, according to his resume, and he has a colorful early job history that includes jobs as "a baker, house painter, film projectionist, bartender, construction worker, hotel maid, a pizza delivery driver, and briefly as a strawberry field worker and as an attendant in a tanning salon."

A graduate of the University of Kansas and Lewis & Clark Northwestern School of Law, he has lived in Alaska for 30 years and was appointed a Sitka Superior Court judge by then-Gov. Bill Walker in 2017.

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State sues to block federal land trust for Tlingit and Haida parcel in Juneau

By CLARISE LARSON
Juneau Empire

What was described by a Southeast tribal leader as a benchmark achievement has led to what could become landmark litigation over Native lands.

The state of Alaska filed a lawsuit Jan. 17 against the federal government over a small plot of land in downtown Juneau, which was approved as the first parcel owned by the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska to be put into federal trust.

Lands held in trust are afforded permanent protection from state or municipal actions that could be detrimental to the tribe, according to supporters of the transfer.

The state's lawsuit asks the U.S. District Court to declare the federal government's action "arbitrary and capricious, an abuse of discretion," and seeks to undo the decision to take the land into trust. The state also wants to stop similar land-into-trust applications in the future.

"It's insulting — I am dismayed the state wants to continue these tired and old arguments," said Tlingit and Haida President Richard Chalyee Eesh Peterson. "It's mean-spirited and it's an assault on many of the mutual efforts and goodwill that have in recent years defined state and tribal relations in Alaska. It's incredibly disappointing."

The lawsuit comes less than a week after the sovereign tribe in Juneau signed a deed on the transfer. The application for the land was originally filed more than a decade ago and was approved in mid-November — only the second such trust agreement ever approved in Alaska.

"This was a great day for our tribe, self-determination and all tribes in Alaska. We have crossed the finish line in the land-into-trust process and will continue the journey for our remaining applications," Pe-

terson said in a statement after the signing.

"Tlingit and Haida will no longer be a landless tribe, but (will) be eligible for a much greater range of land-based programs," he said.

The state's lawsuit echoes an opinion by the Trump administration that replaced a 2017 Obama administration opinion which determined that the Interior Department could take land into trust to benefit Alaska Natives. The Trump-era opinion predicted accepting land into trust in Alaska would result in protracted litigation.

According to the state's complaint, the Department of the Interior action limits the state's sovereign jurisdiction.

The Department of the Interior allowed the first land-to-trust transfer in Alaska by the Craig Tribal Association in 2017. Tlingit and Haida has four more additional applications for land that are still pending, along with applications still pending from the Niniichik Traditional Council and the Native Village of Fort Yukon.

"We believe that this issue of tribal lands was settled with the passage of ANCSA (Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) in 1971, and that has been the law of the land for more than 50 years. If we are wrong, then the court needs to clarify it," said Gov. Mike Dunleavy in a news release announcing the lawsuit. "The purpose of the case is to receive unambiguous legal clarity for the state, local governments, the tribes and all Alaskans, on the question of placing Native land into federal trust for the tribes."

Peterson said he is confident Tlingit and Haida will prevail and "will not give up the fight."

"We're not the enemy — together we can do so much more for Alaskans than we do against each other," he said. "I challenge Dunleavy to put these antics aside and sit down with us civilly with an open heart, mind and ears to learn."

Study shows kelp can remove carbon and nitrogen pollution

By radio station KINY, Juneau

The water-filtering abilities of farmed kelp could help reduce marine pollution in coastal areas, according to a new University of Alaska Fairbanks-led study.

The paper, published in the January issue of *Aquaculture Journal*, analyzed carbon and nitrogen levels at two mixed-species kelp farms in Southcentral and Southeast Alaska during the 2020-21 growing season. Tissue and seawater samples showed that seaweed species may have different capabilities to remove nutrients from their surroundings.

"Some seaweeds are literally like sponges — they suck and never saturate," said Schery Umanzor, an assistant professor at UAF's College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences and the lead author of the study.

"Although carbon and carbon sequestration by kelp received most of the attention, kelp is actually much better at mitigating excessive amounts of nitrogen than carbon," Umanzor said. "I think that's a story that's really overlooked."

Nitrogen pollution is caused in coastal areas by factors such as urban sewage, domestic water runoff or fisheries waste disposal. It can lead to a variety of potential threats in marine environments, including toxic algae blooms, higher bacterial activity and depleted oxygen levels. Kelp grown in polluted waters shouldn't be used for food but could still be a promising tool for cleaning such areas.

Kelp farming is an emerging industry in Alaska, touted to improve food security and create new job opportunities. It's also

been considered as a global-scale method for storing carbon, which could be a way to reduce levels of atmospheric carbon that contribute to climate change.

Analysis of kelp tissue samples from the farms determined that ribbon kelp was more effective than sugar kelp at absorbing both nitrogen and carbon, although that difference was somewhat offset by the higher density of farmed sugar kelp forests.

Umanzor cautioned that the study was limited to two sites during a single growing season. She is currently processing a larger collection of samples collected from six Alaska kelp farms for the subsequent season.

"Maybe it's a function of species, maybe it's the site, maybe it's the type of carbon and nitrogen out there," Umanzor said. "There's a lot to know in a follow-up study."

State sued over monthslong delays in issuing food stamps

By LISA PHU
Alaska Beacon

Ten Alaskans are suing the state, saying it failed to provide food stamps within the time frames required by federal law.

The complaint, filed Jan. 20 in Superior Court in Anchorage, said the state had failed to provide needed services and "has subjected thousands of Alaskans to ongoing hunger and continues to do so."

Some families have waited four months to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, also known as food stamps, the complaint alleged.

"We've got people who are relying on family members. We've got people who are relying on food pantries. We've got people who are eating less so they can feed their kids, trying to juggle their bills and decide whether they're going to pay for their heat or their groceries," said Saima Akhtar, senior attorney at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice, one of the firms representing the plaintiffs in this lawsuit.

"People are taking as many different avenues as they can to take care of their families and eat right now, and it shouldn't be that hard," Akhtar said.

The complaint asserted the delay is due to the "immense delays and chaos of the Alaska Department of Health," and pointed to the unresolved "massive backlog of unprocessed SNAP cases that has left thousands of Alaskans without critical food assistance in the coldest months of the year."

While 10 Alaskans are named in the class-action suit — residents from Anchorage, Marshall, Petersburg, Wasilla, Bethel, Palmer, Nome and Delta Junction — they represent thousands of other Alaskans who are facing the same issue.

Under federal law, the Department of Health must

provide ongoing SNAP benefits to eligible applicants no later than 30 days after the date of application. Households that qualify for expedited processing are required to get their benefits within seven days of the application being filed. Some families have been waiting months, the complaint said.

The suit wants the court to order the Department of Health to process people's SNAP applications and recertifications within the timeframe required by federal law, to allow people to apply and seek benefits on the first day they contact the agency, and to ensure that there are adequate language interpretation services and translations of documents for those who need it.

Essentially, Akhtar said, the injunctive relief is asking the state to "do the things that they are legally obligated to in operating the program within the federal guidelines."

The plaintiffs are not seeking monetary damages. "They want to get fed," Akhtar said. "And they also have the opportunity to try and influence the system so that this is not happening again, so that their siblings and their children and communities aren't going hungry, too."

The chair of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee, Wasilla Sen. David Wilson, said his committee will hear from the Department of Health about the food stamp application backlog during a hearing this week.

"We want to know, basically, what can we do in the Legislature to help you fix this problem and how fast can it be fixed and resolved? And those are the issues that I want to focus on," Wilson said.

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Native Traditional Games set for April 1-2 in Juneau; signup open to 11 and older

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Long jumps, high kicks, feats of strength, balance and coordination — all this and more will be on display at the 2023 Traditional Games in Juneau.

Registration is open for the Traditional Games, also known as the Alaska Native Youth Olympics. Competitors from Wrangell and across Alaska are invited to test their mettle at 10 different Alaska Native athletic events, from the one-hand reach to the two-foot high kick.

"All the games are played for a reason," athlete and games ambassador Nicole Johnson told Alaska Business Monthly Magazine. "Before today's modern amenities, we needed to rely on these skills to survive, moving from one area to the next over the seasons. We had to be strong enough to provide for our families and to carry small and large loads over long distances."

The one-hand reach is "one of the most difficult events" at the games, Johnson explained on an instructional video from the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. Athletes must balance their entire body weight on their flat palm while reaching up with the other hand to touch a suspended ball.

The kneel jump challenges competitors' strength and coordination. Athletes kneel behind a line, then propel their bodies forward, jumping long distances with very little initial momentum before sticking the landing and maintaining balance. "The kneel jump was played to develop the skills hunters needed for jumping up quickly off of ice or from the ground," said Johnson.

The scissor broad jump "helped" develop the skills hunters needed to jump from one ice floe to another," she said. The event involves a four-step series of jumps that are measured by distance, with a complex, destabilizing "scissor step" in the middle.

Johnson, who grew up in Nome, was inducted into

"Before today's modern amenities, we needed to rely on these skills to survive, moving from one area to the next over the seasons."

Nicole Johnson,
athlete and games
ambassador

the North American Indigenous Athletics Hall of Fame in 2022. She's set several records in the two-foot high kick event, including a 6-foot-6-inch kick in 1989. She competed in the traditional games throughout high school.

Since its inception in 1972, the event's mission has been to celebrate the skills that Alaska Native people have been developing for generations.

Athletes at the traditional games may smash records and strive for personal bests, but they also support their competitors. "This is the spirit of the games," wrote Kathy Dye, Sealaska Heritage Institute communications and publications deputy director. "To work together toward common goals and learn from the skill and values that allowed Alaska Native people to survive and thrive in some of the harshest conditions."

This year's games will be held at Thunder Mountain High School in Juneau on April 1 and 2. They will also be livestreamed on the Sealaska Heritage Institute's YouTube account.

Athletes 11 years old or older are eligible to participate and can register at traditionalgames.sealaskaheritage.org. All participants will receive a T-shirt and gift bag; those who register before March 1 will be eligible to win a sealskin kicking ball.

Coach Kyle Worl is available to answer questions at kworl@ccchita-nsn.gov or (907) 227 4998.

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Republicans organize state House by including lawmakers from Native rural areas

By IRIS SAMUELS,
SEAN MAGUIRE
Anchorage Daily News

JUNEAU — A newly formed House majority — comprised of 19 Republicans, two Democrats and two independents — finalized its membership last Thursday, signaling a rightward shift in the chamber after six years of bipartisan coalitions composed mostly of Democrats.

The four-member Bush Caucus representing predominantly Alaska Native rural areas of the state joined most House Republicans to form a caucus on the second day of the legislative session, ending weeks of uncertainty over House leadership and giving many Republicans their first experience of serving in a majority after years of getting relegated to the minority.

"It's going to be an experience where at last we feel like we're part of the process of governing after being in the minority for six years," said Rep. George Rauscher, a Sutton Republican who will serve as one of two majority whips.

House Speaker Cathy Tilton, a Wasilla Republican, said Thursday that the majority's priorities would involve

addressing Alaska's fiscal situation, including through a possible cap on state spending. Caucus leaders balked at articulating any specifics — including on the size of the Permanent Fund dividend.

"The devil's in the details," said House Minority Leader Calvin Schrage, an Anchorage independent. "We've heard 'fiscal stability' from the new majority. What does fiscal stability mean? Is that just a bunch of cuts to balance the budget?"

The House Republicans' biggest challenge in advancing their own priorities could come from the opposite end of the Capitol hallway. On the Senate side, a bipartisan coalition almost evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats has vowed to set aside contentious social issues and focus on policy areas where members of the two parties can agree.

The different ideologies governing the two chambers could become a barrier to advancing legislation, with both chambers empowered to block bills coming from the opposite side. But lawmakers expressed optimism at the prospect of finding a middle ground.

"I'd like to think that iron sharpens iron, and in a lot of times you end up going in a similar direction," said Palmer Republican Rep. DeLena Johnson, who will co-chair the House Finance Committee, overseeing the operating budget.

After closed-door negotiations, the four Bush Caucus members from Nome, Dillingham, Bethel and Utqiagvik (Barrow) agreed to join most Republicans and break a stalemate forming a majority coalition, avoiding prolonged deadlocks that held up the chamber for weeks in 2019 and 2021.

"Folks in rural Alaska are always fine with us reaching across the aisle to work on their behalf," said Rep. Neal Foster, a Nome Democrat who joined the majority caucus. "There's a long history of that." Foster's father, Richard Foster, also served as a Democrat in the Alaska House and often caucused with Republicans.

"In rural Alaska, the big issue is, 'Am I going to be able to heat my home?'" Foster said, adding that basic infrastructure like water and sewer are top of mind for his constituents.

The 15-member minority includes 12 Democrats and three independents, several of whom have been members of bipartisan caucuses in previous years. Schrage said the minority will focus on advancing an education funding increase.

Two Republican House members, Rep. Louise Stutes of Kodiak and Rep. David Eastman of Wasilla, will remain outside of both the majority and the minority caucuses.

"I'm just out on my own," said Stutes, who served as House speaker last session and broke from other members of her party to preside over a coalition made up mostly of Democrats. "I'm just taking it a day at a time, to see how things play out."

Eastman, who recently prevailed in a legal challenge over whether his membership in the far-right Oath Keepers should keep him from serving in the Legislature, is viewed as difficult to work with by some lawmakers.

The House organization came together rapidly on the third day of the legislative session, after lawmakers were sworn in earlier in the week without a set plan for who would lead the House. With 21 Republicans in the 40-member chamber, disagreements between some GOP members had prevented them from forming a majority without bringing along some members of the opposing party.

In the powerful finance committee, Johnson, the Palmer Republican, will be in charge of managing the operating budget in the House. Foster, the Nome Democrat, will work with independent Rep. Bryce Edgmon of Dillingham on managing the capital budget and legislation that comes before the committee, paving the way for the rural lawmakers to have an outsized impact.

For Johnson, who has been a member of the House since 2017, it's her first time serving in the majority.

"It feels great. I mean, I think it's a little scary," said the former Palmer mayor. "I

think the difference between being in the majority and the minority is that you have to really own the actions taken."

Even without specific priorities articulated, some majority members acknowledged that the House's vision could conflict with that of the Senate.

Senate President Gary Stevens, a Kodiak Republican who leads a bipartisan coalition that has vowed to steer clear of contentious issues like abortion and LGBTQ rights, said "time will tell" if the House majority's priorities will align with those of the Senate.

"It might mean that the more liberal issues may never pass," Stevens said. "There could be some things that we will pass pretty readily that they may not even want to consider. And then — the same thing — they may pass and we were not going to consider."

Already, there were signs of the coming friction between the House and Senate.

Rep. Sarah Vance, a Republican from Homer, is set to chair the House Judiciary Committee, where she said she would prioritize an effort to repeal Alaska's ranked-choice voting and open primary election system despite repeated indications from the Senate that they were not interested in doing away with the new voting laws. Vance called repealing ranked-choice voting, which appeared to favor moderates at the expense of conservative Republicans, a "No. 1 issue."

Stevens said he will make an effort to communicate regularly with Tilton, the House speaker, and avoid working on legislation doomed to fail in the House.

"It just seems to me it's a waste of time to deal with legislation that we know is not going to pass the other body. I'm not going to do that and I assume they probably will not want to do that either," Stevens said. "Everything takes a lot of time. And if you find ways to just not spin your wheels when you know it's not going to pass the other body — that's probably the best approach to take."

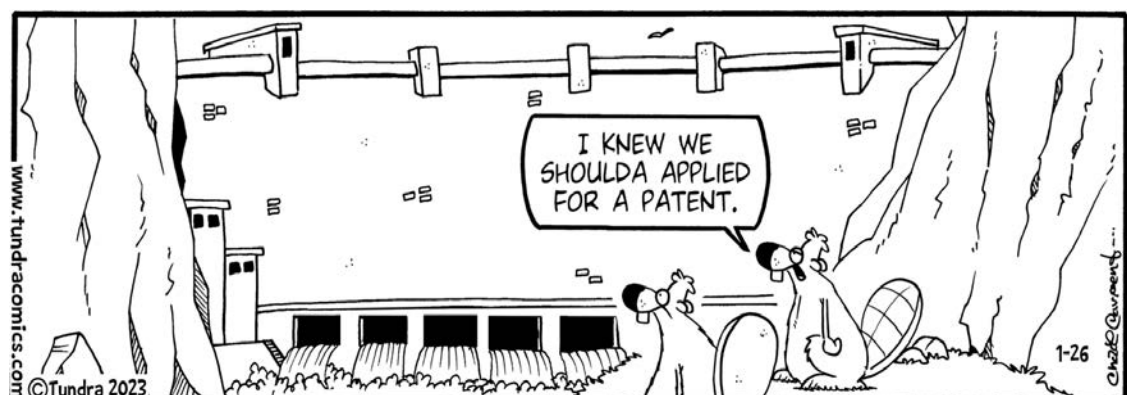
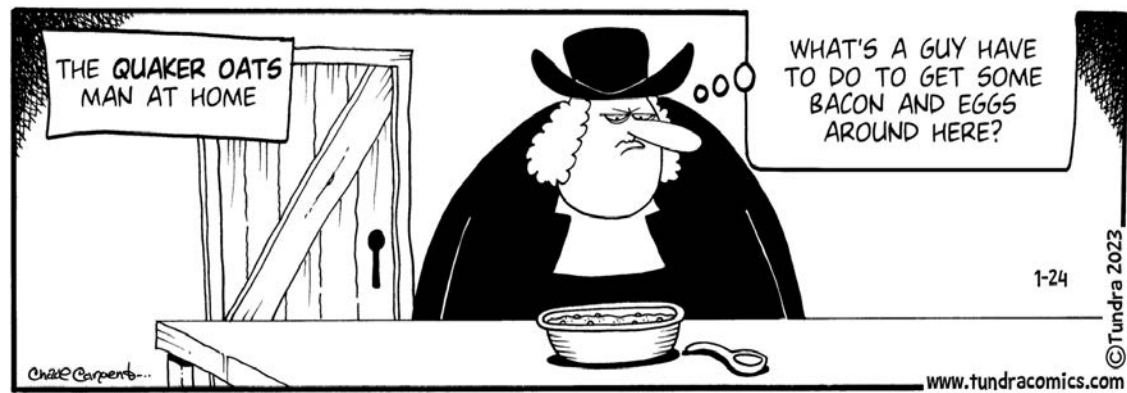
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Police report

Monday, Jan. 16

Threats.
Agency assist: Fire Department.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for no headlights.
Disturbance: Cutting firewood too late at night.

Tuesday, Jan. 17

Domestic.
Summons service.
Summons service.
Arrest: Assault and misconduct involving weapons.
Parking complaint: Vehicle was moved.

Wednesday, Jan. 18

Citation issued: Time-limit parking.

Thursday, Jan. 19

Agency assist: Fire Department.
Welfare check.
Civil standby.
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.
Domestic.
Subpoena service.
Traffic stop.
Noise complaint.

Friday, Jan. 20

Illegal parking: Vehicle will be moved.
Trespass.
Traffic stop: Citation issued for failure to provide proof of insurance, expired registration, driving with license revoked.
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for showing wrong expiration tag.
Civil standby.

Saturday, Jan. 21

Traffic stop: Verbal warning for headlight height.
Traffic stop: Citation issued for expired registration and no proof of insurance.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for no headlights.
Noise complaint: Music was turned down.

Sunday, Jan. 22

Agency assist: Marine Bar.
Traffic incident.
During this reporting period there were three citizen assists for vehicle unlock.

Polar bear kills mother and son in Northwest Alaska village

By ZACHARIAH HUGHES,
ALENA NAIDEN
Anchorage Daily News

A mother and her young son died Jan. 17 in an extremely rare attack by a polar bear in the Northwest Alaska village of Wales, the state's first fatal polar bear mauling in more than 30 years.

Alaska State Troopers identified the victims as 24-year-old St. Michael resident Summer Myomick and 1-year-old Clyde Ongtowasruk.

Troopers said reports of a polar bear attack came in around 2:30 p.m., with initial accounts describing the bear chasing several people before a Wales resident shot and killed the animal "as it attacked the pair."

Myomick was walking with her son between the school and the Wales clinic when the bear attacked them, troopers said.

Bering Strait School District officials said the mauling occurred next to the front entrance of Wales' Kingikmiut School building, which the bear threatened to enter. The principal and other employees rushed people into the school after the animal was spotted, the said district's chief school administrator, Susan R. Nedza.

"The bear tried to enter with them," Nedza said, but principal Dawn Hendrickson "slammed the door" to keep it out. "It's terrifying," Nedza said.

"Not something you're ever prepared for."

School officials locked down the building and drew the shades, she said. Eventually, they got the word out to the community that "they needed someone to take care of the bear."

Authorities had not publicly identified the person who killed the bear.

A state trooper and an Alaska Department of Fish and Game representative reached Wales on Jan. 18 to investigate the attack, after poor weather and "the lack of runway lights in Wales" had kept them from flying to the village earlier, according to state public safety officials. The remains of Myomick and her son were sent to the State Medical Examiner Office for autopsy.

Public safety officials say they won't be able to provide specifics about the bear involved in the attack until troopers and Fish and Game biologists can examine the animal.

Wales, a predominantly Inupiaq village of fewer than 150 people, is on the far western tip of the Seward Peninsula bordering the Bering Strait, just over 100 miles northwest of Nome. St. Michael, about 200 miles southeast of Wales, is on Norton Sound.

Myomick split time between the two communities, St. Michael city administrator Virginia Washington told the Associated Press.

In the wake of Myomick and her son's death, the community is grappling with "crippling grief," Nedza said.

Fatal polar bear attacks are rare in Alaska.

In 1990, a polar bear killed a man in the North Slope village of Point Lay. Biologists later said the animal showed signs of starvation. In 1993, a polar bear burst through a window of an Air Force radar station on the North Slope, seriously mauling a 55-year-old mechanic. He survived.

Polar bears are at the top of the food chain, the largest land carnivores on the planet and are more likely to enter populated communities or attack groups — as seen when solo bears take on dense herds of walrus hauled out on shore, researchers say.

But interactions with people remain exceedingly rare, said Geoff York, senior director of conservation at Polar Bears International, a nonprofit conservation group, in an interview Jan. 18.

"In this case, the bear had chased multiple people, which indicates it's a bear that's desperate," York said.

While there are large areas of open water just south and just north of Wales now — unusual by historical weather standards, but increasingly common in recent years — York said extensive sea ice is covering the Chuk-

chi and the Bering seas.

"Polar bears should be out on ice successfully finding natural prey — seals, small walrus and other animals in that region — so what this particular bear was doing onshore remains to be seen," he said.

Community members in Wales developed a polar bear patrol program in 2014 but discontinued the patrol later due to lack of funding, according to the Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council, a tribally authorized organization consisting of the 15 Alaska tribes, including Wales, that have traditionally harvested polar bears for subsistence.

Historically, the increase in polar bear attacks has been linked to two things, York said: less sea ice leading to more bears on shore, and more human activity in the Arctic, connected to shipping, natural resource exploration, research, tourism and growing communities.

It's also possible that fundamental changes under the ice might be impacting food availability for polar bears, sending them farther inland to spend more time on shore — fasting or searching for alternative food sources like unsecured garbage, York said.

"Once they find that caloric reward, then they become very difficult to manage," he said.

CLASSIFIED

SPOTS AVAILABLE FOR PILOT COMPOST PICKUP PROGRAM

WCA IGAP has 20 available spots in its Pilot Compost Pickup Program. Participants will be given a bucket with a lid and easy-to-follow instructions. Participants will fill their buckets with household food waste each week, and WCA IGAP staff will pick it up on the designated day of the week. If interested, please get in touch with Kim Wickman at igaptech.wca@gmail.com, or 907-874-4304 ext. 104.

COVER PHOTO WANTED FOR HOSPICE BOOKLET

Hospice is looking to select a donated photo for the cover of the 2023 edition of "Wrangell Community Final Arrangements and End of Life Information," which is given out free to the community. Photo credits will be printed in the publication. Deadline is Feb. 5 and a maximum of five entries can be emailed to cindymartin@gci.net.

HELP WANTED

Wrangell Cooperative Association is seeking a Domestic Violence Prevention Specialist. A complete job description and application are available at the Wrangell Cooperative Association office at 1002 Zimovia Highway or visit www.wca-tribe.org. Contact Esther Ashton at 907-874-4304 with any questions. Open until filled. Next review date is Feb. 1.

HELP WANTED

Wrangell Public Schools is accepting applications for the following positions:

- **Business Manager:** This is a full-time, 12-month position with benefits paid on the Exempt Employee Salary Schedule. Responsibilities include oversight of the school budget using a uniform chart of accounts coding, maintaining financial records, conducting all banking, payroll, accounts payable, annual audit preparation, and advising the superintendent in all matters that are financially relevant for the district. A degree in business and/or five years of experience in school business management is preferred but not required; professional

development/job training is available. Although an on-site employee is preferred, a remote employee or contractor with scheduled on-site visits may be considered.

- **Paraprofessionals:** These are part-time, nine-month positions working with students one-on-one or in small groups in grades K-12. Salary placement is Column A-C on the nine-month Classified Salary Schedule. The successful applicant must have an associate degree or equivalent (or higher) or the ability to pass the para-pro assessment administered by the District.
- **Technology Director/Network Administrator:** This is a full-time, 12-month position with benefits paid on the Exempt Employee Salary Schedule. The Technology Director/Network Adminis-

trator is responsible for managing the District's information technology infrastructure and applications, technical support team, and providing IT services for staff members and students. The Technology Director is responsible for the Local Area Network (LAN) and Wide Area Network (WAN), as well as all attached workstations and peripherals. The Technology Director is responsible for all firewalls, business applications and support thereof. The Technology Director reports current project status, offers IT solutions, working with e-rate services, and makes recommendations on all IT projects to the Superintendent and Technology Committee. The Technology Director approves all purchases at the division level, obtaining final

approval from the Superintendent. This position has independent judgment and decision-making authority.

For more information and detailed job descriptions, please contact the District Office at 907-874-2347. Positions are open until filled. It is the Wrangell Public School District's policy to not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, sex or disability.

BLADE SHARPENER NEEDED

Looking for someone who can

sharpen the blade on a paper cutter. Call 907-874-2301.

FREE PAPERS

Stop by the Sentinel to pick some up.

FREE ADS

Do you have something to sell? Having a garage sale? Looking to buy something? Classified ads for individuals and community groups are free in the Sentinel. Contact Amber at 907-874-2301 or email wrgsent@gmail.com.

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF IN-HOUSE and PUBLIC JOB OPENING Parks and Recreation Director

The City and Borough of Wrangell is seeking candidates for the position of Parks and Recreation Director. The Parks and Recreation Director position will remain open until filled. The position will be posted for no less than 14 days. Applications will be reviewed as soon as Jan. 25, 2023.

The Parks and Recreation Director is a supervisory position that integrates recreation services such as but not limited to a swimming facility, athletic programs, interest-based recreation programs, special events and classes. The Director oversees all elements of operation including the year-round maintenance of parks and related facilities, management of full and part-time staff, development and oversight of the department budget, coordination and support of various boards and committees, facilitation of facility use and interest groups. Advancement to Director requires compliance with the qualifications of the position and the ability to establish goals for the section based on community needs assessment, review of the accomplishments of teams and performance of individuals.

The position will appeal to a candidate who thrives in a fast-paced, collaborative and team-centered work environment and enjoys interacting with community members, families and children. The successful candidate will have experience that demonstrates strong organizational skills and an aptitude for solving programs autonomously and efficiently that will serve as an asset to the successful candidate.

This is a permanent exempt position with all City and Borough benefits, paid at a Grade 24 wage ranging from \$5,358.06 to \$6,760.52 per month. The full job description, qualifications and requirements and job application can be obtained on the borough website at <https://www.wrangell.com/jobs>.

Applicants are required to submit their cover letter, resume and application to City Hall, 205 Brueger Street (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929 or via email at rmarshall@wrangell.com.

The City and Borough of Wrangell is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE INVITING BIDS Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) System

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the construction of the AUTOMATED METERING INFRASTRUCTURE (AMI) SYSTEM project. Work consists of providing and implementing a mesh Advanced Metering Infrastructure System (AMI) with a smart grid to facilitate two-way communications with its electric utility service to improve staff efficiencies, customer service, ensure billing accuracy, and perform data collection. The Estimate for all work is approximately \$700,000 to \$750,000.

Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, P.O. Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or located at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on March 2, 2023, 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) under the Bids and RFPs section. Downloading Contract Documents from the City and Borough of Wrangell's website requires registration with the Borough Clerk in order to be placed on the Plan Holders List and to ensure receipt of subsequent Addenda. Failure to register may adversely affect your proposal. It is the Offeror's responsibility to ensure that they have received all Addenda affecting this Solicitation. To be registered, contact the Borough Clerk at 907-874-2381 or at clerk@wrangell.com

The Owner reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any informality in a Bid, or to make award as it best serves the interests of the Owner.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Jan. 25, Feb. 1, 8 and 15, 2023

Publish Jan. 25, 2023

The Wrangell Convention and Visitor Bureau and the Sentinel are joining forces to create one visitor guide showcasing all that Wrangell has to offer!

Wrangell has recently gone through a tourism rebrand. If you want your business to be a part of this collaboration of tourism and business promotion, showcasing the town, reserve your ad space now.

The guide will be online year-round and 10,000 copies will be printed to mail out to inquiries, take to trade shows and hand out to spread the word of Wrangell as a great visitor destination.

No change in ad rates from last year!

Call or email Amber at the Sentinel today to ask about advertising in the guide.

907-874-2301

wrgsent@gmail.com

