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WCA will give blessing at Capitol Christmas Tree lighting ceremony

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

A large contingent from Wrangell will be in the crowd as the switch is flipped to light up The Capitol Christmas Tree on Tuesday, Dec. 3, including tribal members of the Wrangell Cooperative Association who will bless the 80-foot-tall spruce.

The lighting ceremony is scheduled for 1 p.m. Alaska time and will be available for online viewing, including on the YouTube channel of the Speaker of the U.S. House at <https://bit.ly/3V5EDQg>.

The tree, with a trunk almost 22 inches wide, arrived in the nation's capital on Friday, Nov. 22, after a long journey from Zarembo Island, where it was harvested last month. It traveled from Wrangell by barge to Seattle, then by truck for about 4,000 highway miles to Washington, D.C.

A couple of Lynden Transport Alaska drivers steered the tree from Puget Sound to the East Coast: John Schank, 72, and Fred Austin, 89.

Upon its arrival, a team from the Architect of the Capitol, which is responsible for the building and grounds, started work to secure the Tongass National Forest tree in its place of honor on the Capitol's West Lawn and hang decorations. Alaskans made about 14,000 ornaments — including hundreds from Wrangell — to hang on the honored tree and several others that will be stationed around the capital city.

The lighting of the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree goes back to 1964. This year is the second time the tree has come from Alaska; the Chugach National Forest in Southcentral Alaska gave up one of its trees for the honor in 2015.

It's no one-night stand for the Zarembo Island tree. It will remain lit from dusk to 11 p.m. each evening through Jan. 1.

Alaska's U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski's office confirmed on Nov. 21 that the WCA would give the blessing at the tree lighting, said Esther Aaltséen Reese, tribal administrator.

Joining Reese for the event in Washington will be tribal council member Sandy Churchill, clan leader and tribal council mem-

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PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER MULLEN / KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

The Wolves celebrate after beating Metlakatla in five sets to win the Southeast 2A volleyball tournament at Craig High School on Saturday. Both teams will advance to state, with Wrangell as the No. 1 seed.

Volleyball team takes Southeast regional title, state meet up next

By SAM PAUSMAN
Sentinel senior reporter

Three-peat secured.

The Wrangell High School volleyball team are Southeast champions. After entering the tournament as favorites, Wrangell beat Hoonah, Petersburg and Metlakatla en route to head coach Brian Herman's third consecutive title in as many years at the program's helm.

The Southeast 2A tournament was held at Craig High School on Thursday through Saturday, Nov. 21-23. The champs have a week to rest up before the state tournament Dec. 5-7 in Palmer.

Wrangell trounced the Hoonah Braves in

the first day of the Southeast tournament, beating them 25-15 in the first set, 25-23 in the second and 25-12 in the final set. Christina Johnson and Aubrey Wynne led the way for the Wolves, serving 14 aces between the two of them.

In the next day of the double-elimination tournament, No. 1 seed Wrangell matched up against No. 4 Petersburg. The Vikings were coming off a hard-fought, four-set thriller over Craig in the first round and were looking to finally get the better of their rivals to the south.

But the Wolves didn't care. They didn't care that pretty much the entire crowd were cheering against them. They didn't care that they

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Borough drops asking price for old hospital property

By SAM PAUSMAN
Sentinel senior reporter

For about half the average price of a home in Seattle, you could buy Wrangell's former hospital property.

The borough assembly

passed a resolution on Nov. 18, dropping the price of the property from its appraised value of \$830,000 to a new asking price of \$498,000, pretty close to the reduced price of \$470,000 the borough advertised in 2022.

The property, which has been vacant since SEARHC moved out in 2021, currently sits empty. It costs the borough several tens of thousands of dollars a year to insure and maintain the building against

damage from cold and water.

In dropping the price to 60% of its appraisal value, borough officials hope they can get the property off their books as soon as possible. Though City Hall came close to selling the prop-

erty to Georgia-based developer Wayne Johnson this summer, Johnson pulled out of the deal on June 28.

Johnson had agreed to pay \$200,000 for the 1.94 acres, with plans to demolish the decades-old 30,000-square-foot hospital to build condominiums.

After Johnson walked away, the borough implored its economic development board to identify a list of hopes for the property's sale. The board said that, ideally, any sale would see the property transformed into something that spurred economic development in town — whether job creation or increased tax revenue.

The borough is willing to take a smaller payday on the front end with the hopes that the long-term economic benefits eclipse the short-term cost of a reduced sales price.

However, anyone prospective buyer who makes an offer

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Community gathers to remember landslide victims

By SUE BAHEIDA
For the Wrangell Sentinel

Virgina Oliver set the reflective tone for the community's landslide remembrance by singing the first verse of "Silent Night" in Tlingit, and then inviting people to sing it together in English. The town gathered on Wednesday, Nov. 20, at the Nolan Center to remember their six friends and neighbors who died in a destructive landslide a year ago that evening.

With the words "sleep in heavenly peace" resonating in the hall, Esther Aaltséen Reese, WCA tribal administrator, explained the vision for the evening: coming together to remember, but also to connect, to eat together and to deepen the ties and relationships that reflect the resilience and purpose of those who live in Wrangell.

Reese read a letter from Alaska U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski which, in part, echoed those thoughts: "The past year has been a testament to the strength and resilience of Wrangell. ... Neighbors became heroes and friends became family as everyday Alaskans

rose to the moment to help each other out."

Reese concluded her remarks with two Tlingit offerings. The first was a "gift to guests on our land: 'Have strength and courage.'" The second: "We are going to succeed with love."

Mayor Patty Gilbert followed: "Our community shares a collective experience of loss but our grief is as individual as our lives." She thanked first responders, adding a prayer for their courage, wisdom, strength and compassion.

Sarah Scambler, a close friend of Beth Heller, rose to read a letter from the extended family of Tim, Beth, Mara, Kara and Derek Heller, who all died in the landslide. The letter acknowledged the challenges faced by first responders and how they — and the entire community — gave their all, from the first impact of the landslide to the assistance with preparations for the memorial services.

"We want you to know that we have noticed the incredible heart of this community, and that we have valued every act of kindness," the letter stated.

Continued on page 4

Senior Center Menu

Thursday, Nov. 28

Closed for Thanksgiving Day

Friday, Nov. 29

Taco salad, oranges

Monday, Dec. 2

No meal service on Mondays

Tuesday, Dec. 3

Spaghetti with meat sauce, steamed zucchini, tossed salad, garlic rolls, fruit

Wednesday, Dec. 4

Roast beef and gravy, green beans, romaine and radish salad, mashed potatoes, fruit

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.



ALASKA AIRLINES CLUB 49 COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

TURKEY TROT on Thanksgiving morning, Nov. 28, at the covered basketball court, hosted by Parks and Recreation. Sign-up is at 8:45 a.m. and the fun run starts at 9 a.m. Costumes encouraged. All donations will go to the Stikine Middle School cross-country team travel fund.

ELKS HOOP SHOOT free-throw contest for ages 8 to 13 will be Saturday, Nov. 30, at the community center gym: 10 a.m. for ages 8 to 9; 11 a.m. for ages 10 to 11; noon for ages 12 to 13. For more information, call Jeff Jabusch 907-305-0086. A hamburger lunch for all participants will be held at the Elks Lodge after the shoot.

CHRISTMAS TREE LANE is coming to town, and decorated trees will be accepted noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 30, and 4 to 7 p.m., Monday, Dec. 2, at the Nolan Center. Each entry goes up for a silent auction to support Hospice of Wrangell. Be creative and beautify the Nolan Center lobby. Bidding opens Dec. 5 and closes 1 p.m. Dec. 19. For more information, email rooney@aptalaska.net.

DOVE TREE CEREMONY 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 1, in the Nolan Center lobby. The ceremony is to remember deceased loved ones, and is open to all. The Dove Tree will remain up through the new year. Anyone may add doves to the tree. Sponsored by Hospice of Wrangell. For more information, call Alice Rooney 907-305-0007.

SING-ALONG MESSIAH 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 1, at St. Philip's Episcopal Church. Short evening prayer service followed by singing selections from Handel's Messiah. Reception to follow in the parish hall. Bring your own copy of the music if you have one.

COMMUNITY PUPPET PLAY REHEARSALS 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays at The Salvation Army. Middle and high school age students are welcome to participate in a fun, low-stress, low-embarrassment form of theater. Learn the basics and build up to preparing a Christmas play for the community. Adults interested in helping call 907-874-3753.

HOMESCHOOL HANGOUT 10 a.m. to noon Tuesday, Dec. 3, at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Bring school work, play games and be with friends. Snacks provided.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WINTER CONCERT 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 5, in the elementary gym. Doors open at 6:45 p.m. Stream online: <https://bit.ly/3G2ulZ8>.

COMMUNITY MARKET from 4 to 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, at the Nolan Center for Midnight Madness. Check out the locally grown and handcrafted item.

MIDDLE and HIGH SCHOOL WINTER CONCERT 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 10, in the high school gym. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Stream online: <https://bit.ly/3G2ulZ8>

ADVENTURERS CLUB 2 to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14, at the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Come learn about the Bible, pick up skills and earn badges. Register and learn more at <https://bit.ly/3TBw0fl>. A \$10 fee covers the school year.

"BABE" 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 17, at the Nolan Center. The 1995 animal adventure, comedy, drama, family movie is free; presented by Island of Faith Lutheran Church as part of its retro-movie program. The concession stand will be open.

CHILDREN'S CLASS 2:30 to 4 p.m. Tuesdays at the elementary school music room for kindergarten to fifth grade. The focus of the program is for spiritual growth to learn to apply virtues through stories, devotions, music, games and art. All are welcome. No charge. For more information call Kay Larson, 907-209-9117.

WRANGELL KIDS CLUB 2:30 to 5 p.m. Mondays at the community center for open gym, board games and coloring; 2:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesdays at the Irene Ingle Public Library for STEM activities and crafts; 2:30 to 5 p.m. Fridays at the Nolan Center for a movie. For ages 7 to 13 years old. Runs through Dec. 16. Free.

AA MEETINGS: North Star Group meets from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Fridays, St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

WRANGELL PARKS and RECREATION is offering multiple activities to get your body moving. For more information on any of the activities visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

- **WATER AEROBICS** noon to 1 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the swimming pool with volunteers Alice Rooney and Melody Hazel.
- **PICKLEBALL** 6 to 8 p.m. Mondays and Saturdays, noon to 2 p.m. Wednesdays at the community center gym. For ages 18 years old and up.
- **ZUMBA** 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Fridays at the community center gym with Nene Wilson. For ages 16 years old and up.

Ferry Schedule

Northbound

Sunday, Dec. 15

Columbia, 10:45 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 22

Columbia, 4:45 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 29

Columbia, 9:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 5

Columbia, 4:45 p.m.

Southbound

Wednesday, Dec. 18

Columbia, 8:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 25

Columbia, 7:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 1

Columbia, 7:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 8

Columbia, 6:30 a.m.

Listings are scheduled departure times.

Call the terminal at 907-874-2021 for information or 907-874-3711 for recorded information.

Tides

High Tides

Low Tides

	AM		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Nov. 27	10:12	15.8	10:53	13.5	03:49	3.4	04:40	1.0
Nov. 28	10:47	16.3	11:35	13.9	04:29	3.4	05:15	-0.1
Nov. 29	11:20	16.6	05:06	3.5	05:48	-0.8
Nov. 30	00:15	14.1	11:53	16.8	05:40	3.6	06:21	-1.3
Dec. 1	00:53	14.1	12:24	16.7	06:13	3.8	06:53	-1.6
Dec. 2	01:29	14.0	12:56	16.6	06:45	4.1	07:27	-1.6
Dec. 3	02:06	13.8	01:30	16.4	07:19	4.4	08:04	-1.4

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

Nov. 20 1924

The present week has been observed as National Education Week in the schools. No elaborate program has been prepared but the emphasis in all the regular classes has been placed upon the country's need of an educated citizenship. Col. Knott, who was with Gen. Allenby on the occasion of the taking of Jerusalem in the world war, gave a vivid picture of some world war scenes in connection with a very inspirational assembly lecture at the high school on Thursday. In the afternoon of the same day, Brigadier Simms, of The Salvation Army, gave a talk at the grade school, illustrated

with lantern slides.

Nov. 25, 1949

A joint meeting of the Wrangell Health Council, the Red Cross and the Tuberculosis Association met in the state public health office last week. Several of the town's organizations were represented, but not all, and a request was put forth for all representatives of local organizations to attend these meetings. The organizations have decided to place a loan closet in the hospital, to be equipped with sick room supplies that anyone may borrow if they cannot purchase the necessary items. The items will be checked out to

the parties and will have to be returned within a certain length of time, but if they still have further need they may ask for a reissue.

Nov. 20, 1974

The fight against a city plan to annex a massive chunk of Wrangell Island, including about 800 residents, will be abandoned, a leader of the opposition said this week. Orden Phillips, owner of Panhandle Trailer Park just outside the city line, said the Ketchikan attorney retained to weigh the chances of beating the annexation in the court has recommended the move. No official meeting of the

opponents has been called to affirm dropping the matter, Phillips said, but he indicated the feeling "is to drop it." The city proposed the annexation, which will expand the city limits to take in the northern third of the island, and the action was approved by the state Local Boundary Commission after a public hearing here. The annexation will become fact unless it is challenged and denied by a majority vote in the coming legislative session.

Nov. 25, 1999

The sound of drums will soon be echoing through Wrangell when students of

Jennifer Brady-Morales finish their instruments. Twenty two students, both adults and children, worked for four days last week crafting handmade elk hide drums with artist Brady-Morales from Sitka. The artist is well known Alaskan whose work is on display at the Alaska State Museum and the Smithsonian. Students heard Brady-Morales lecture on the history of drum making, to increase respect for the craft. The drums will be played at a JOM potlatch on Nov. 29 at the SNO Building and will be on display at the high school on Nov. 30 during a program celebrating National Native Heritage Month.

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FREIGHT FOR LESS

Borough, school district officials explore solutions for education funding woes

By SAM PAUSMAN
Sentinel senior reporter

The Wrangell school district is running out of money — literally. If state and borough funding continue at the current levels, the schools will empty their reserves within two years.

To help counteract the funding woes, the school board and superintendent met with the borough manager, mayor and borough assembly to workshop potential solutions on Nov. 19. The conversation lasted nearly two hours and began with slide deck presentations from Borough Manager Mason Villarma and school district Business Manager Kristy Andrew.

Villarma was blunt.

“We’re in poor shape,” he said, referencing the school’s draining reserves balance. “What we’re doing isn’t sustainable.”

This year, the borough funded the school district at \$1.3 million, about \$300,000 less than the past two years. Though the state Legislature appropriated funds for a one-year boost in state aid to school districts this year — worth about \$440,000 to Wrangell — the assembly reduced the borough contribution to the school budget by about the same amount. The result was no gain in funding for the schools, while the borough was able to avoid spending down its own reserves.

Villarma explained that the school district’s borough-based funding comes from two sources: The first is a percentage of annual sales tax revenue (currently 20%), and the second comes from a federal aid program called Secure Rural Schools.

The U.S. Forest Service program, subject to annual congressional appropriation, provides rural communities with money for roads and schools to help compensate for the fact that municipalities cannot collect property taxes on Forest Service land.

The borough allocated its entire SRS check toward the school district for the 2023-2024 school year.

With this year’s reduced borough contribution to the school district, the borough expects to end the fiscal year next June 30 with more than \$1.4 million in its Secure Rural Schools reserve fund from prior federal payments, roughly \$2 million less than the fund had in 2019.

The school district shows it started this school year with \$1.377 million in its own reserves, but expects to draw down its savings by \$727,000 to balance the budget, leaving an estimated \$650,000 in reserves at the end of the school year.

Absent more local funding or state aid, the district could empty its reserves in a year without significant cuts to its budget.

Villarma wants to expand the list of possible solutions for the school’s financial stress, but he acknowledged that the extent of the problem lies at levels outside of local jurisdiction.

“Education funding is a state issue they haven’t taken ownership of in recent years,” he said. “It’s our obligation to work together (with

the schools) and we want to do that. It’s no good to point fingers because its neither of our fault. We’re just inheriting circumstances from the state.”

The school district received over \$3 million in state funding for the current school year, an amount that constitutes about two-thirds of the district’s general fund operating revenue, according to business manager Andrew. However, the state’s funding is tied to student enrollment, meaning the downward trend of students in the school system results in less funding from the state.

At the Nov. 19 work session, the assembly and school board tried to brainstorm solutions to bring more money into the school district. They discussed a “sin tax” — essentially a 2% or 3% tax on tobacco and alcohol products that would directly fund the schools. Villarma noted that Petersburg, Ketchikan and Sitka all do something similar.

He also suggested increasing the sales tax cap. Currently, Wrangell residents are only taxed on the first \$3,000 of a purchase. Meaning, whether you buy something for \$3,000 or \$10,000, the borough will receive the same amount (\$210) from sales tax. By increasing the cap, the school’s allotment of sales tax revenue would increase alongside it.

However, Villarma acknowledged that generating new taxes can only do so much, which is the reason he is such a strong proponent of a potential exchange student program. Marketing it as a Wrangell, Alaska exchange experience, Villarma said the program could help increase state funding.

“The exchange kids would count toward enrollment, so you go from 270 to 300 kids in the district, and you bring in close to \$300,000 in funding from the state,” he said. “And you send some Wrangell kids down south too, just at a lesser ratio.”

He also said bringing in students from out of town would make for a better educational product.

“You’re introducing different perspectives and diversity and different kinds of kids that come from a different educational background into the system,” Villarma said.

Schools Superintendent Bill Burr said marketing the experience as a form of “student tourism” could increase interest from down south.

Burr and Villarma will continue to meet regularly. The borough’s finance committee will also explore the viability of proposed options at its meeting next month. Villarma hopes the schools will be proactive about finding solutions.

“We expect our partners at the school would do something either to increase their revenues” or reduce expenses, he said. “Whether that’s through grants, whether that’s through other ideas that me and Bill have talked about, or there’s cutting inefficiencies and operations, which we should all be doing anyway as stewards of the taxpayer dollar.”



Creative cookie decorators

More than 80 kids, including Violet Allen, turned out at the Irene Ingle Public Library on Saturday to decorate cookies “in honor and loving memory of the Heller family” who died in a landslide a year ago.



PHOTOS BY SARAH SCAMBLER

Zeplyn Stutz applied swirls of icing plus sprinkles, candy pieces and other edible decorations to the cookies she created at the library on Saturday.

Correction

The Sentinel misspelled the name of Lynden Transport driver John Schank in a Nov. 20 news report about Schank and Fred Austin driving the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree cross country to Washington, D.C.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Don't ask and maybe they won't tell

BY LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

I like flying. I like looking down at the Earth and trying to identify what I see. I like having breakfast in one state and dinner in another. I like resetting my watch as if I am traveling in time, which I am.

And I enjoy imagining stories about people on the plane. It's as if I am writing a novel, only no one will review and criticize my work.

The key point being I imagine what I like. I don't really want to know their long stories, so I generally don't talk to people on planes. Of course, it doesn't always work.

I was flying back to Alaska from Houston and the guy in the seat next to me kept squirming and wiggling. Though I ignored him, he turned to me and asked: "You're probably wondering why I am squirming so much?"

I lied and said no.

He ignored my answer and proceeded to tell me his story. He was a traveling salesman of Tibetan beer and had checked into his hotel the night before and taken a shower. He was tired, so he sat down on the narrow ledge in the shower, which was there for shampoo bottles, not 200-pound guys.

The tile shattered under his weight and left him with a cut bottom and a bruised ego. He wrapped his bleeding rear end in a towel and drove himself to the ER. The doc examined the cuts, announced that the man needed stitches, and then called over younger doctors and nurses to observe the skill and style required to stitch up a flexible bottom as this guy was bent over the exam table.

At that point in his storytelling, the guy

pulled out his phone. I panicked. I thought, no way do I want to see photos of his stitches. Thankfully, they were only photos of the shattered shower tile. He blamed the hotel for his stitched-up butt and planned to file a claim.

I should add that he was so happy with the doc's stitches that he delivered a case of beer to the ER before he left town.

I had an uneventful couple of years of flying seatmates until last week on a flight to Seattle. The man next to me was checking the texts and emails on his phone as we were landing at SeaTac. He was clearly upset at what he was reading.

Turns out he and his partner in the next seat over had reserved a rental car through Turo for their visit. But Turo had sent him a cancellation notice. Apparently he did not pass Turo's trust screening that the app conducts before putting him in the driver's seat of somebody else's car. Turns out Turo had sent him four emails with questions the day before, none of which he answered. Turns out the non-responses led to the failing grade on trust.

His response to all this, which I overheard as we were separated by nothing more than a three-inch-wide armrest, was to tell his partner what he intended to do about Turo: "We need to give them a really bad review."

No sense of personal responsibility for ignoring the emails, just as the beer salesman did not accept that it was his fault for thinking a shampoo bottle shelf would support the weight of 20 12-packs.

No surprise that I'd rather look out the window and daydream about untold stories. Fiction is better than listening to the truth.

EDITORIAL

State and borough both need to boost school funding

No question about it, the state is delinquent in funding public schools in Alaska. It has failed to do its homework, turn in assignments, come to class prepared and whatever other analogy you want to use.

The mathematical fact is that the state's per-pupil funding formula hasn't had a permanent raise of any significance since the Chicago Cubs broke a 108-year drought and won the baseball World Series in 2016. And while 2016 was a good year for Cubs' fans, that shouldn't also be remembered as the last year the Alaska Legislature and governor agreed to a real boost in the funding formula which is so important for local school districts.

Legislators have tried over the years, particularly the past couple of legislative sessions when school administrators, teachers and parents pushed hard for more school funding. But Gov. Mike Dunleavy, soon to start his seventh year in the job, has declined to support a permanent raise in the funding formula unless it is tied to his own agenda to promote charter schools. Even then, he has been non-committal on how much more funding he would support for K-12 schools.

The Legislature in this year's budget appropriated a one-time boost in state funding for the 2024-2025 school year, but all that did was kick the school book down the road.

Then in Wrangell's case, the borough assembly reduced the local contribution to the school district by the same amount as the one-year state money, negating any classroom benefit from the extra state dollars.

The assembly held back on its contribution to the schools to preserve the borough's own reserves, which is fiscally prudent. The account needs to stay healthy to help pay for schools and road work in the years ahead.

However, the assembly decision left the school district no choice but to draw down its reserves even more than planned to balance the budget. At the current rate, the district's reserves could be gone by the 2026-2027 school year.

It's a multiple-choice test to fund Wrangell schools. A permanent increase in the state's funding formula is one answer, which legislators will work toward when they convene in January.

The second answer is Wrangell needs to contribute more. It's not like the school district is extravagant. There is a single counselor for 260 students; many of the district's jobs are filled by part-time contractors, not full-time staff; the community is asked to do more to help pay for student travel; and teacher salaries are nowhere near the statewide leaderboard.

Borough officials have suggested maybe a tax on alcohol or tobacco, or maybe raising the amount of individual purchases subject to Wrangell's general sales tax which shuts off after \$3,000.

It's good that borough and school district officials are looking for answers. It's a chance for the school board to make its case and show that it needs the money, as the assembly will need convincing to raise tax revenues. Students will benefit if both groups do their jobs.

- Wrangell Sentinel

Hospital price drop

Continued from page 1

below the property's appraisal value is required to "submit a detailed proposal outlining specific economic development benefits of their proposed use," per the assembly resolution.

Kate Thomas, the borough's economic development director, said she will promote the sale through a nationwide public property surplus website and "any other marketing materials we have." She said sale strategy conversations between her and Borough Manager Mason Villarma are underway.

The \$498,000 asking price does not include the six borough-owned lots adjacent to the property, which Johnson had wanted for his condo project.

As part of his offer to the borough, the developer had agreed to cover the costs of the hospital building demolition.

"The reason we pursued the sale with Mr. Johnson was the value of demolition," Villarma said. "But I think prospective buyers got the notion that we would (accept) \$200,000 for any proposal, and that's not the

truth."

Assembly Member Jim DeBord was the sole member of the assembly to express concerns about the price drop.

"We had the perfect solution, but that got torpedoed," he said, citing the near sale to Johnson. "I think somebody is going to end up in over their head, and we're going to have bigger issues and lose site control."

DeBord said his ideal solution would be to "find some type of funding to demolish" the building and then explore the best solution for the "nice piece of property" afterward.

Villarma said he expects a demolition could cost the borough around \$2 million, something he said could be assisted by the EPA's brownfields program — a grant and loan program designed to help municipalities to safely "clean up and sustainably reuse contaminated properties" like the old hospital which contains some asbestos.

Villarma said the borough could try and cover its bases by

simultaneously exploring demolition grant funding through the EPA while also marketing the property to potential buyers. "It's not mutually exclusive," he said. "I think that's not a bad backstop. Maybe that's a good solution."

The assembly passed the resolution to drop the asking price; the only dissenting vote came from DeBord.

Landslide remembrance

Continued from page 1

The letter closed with words that shaped the Heller family: "No matter what happens in life, be good to people," and a reminder to "live like Derek, with the silliest of grins!"

Words of thanksgiving and appreciation from the only survivor of the landslide, Christina Florschutz, were shared. Though she has moved to Kodiak, she spoke of the affirmations she received, especially from the students and staff at Evergreen Elementary School where she worked as an aide. Florschutz's husband, Otto, died in the landslide.

High school cross-country coaches Borough Manager Mason Villarma and Laura Davis spoke of Kara and Derek Heller's all-in attitude to sports and announced plans for a Heller Memorial Invitational Run next fall, which they hope will attract

as many as 300 runners from around the state.

Salvation Army Capt. Chase Green closed the program with a prayer that reminded the gathering that Wrangell is not just a community but a family, and that the love, joy and kindness of those who died remains true in everyone.

Alongside a generous potluck and table conversations, art teachers Tawney Crowley and Anne Luetkemeyer had prepared materials that will go into a memorial bench. Rocks of various sizes and shapes were available for painting images and messages. The painted rocks will be incorporated into a bench, for installation at a location yet to be determined.

While it was a night to mark the anniversary and to remember those who died, the spirit of the evening was of thanksgiving, resilience and connection.

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Two tax-free days a year may no longer be guaranteed

By SAM PAUSMAN
Sentinel senior reporter

In a unanimous decision, the borough assembly took the first step toward increasing flexibility for the number of annual tax-free days, allowing for anywhere between zero and two days in a year.

Currently, there are two sales tax-free days per year, often bookending the summer season so that full-time residents (rather than tourists) can enjoy the town-wide discounts in the spring and fall. On tax-free days, Wrangell's 7% sales tax is removed for 24 hours. Local businesses tend to run additional sales on these days, with the hope of increasing foot traffic in their stores.

However, the opportunity cost for the borough on these days is sizable.

Borough Manager Mason Villarma

estimates the borough loses between \$20,000 and \$30,000 in revenue every tax-free day. As it currently stands, sales tax revenue is divided into two buckets: 80% contributes toward the borough's general fund, and the remaining 20% is allocated to the school district.

With the school's reserve fund headed in a steep descent downward in the coming years and the borough trying to maximize revenue for capital projects like road improvements, the assembly recognizes that increased funding has to come from somewhere. That is driving the change to the municipal code governing tax-free days.

Though the change will likely result in a single tax-free day in 2025 according to Villarma, the flexibility of the proposed ordinance opens up the possibility of a future return to two days. It

also means that if the borough finds itself in a tighter fiscal pinch, the assembly could do away with tax-free days altogether.

Assembly Member Anne Morrison also sits on the borough's code review committee. She teamed up with Mayor Patty Gilbert to rewrite the language in the proposed ordinance, which the assembly approved in the first reading on Nov. 18.

Morrison explained the decision to change the code: "I've talked to several business owners here in town and they advocate for the one tax-free day rather than the two," she said.

Currently, the chamber is responsible for scheduling and seeking approval for the exact dates for tax-free days. If there is just one in a calendar year, the chamber will need to determine if a spring

date or a fall date is preferred.

Borough Clerk Kim Lane said the proposed ordinance would reframe the planning process for such days. If the ordinance is passed in the second and final reading next month, the chamber would need to submit the requested tax-free days to the assembly by April. This would allow the City Hall finance team to adjust the upcoming fiscal year's budget accordingly.

Meanwhile, borough officials are exploring possible solutions to revitalize sales tax revenue, which dropped 6.9% last year, including implementing a sales tax on purchases made on cruise ships while they are in town.

The second reading and public hearing to adopt the changes for tax-free days is scheduled for the borough assembly meeting on Dec. 17.

Electrical transformers ordered; subdivision land sale back on track

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The sale of 20 borough-owned residential lots at the Alder Top Village (Keishangita.'aan) subdivision near Shoemaker Harbor is on track for summer 2025.

The sale — half of the lots by auction and half by lottery — had been planned for this past summer, but site work pushed that back to the fall and then a nationwide shortage of electrical transformers delayed it even further.

However, the borough assembly at its Nov. 18 meeting approved a contract with a South Dakota-based company for a dozen electrical transformers for the subdivision.

The borough will later issue a separate contract for installation of the transformers, said Kate Thomas, Wrangell's economic development director.

Assuming no further delays, the land sale should proceed next summer, she said.

"There's certainly still a lot of excitement by people" for the opportunity to choose among the lots, she said. The parcels are about a half-acre in size each.

Starting sale prices had been estimated earlier this year at between \$45,000 and \$70,000, depending on parcel size, location and water view, but those numbers could change. The borough will get the lots ap-

praised before the sale to determine their market value.

Next year's sale will include 10 lots sold by lottery at a fixed price, and 10 sold by an online auction.

The borough received five bids to supply the transformers, ranging from \$50,728 from T&R Electric, which says it is the largest supplier of rebuilt transformers in the U.S., to \$110,000 from ECB Solutions, an Alabama-based supply chain and project management company.

The assembly awarded the contract to T&R Electric. The contract requires delivery by May 2025.

The borough had decided to wait until the streets and utilities are finished at the property before opening access to the land for potential buyers to evaluate which lots they may want to buy. The transformers and buried electrical lines are part of the work.

A national energy lab report in March said an "unprecedented imbalance between supply and demand" had created a significant increase in lead times for developers to find and buy distribution transformers, which are used to step down medium-level voltage to service-level voltage for end-use electrical consumption.

"Shortages have been attributed to pent-up post-pandemic demand; difficulty recruiting, training and

retaining a skilled workforce; component supply chain challenges; and materials shortages," the report said.

The borough has owned the property near 6-Mile Zimovia Highway since 1996, when the federal government transferred the acreage to the municipality. It was the site of the 1932-1975 Wrangell Institute, a Bureau of Indian Affairs Alaska Native boarding school.

The borough expects it will have spent more than \$2.5 million to develop the land, paying for surveys, clearing, leveling and fill to create buildable lots, putting in streets and buried utilities. Depending on the results of a new appraisal, the borough's residential construction fund might recover around half of the cost if all 20 lots are sold.

After the land sale, the borough estimates the residential construction fund will have a balance of just over \$400,000, limiting the municipality's ability to front the expenses of developing a second or third phase to open up more parcels at Alder Top.

The borough, however, could consider selling acreage to a private developer for the next phases, with the developer paying the costs of preparing the lots for sale.

Christmas tree blessing

Continued from page 1

ber Lu Knapp and clan leader Mike Aak'wtaatsen Hoyt, a historian and Teehitaan clan leader who designed the formline art for the tree's emblem with the Tlingit words kayéil', sagú and ka toowúk'ei. The English translation is "peace, happiness and joy."

Also in the crowd will be students from Wrangell High School's T3 program (Teaching Through Technology), who worked on the watering system that kept the tree hydrated for its long journey to the East Coast.

It will be a mother-daughter event for Reese;

her daughter is among the T3 students.

Murkowski worked with Alaska Airlines to cover the students' travel expenses. The U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Forest Service are helping to cover hotels and other expenses.

Also planning to attend are Wrangell florist Artha DeRuyter and her husband John. Artha was among 300 volunteers selected from around the country to help decorate the White House for the holidays. Though she is expected to finish her decorating work over the weekend, she plans to stay in town for the tree lighting.

Annual Hoop Shoot for children goes to the basket on Saturday

SENTINEL STAFF

Participants in the nationwide Elks Hoop Shoot have to be a lot younger than the event itself. The free-throw contest is more than 50 years old, but it's open only to kids 8 through 13 years old.

The annual Hoop Shoot will be held Saturday, Nov. 30, at the Wrangell community center gym. The times are 10 a.m. for ages 8 to 9; 11 a.m. for ages 10 to 11; and noon for ages 12 to 13.

Kids' age as of April 1, 2025, will determine which group they will shoot in.

They will each get five warm-up shots at the hoop, followed by a round of 10 throws and a second round with 15 throws, explained Jeff Jabusch, who has volunteered for the event since the 1980s.

The winners in each age category will receive medals for first, second and third places, with separate competition for boys and girls.

Along with the medals, every kid will receive a free basketball to take home and can enjoy free hamburgers at the Elks Club after the Hoop Shoot ends.

Jabusch said kids should arrive at the community center about 15 minutes early to sign up, and "it's a good idea to a bring parent," though it is not mandatory. No advance sign-up is required.

The scores from Wrangell's Hoop Shoot will be sent to the program's state directors to line up against competition held by the 15 Elks Lodges across Alaska. The state winners will travel to regional and, if they qualify, to national competition, courtesy of the Elks-funded program, Jabusch said.

The Wrangell Elks Lodge pays for the basketballs, medals and burgers.

For more information, call Jabusch 907-305-0086.

The basketball net will be at the usual height — 10 feet — but players in the 8- and 9-year-old bracket will shoot from four feet closer to the basket than everyone else who will stand at the free-throw line 15 feet away from the net.

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PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MULLEN / KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

Petersburg's Iris Case hits the ball as Wrangell's Christina Johnson (right) tries to block the shot during Wrangell's three-set victory over Petersburg 25-21, 25-13, 25-14 on the second day of the Southeast 2A volleyball tournament at Craig High School on Friday.

Volleyball

Continued from page 1

were heavy favorites — that Petersburg hadn't won a single set against them in this season's previous two matchups. They didn't care that Petersburg was coming in hot, and they certainly didn't care about Metlakatla, who awaited them in the next round. They

only cared about winning.

So, they won. Wrangell won by eight points in the first set, before blowing the Vikings out of the water in the subsequent second and third sets, 25-13 and 25-14. Wynne attributed the stomping win to the team's consistency.

"We are really well-rounded



Sophia Martinsen sets the ball during Wrangell's five-set victory over Metlakatla on Saturday to advance to the Southeast championship game later in the day.



Wrangell's Aubrey Wayne and Sophia Martinsen (right) dive for the ball during Wrangell's five-set victory over Metlakatla to advance to the championship game of the Southeast tournament at Craig High School on Saturday.



Wrangell's Kayla Young looks at the bench and cheers after beating Metlakatla in five sets on Saturday to advance to the championship game of the Southeast volleyball tournament.

as a team offensively and defensively," she told the Ketchikan Daily News. "It is hard to find our weak spots, we just have a strong all-around team of girls."

Next up was Metlakatla on the third day. The first match went back and forth. Wrangell took the first set; Metlakatla took the second and third. Wrangell forced the match to a tiebreak fifth set when they won the fourth by just two points. The tiebreak, however, wasn't close. Wrangell won 15-9, the highest margin of victory by either team in the match.

This win moved Wrangell to

3-0 on the season when a best-of-five match went to a tiebreak set. Due to the double-elimination nature of the tournament, Metlakatla was bumped down to the losers' bracket. If they beat Petersburg, they would again face Wrangell, who now awaited them in the finals. Metlakatla won, securing a finals date with their rivals to the north.

As Gladiator II opened in movie theaters across the country, Wrangell girls volleyball stepped into a coliseum of their own, facing Metlakatla for the Southeast title.

In the teams' previous matchup at the Southeast seed-

ing tournament in Petersburg on Nov. 9, the Chiefs got the better of the Wolves. Metlakatla delivered Wrangell its sole Southeast defeat all season, beating them in a tight first set before walloping Wrangell in the second set 25-14 to secure the win.

But fast forward to the Southeast championship match, and it's safe to say that Wrangell had their vengeance (in this life, not the next).

Wrangell started off right where they picked up in the previous round, beating the Chiefs by a combined 15 points in the first two sets. Metlakatla clawed back and won the next two sets (26-24, 25-17) and forced the Wolves into a first-to-15 tiebreak set. But the Metlakatla rally wasn't enough. It wasn't enough to get past Wrangell's aggressive serving, it wasn't enough to make up for Wrangell defensive fluidity and it certainly wasn't enough to take the Southeast championship out of the hands of the region's best team.

So, when Wynne's aced a serve from the left side to win the final set, one thing was for certain: the Southeast trophy wasn't going anywhere.

Next up, the Wolves will head to Palmer for the state championships on Dec. 5-7. Herman, who is hoping to improve on last year's fourth-place finish, is already preparing for the tournament.

"We are watching film this week to see how we match up against some of those other teams," he said. "From what we've seen, we've got a pretty good shot."



Wrangell's Sophia Martinsen dives for the ball during Wrangell's victory over Petersburg at the Southeast volleyball tournament on Friday.

Wrestling team finishes 4th in Sitka; individuals score 8 podium finishes

By SAM PAUSMAN
Sentinel senior reporter

One day Wrangell will attend a wrestling meet where they don't come home with a podium finish. The Sitka Invitational on Nov. 22-23 was not that day.

Four Wrangell wrestlers ended the weekend on the podium's top step. Two finished with silver medals and two more finished third. The team finished in fourth place, just 10 points behind third-place Ketchikan.

Mt. Edgumbe High School won the meet, but Wrangell boasted the highest winning percentage, beating opponents in 53 of their 75 matches. The Wolves pinned their opponents 24 times, more than the sum of Metlakatla, Sitka and Hoonah put together.

"I'm super proud of the team," head coach Jack Carney said. "We've been wrestling six weeks in a row, and we are all feeling it. Even though we felt muggy, you could tell we were the best and most disciplined team at the individual level."

Senior captain Della Churchill returned to the top step of the podium in the girls 126-pound bracket, pinning Mt. Edgumbe's Tahira Akaran in the championship match to secure the win. Cooper Powers came in first in the boys 135-pound division while Hailey Cook took first in the girls 107-pound bracket. Notably, Powers' victory was his first-ever first place finish.

"He was able to battle back, come from behind, and win by one point," coach Carney said proudly.

Rounding out the Wrangell champions was Ben Houser, who beat Mt. Edgumbe's Ralphie Steeves by major decision in the boys 125-pound division.

Wrangell's two silver medalists were Cody Barnes in the 215-pound bracket and Jackson Carney, who lost out to longtime Ketchikan rival Gage Massin by decision in the 140-pound championship match.

Vanessa Barnes finished third in the girls 185-pound division and Everett Meissner secured the team's final bronze medal when he pinned Juneau's Orrin Noon in the boys 160-pound third place match.

The team had several fourth-place finishes in addition to the eight podium finishers. Lennex Gurule, Lucas Stearns, Michael Cook and Kalee Herman all finished fourth in their respective weight classes.

The meet in Sitka was the team's final competition before a week off to prepare for the run-up to the state championship. Coach Carney is making sure to give his wrestlers ample rest during the off week so that they can hit their stride in the season's final weeks.

"We're just looking forward to a nice weekend off," he said. "We're going to have short practices. We slow down for Thanksgiving weekend so that they can peak for the final push when we come back."

They will wrestle in the final regular season meet of the year in Petersburg on Dec 6-7. The next week, Wrangell will attend the Southeast championship in Haines before attending the state championship in Anchorage to close out the season.

The team will host a fundraiser dinner Saturday evening, Nov. 30, from the Stikine Inn – pickup only between 5 and 7:30 p.m. Wrestling team members are selling the tickets, with a pickup time designated on each ticket. A silent auction also is planned for the evening, starting at 4:30 p.m.

Whether you purchase deep-fried halibut or just want to support the wrestlers, all donations will help support the team's operating and travel costs.

Sing-along 'Messiah' returns to St. Philip's Sunday evening

SENTINEL STAFF

The music is almost 300 years old, and it's been at least 20 years since it's been performed at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Wrangell, but George Frideric Handel's "Messiah" is timeless and the community is invited to a sing-along Sunday, Dec. 1.

"We decided to try to revive it," Bonnie Demerjian said of the community sing-along event.

"We're just going to sing along with the recording" of "Messiah" by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, she explained. "They're our backup."

It's "classical (music) karaoke."

It will be a much shorter version than the full "Messiah," which runs more than two hours. The sing-along will include the Hallelujah chorus and maybe one other chorus, Demerjian said. "It will depend on how much people want to do."

There are no practice sessions and the sing-along will be informal. The organizers will have some copies of the music available to share if people don't have their own to bring.

The community is invited to come listen; singing is optional.

The sing-along will start soon after a short service at 6:30 p.m. Sunday at the church. Light refreshments will be served after the music.

Alaska commercial salmon harvest third-lowest since 1985

By KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

Commercial salmon harvesters have had a tough year in Alaska, with preliminary state estimates showing that the 2024 season had the third-lowest catch since 1985 and the third-lowest inflation-adjusted ex-vessel value to fishermen since 1975, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

The department released its annual salmon harvest summary on Nov. 18.

Statewide, commercial fishermen landed 101.2 million salmon of all species during the 2024 season, according to the summary. That's down 56% from the total harvest of 232.2 million in 2023, and 25% lower than the preseason projection of 135.7 million salmon of all species.

Pink salmon harvests statewide fared the worst among the five salmon species relative to preseason forecasts, coming in at about 58% of the preseason harvest projection, according to the summary.

The number of commercial permit holders participating in the fisheries declined, as well, sliding from 5,592 permit holders in 2023 to 5,276 in 2024.

The state's preliminary estimate of "ex-vessel" value, which represents the amount that fishermen are paid for their catch, is about \$304 million. In 2023, the preliminary ex-vessel estimate was \$398 million.

"Market conditions significantly impacted the pricing of salmon statewide and consequently, the value of the harvest," according to the announcement, which noted that the "final value of the 2024 salmon fishery will be determined in 2025 after seafood buyers and processors report the total value paid to fishermen."

Competition from farmed salmon and cheaper Russian salmon have cut into Alaska's market share and undermined prices.

For Southeast Alaska, commercial harvesters

landed an estimated 35.74 million salmon of all species, with a total estimated ex-vessel value of about \$79.89 million.

That preliminary number was the second lowest since 2013, higher than only the pandemic season of 2020 at about \$50 million, according to Fish and Game data.

Chum salmon was the largest contributor to the Southeast Alaska harvest by value, according to the summary data. Harvesters landed about 13.69 million chums, which, at an average price of 41 cents per pound, netted a total of about \$38.29 million for Southeast Alaska fishers.

Between 2007 and 2024, chum have contributed from \$10.35 million (2020) to \$82.63 million (2012) in preliminary ex-vessel value to commercial harvesters in Southeast Alaska, according to department data.

Unlike other areas of Alaska, the Southeast harvest of about 19.88 million pink salmon was almost spot on the preseason point-estimate forecast of 19 million pinks.

However, with an average price of 25 cents per pound, the preliminary ex-vessel value of pink salmon to commercial harvesters was only about \$14.5 million – the 10th lowest dollar amount (not adjusted for inflation) since 2013.

Only 2020 (\$6.24 million) and 2018 (\$11.35 million) saw lower preliminary ex-vessel value numbers for pinks. The year with the highest preliminary ex-vessel value for pinks during that time frame was 2013, which tallied \$124.74 million.

Other preliminary harvests and ex-vessel values in Southeast in 2024 were 189,286 king salmon valued at \$10.92 million (\$5.44 per pound on average); 738,110 sockeye valued at \$5.85 million (\$1.52 per pound) and 1.25 million coho valued at \$10.35 million (\$1.38 per pound), according to department data.

Next year's pink salmon harvest forecast at 45% above this year

By ANNA LAFFREY
Ketchikan Daily News

State and federal fisheries managers predict that Southeast Alaska fishermen will harvest about 29 million pink salmon in 2025, an "average" harvest based on catch data going back to 1960 but a 45% boost over this year's catch.

The prediction comes from a

joint National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries and Alaska Department of Fish and Game 2025 Southeast Alaska Pink Salmon Harvest Forecast that the state released Nov. 19.

The 2025 forecast for 29 million pinks is "approximately 60% of the parent-year (2023) harvest of 48 million," Fish and Game said.

Managers predict that the 2025 pink salmon harvest will increase from 2024, when the commercial fleet in Southeast and Yakutat harvested approximately 19.9 million pinks, according to preliminary salmon harvest data.

Teresa Fish, the state's Southeast pink and chum project leader, noted in an email to the Ketchikan Daily News that

managers' 2024 harvest prediction of approximately 19 million pink salmon was "pretty close" to the actual harvest.

The department's 2025 prediction for a Southeast Alaska harvest of 29 million pink salmon is "slightly above" the region's 10-year average annual commercial harvest of 26 million pinks from 2015 through 2024, according to Fish and Game.

Almost all pink salmon return to their home streams two years after they spawn. In recent years, pink salmon returns and harvests in Southeast Alaska have been larger during odd-numbered years than in even-numbered years.

In recent odd-numbered years, managers' harvest predictions have shown "poor forecast accuracy," according to the Nov. 19 announcement.

In 2021, commercial fishermen harvested about 48.5 million pink salmon after managers predicted a 2021 harvest of just 28 million pink salmon.

In 2023, commercial fishermen in Southeast Alaska harvested nearly 48 million pink salmon. NOAA and Fish and Game had estimated that commercial fishermen would have a "weak" catch of just 19 million pinks in 2023.

As the 2023 harvest blasted past the forecast, pink salmon markets collapsed mid-season and processors in early August 2023 dropped their pink salmon prices to 20 cents per pound.

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Alaska seafood industry hurting on multiple fronts

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

State officials and industry leaders trying to rescue the ailing Alaska seafood industry are facing daunting challenges, recently released numbers show.

The industry lost \$1.8 billion last year, the result of low prices, closed harvests and other problems, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Direct employment of harvesters last year fell by 8% to the lowest level since 2001, when counts of harvesting jobs began, the Alaska Department of Labor said. The monthly average for seafood-harvesting jobs fell below 5,900 in 2023, down from a peak of about 8,500 in 2015, according to a newly published analysis in Alaska Economic Trends, the department's monthly research magazine.

Local ownership of fishing permits has eroded over several years. In the Bristol Bay salmon fishery, for example, from 1975 to 2023, locally owned setnet permits declined in number by 54% and locally owned driftnet permits declined by 59%, according to experts at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and elsewhere.

Dillingham State Rep. Bryce Edgmon, part of a task force charged with making recommendations on ways that lawmakers can help rescue the industry, said the solutions will be difficult and will require the full attention of his colleagues next year.

"I think this next session is an opportunity for us to really take that sort of hard look at the industry — where it is today where it could be tomorrow, where it may not be if we don't take action," Edgmon said on Nov. 14, the second of two days of hearings held last week in Anchorage by the Joint Legislative Task Force Evaluating Alaska's Seafood Industry.

The task force is due to produce a report, with recommendations for action, at the start of the 2025 legislative session.

As described by experts who testified at the task force's most recent hearings, the causes of the crisis hitting nearly all sectors of Alaska's seafood industry are myriad.

One is climate change. The stock crashes that prompted cancellation of recent and formerly lucrative Bering Sea crab fisheries, for example, have been blamed by scientists on a marine heat wave, part of a series of heat waves connected to climate change.

There is no question that climate change is impacting the fish in the ocean environment, said Florence Kargi, regional affairs manager at the Coastal Villages Region Fund, a Western Alaska regional organization that holds Bering Sea harvest shares through the federal Community Development Quota program.

"We see it. Every year. This time of year in the '90s, when I was growing up, the ocean would be frozen" and winter conditions would have swept in, Kargi, who is from the Yup'ik village of Hooper Bay, told legislators on Nov. 14. "But now we're in mid-November, and the ocean

isn't frozen."

There are plenty of other causes of the economic turmoil, however.

Joe Bundrant, chief executive officer of Trident Seafoods, described how Russian fish production is part of a "perfect storm" of low prices, devaluation of Alaska's product and a geopolitical landscape "like I've never seen anything close to it."

In a panel discussion at last week's Resource Development Council for Alaska annual conference in Anchorage, Bundrant pointed to the recently an-

nounced Russian decision to increase its allowable catch of pollock by 7% to 2.46 million metric tons. The Russian quota decision ran counter to advice from some scientists and pleas from some Russian fishing groups worried about low prices in a glutted market.

The 2025 Russian quota compares to a total allowable catch of pollock for 2024 on the U.S. side of the Bering Sea of 1.3 million metric tons.

"This hurts me to even say," Bundrant told the conference audience. "When the fish swims

across the dateline, it's harvested, it's sold around the world as Alaska pollock. That is the species' name. So even though we can put together a great marketing campaign in South America, we put together a great marketing campaign in Germany or Japan, the Russians come in and say, 'Well, we have Alaska pollock too. It's just cheaper.'"

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Doug Vincent-Lang, speaking at the same conference, said booming supplies of salmon from new

sources are among the many headwinds the Alaska seafood industry faces.

That includes increasing hatchery releases from Asia that are crowding the ocean that Alaska fish use, he said. And it includes pen-reared salmon, he said.

"We're seeing increased fish farming worldwide," Vincent-Lang said. "That's having an impact on our wild salmon and our ability to sell those wild fish."

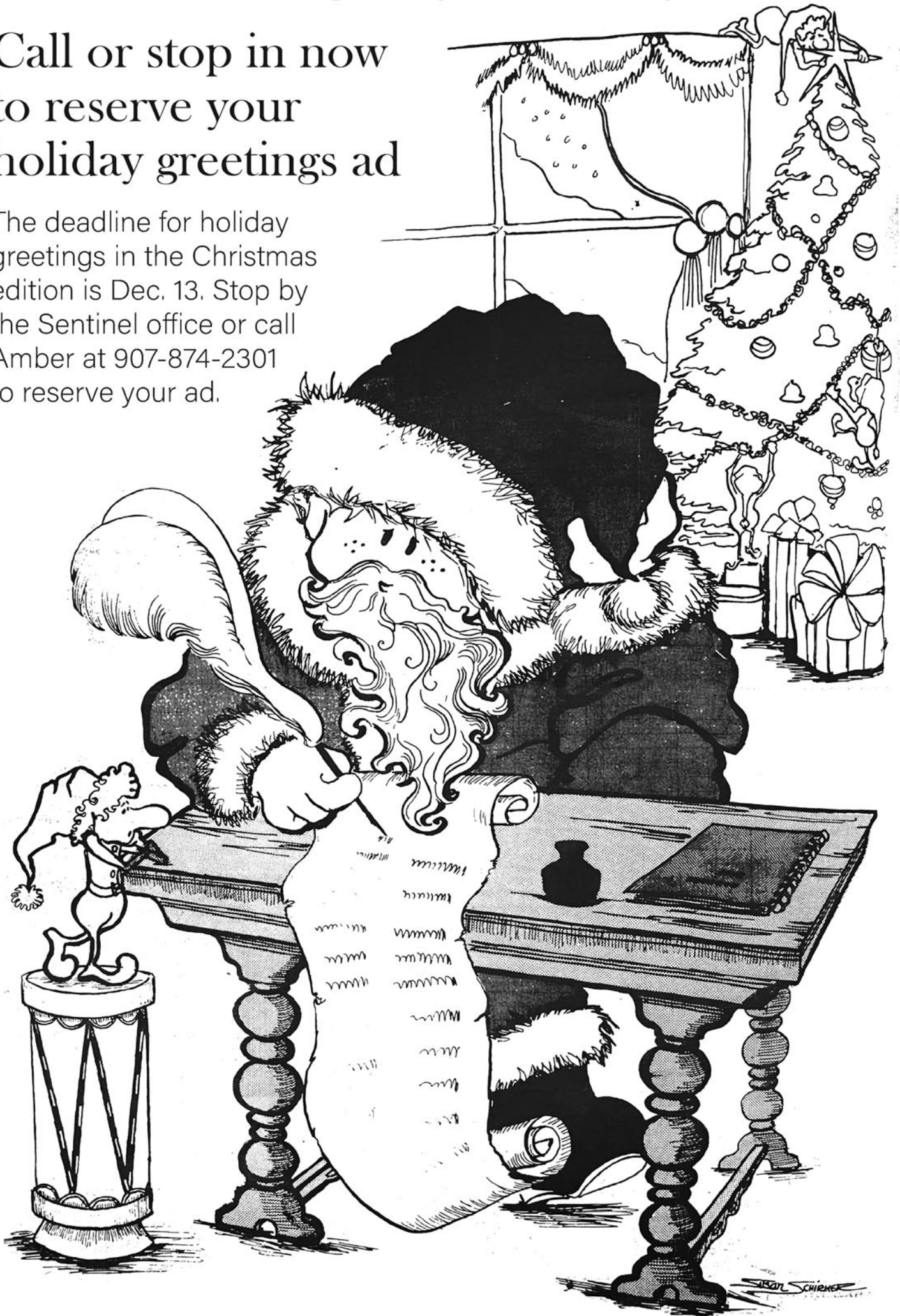
Farmed salmon is produced not only in cold-water places like

Continued on page 9

THE ANNUAL SENTINEL CHRISTMAS GREETINGS ISSUE WILL BE PUBLISHED DEC. 18

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State says seafood processors struggled last year to hire workers

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Alaska seafood processors hired fewer people in 2023 but paid them more and relied more on nonresidents to fill the jobs, a state analysis shows.

The employment trends are what would be expected in an industry struggling to find workers, said Dan Robinson, the state economist who wrote the analysis for the Alaska Department of Labor's monthly magazine.

"I do think the reason for that is just they've had to work harder to get workers and to pay workers more to come there," said Robinson, the department's research chief and author of the article in the November issue of Alaska Economic Trends.

The number of Alaska seafood processor jobs totaled 8,495 in 2023, about 20% lower than the total in 2014, the analysis

shows. At the same time, according to the analysis, total pay to processing workers of \$626 million last year was about 30% higher than the aggregate pay in 2014, calculated in 2023 dollars, of \$482 million.

The average monthly wage for seafood workers in 2023 was \$6,100, exceeding the statewide average of \$5,700 for all workers, the analysis found.

Processing workers made more money, despite myriad woes afflicting the Alaska seafood industry, including market erosion, low fish prices and rising costs.

It is not clear whether the inflation-adjusted increase in processor workers' earnings was from higher base pay or from increased overtime pay, Robinson said. The department does not have the information needed to make that determination.

Increased earnings of either type, along

with the smaller jobs total, point to the same underlying cause, he said.

"Lower employment, higher wages, that smells strongly of difficulty finding enough people and having to pay them more," he said.

Nonresidents made up 82.3% of the seafood processing workforce in 2023, according to the department's analysis. Nonresidents have long made up the majority of seafood processor workers, but the proportion has crept up in recent years, from about three quarters from 2014 to 2018 to over 80% since 2021, according to the analysis.

Workers from outside the U.S. have also been important to the industry, but the numbers who are employed through a special visa program vary by year. In 2023, the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration

certified Alaska employers to hire 825 workers under a federal visa program, which is commonly used for the seafood industry. Of the authorized positions, 554 were for seafood processing workers, according to the state analysis.

It is unclear whether all 554 spots were used by the seafood industry, Robinson said.

In some years, there are far fewer seafood processing workers hired through these visas. In 2014, for example, the federal Department of Labor granted only one company's request to hire workers under the visa program, and only 20 workers were authorized, Robinson's analysis said.

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Seafood task force

Continued from page 8

Norway and Chile but also in some less-likely locations, now including Florida.

Luke Fanning, head of a non-profit that supports fishery development and participates in Community Development Quota harvests in the Aleutian-Pribilof region, cited aged infrastructure as another challenge.

"So much of the Alaska seafood infrastructure was built in the 1970s and 1980s, and it's all getting old. At the same time, we need to have the retained

earnings, we need to have the support, we need to have the capital investment to continue to make those investments to revitalize the industry or we're going to lose all those community benefits," Fanning, who is chief executive office of the Aleutian Pribilof Island Community Development Association, told the Resource Development Council (RDC) audience.

Five seafood plants in Alaska have closed in the past four years, dealing devastating blows

to those communities, Fanning said.

There was some consensus among speakers at the two-day legislative task force hearing, as well as panel speakers at the RDC conference, about certain solutions.

They want more rigorous fishery and environmental science and the funding it would require.

They want continued and enhanced federal trade policies to counter what they say are unfair practices by Russia and other

players. Last year's executive order barring imports of Russian fish processed in other countries is an example of desired trade policies, Bundrant said.

Legislative task force members have zeroed in on the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, an industry-funded state agency, as critical to any solution.

Senate President Gary Stevens, of Kodiak, the chair of the task force, noted that lawmakers approved increased funding for ASMI last year, but

that Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoed the increase.

"I think it'll be added back into the budget this coming session," Stevens said during the second day of last week's hearing. "We realize how important it is, that marketing is an important issue."

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Police report

Monday, Nov. 18

Agency assist: Fire Department.
Civil matter.
Agency assist: Ambulance.

Tuesday, Nov. 19

Welfare check.

Wednesday, Nov. 20

Child neglect.
Agency assist: Southeast Alaska Cities Against Drugs Task Force.
Traffic stop.

Thursday, Nov. 21

Agency assist: Fire Department.
Loose dog.

Friday, Nov. 22

Motor vehicle accident: Car versus deer.
Theft: Unfounded.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for no taillights.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for headlight out.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for no turn signal.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for driving habits.

Saturday, Nov. 23

Traffic stop: Driving with suspended license.
Agency assist: Public Works.
Traffic stop: Citation issued for no proof of insurance.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Traffic stop: Verbal warning for faulty headlight and not carrying drivers license.
Vehicle unlock.
Traffic stop: Citation issued for no proof of insurance.

Sunday, Nov. 24

Parking complaint.
Traffic stop.

During this reporting period there were five bar checks.

Obituary: Willard Dee Lowe

July 29, 1939 - November 18, 2024

Willard Dee Lowe passed on Nov. 18, 2024, in Colfax, Washington.

Willard was born on July 29, 1939, to Otis and Gala Lowe in Green Hollow, Washington, on the family farm. His birth was assisted by his maternal grandmother, Margaret Frederick, and his paternal aunt, Dorothy Lowe. He grew up loving hunting, fishing and camping. He attended Colfax schools in Washington state. During his junior year in high school, he was invited to the Sadie Hawkins dance by Anne Pierce, a freshman. This started a relationship that spanned 69 years.

Upon graduating from Colfax High School, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. He served his country as an infantryman from 1957 to 1961. He was stationed at Camp Pendleton in California and Okinawa, Japan.

He came back to Colfax and married Anne Pierce on Oct. 3, 1959. They were stationed at Camp Pendleton until 1961. While there, they lost their first child, Gail Wanda (stillborn). She was brought home to be buried in the family plot at Colfax cemetery.

In 1962, Willard enrolled at Washington State University and studied Forestry. He graduated in 1967 and began his U.S. Forest Service career in St. Maries, Idaho, working on the St. Joe National Forest.

His second child, Dee Anne, was born in Colfax in 1962. His third child, Stephanie Lynn, was born in St. Maries, Idaho in 1967.

The family spent the years 1967 to 1974 in the Idaho panhandle. Willard worked in St. Maries and Avery, Idaho, on the St. Joe National Forest. He then was transferred to the Clearwater National Forest and worked out of the



WILLARD DEE LOWE

towns of Pierce and Kamiah, Idaho. While in Pierce he took up the sport of trapshooting and it would remain a favorite pastime for the rest of his life.

In 1974 he accepted a transfer to the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. His first station was in Kake, Alaska, on Kupreanof Island. His next transfer was to Wrangell. This is where he spent the remainder of his career. While there he was trained to be a federal law enforcement officer; his job was to protect federal lands. He was a member of the Elks Club. He was also instrumental in the development of the Wrangell shooting range as well as instructing Wrangell youth in gun safety.

Alaska proved to be the perfect place for Willard and his family. He enjoyed hunting duck, geese, deer, moose and caribou. Fishing was another favorite pastime, whether it was shrimp, crab, clams, halibut, cod or any type of salmon.

He retired from the Forest Service in 1992. In 1994, Willard and Anne moved to Ketchikan, Alaska. Anne was trans-

ferred there while working for the Alaska court system. Willard joined the Ketchikan Trapshooting Club and continued his love for the sport. In 1996, Willard and Anne moved to Priest Lake, Idaho. In 2002, they moved to Endicott, Washington. He enjoyed being back on the Palouse of Idaho and Washington state and rekindling past friendships. While in Endicott, he became an active member of the Endicott Gun Club.

Willard was preceded in death by his parents, Otis Lowe and Gala Lowe, as well as his infant daughter Gail Wanda Lowe.

His surviving family members are spouse Anne Lowe; sister Corrine Lowe; daughters Dee Anne Hill and husband Douglas, Stephanie Lynn Dever and husband Arthur; grandchildren and great-grandchildren Marcus Quet Hill and wife Jamie (Marlowe, Winona and Waylon), Ian Allistaire Hill, Mandie Dever (Jordan, Taylor and Tyson), Felesha Dever (Ava and Levi), and James Garrett.

A viewing for friends and family will be on Friday, Nov. 29 from noon to 5 p.m. at Corbeill Funeral Home 109 N. Mill St., Colfax, Washington 99111.

There will be a celebration of life at the Endicott Gun Club at the end of March 2025. Date and time will be announced in the spring.

The family suggests memorial gifts be made to the following: Endicott Gun Club, Courtyard Assisted Living and Gentiva Hospice, or to your choice.

Corbeill Funeral Homes of Colfax is caring for the family. Online condolences may be made at www.corbeillfuneralhomes.com.

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Voting system repeal fails by 664 votes out of 340,110

BY IRIS SAMUELS AND SEAN MAGUIRE
Anchorage Daily News

A final ballot count on Nov. 20 cemented the narrow lead for supporters of Alaska's ranked-choice voting and open primary system, who defeated a ballot measure that would have done away with the state's 4-year-old voting process.

After 6,074 additional ballots were counted, bringing the total to 340,110 ballots in the decision, the repeal initiative, Ballot Measure 2, was on track to narrowly fail in a 49.9% to 50.1% split. Its losing deficit after the Nov. 20 final count was 664 votes.

Supporters of the ballot measure argued that the open primaries and ranked-choice voting system was confusing and took away political parties' power to shape electoral outcomes. Opponents of the repeal said the voting system — which was narrowly adopted by initiative in 2020 and first used in 2022 — favored centrist candidates who were more likely to overcome partisan gridlock.

The results for the repeal effort, and other races that appeared on the Nov. 5 statewide ballot, won't be finalized until the end of the month, when the elections review board is set to complete its work. Once the results are certified, voters have

up to five days to request a recount.

If the final count puts the gap at less than 0.5% of votes (1,700 for the ballot measure), the state must cover the cost of the recount. Otherwise, a recount would be conducted if those requesting it agree to cover its cost.

The retention of ranked-choice voting and open primaries could have far-reaching consequences.

A coalition of left-leaning and moderate legislators in the Alaska House has announced its plans to form a majority in the legislative session that starts in January. A bipartisan coalition has organized for the Senate, too. A return to political party-controlled primaries would weaken the chances of forming bipartisan coalitions between moderate Republicans, Democrats and independents.

Alaska's recent election results have shown that some Republican state lawmakers

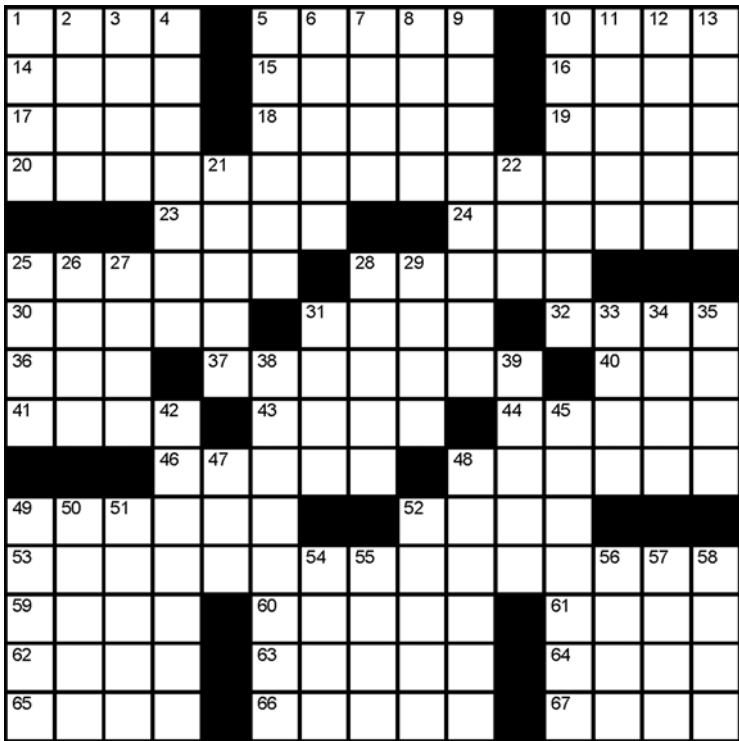
have been rewarded for their willingness to join bipartisan coalitions, rather than hold tight to the right on social issues and other conservative causes.

Proponents of Alaska's voting model tried this year to implement similar voting systems in several other states. In most states where ranked-choice voting or open primaries were on the ballot — including Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Oregon — voters decidedly rejected the reforms.

In Alaska, proponents of the voting method spent nearly \$15 million opposing the repeal initiative. That is more than 100 times what supporters of the ballot measure spent promoting their cause. But the Alaska Republican Party also threw its weight behind the repeal initiative. Party leaders argued that the voting method took away its power to shape results through partisan primaries.

Crossword

Answers on page 12



CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Unorthodox religion
- 5 Whip
- 10 Fashion and lifestyle magazine
- 14 "Houston, we've had a problem ..."
- 15 To pray, to Ovid
- 16 Israeli prime minister, 1969 - 1974
- 17 Test or boob?
- 18 Giver
- 19 "Terrible" leader
- 20 Chop Springsteen into pieces for many retailers
- 23 Fly ball trajectories
- 24 Hate
- 25 --- Smith, Empress of the Blues
- 28 Compel
- 30 Boiling mad
- 31 Harmless simpleton
- 32 Janes, who could be anyone
- 36 Comedian's date
- 37 Spreads into a battle line
- 40 Winter bug
- 41 Suddenly lose it
- 43 Filth
- 44 "--- Body?" (Dorothy L. Sayers)
- 46 Pass into disuse
- 48 Topes
- 49 Don't take chances
- 52 Ipanema stroller?
- 53 Kind of field
- 59 Egyptian opera
- 60 In plain sight
- 61 Indifferent
- 62 Nicholas was the last
- 63 Lead character in "First Blood"
- 64 "The Rite of Spring" composer --- Stravinsky
- 65 Personal set of cards
- 66 Single-masted sailboat
- 67 "And Then There Were ---" (Agatha Christie)

CLUES DOWN

- 1 Budgetary reductions
- 2 "I refuse!"
- 3 Gray wolf
- 4 "--- is a foreign country ..." (L P Hartley, "The Go-Between")
- 5 Dress top
- 6 Smooths
- 7 Summoned the servants
- 8 Foam clog
- 9 Tendency of like to beget like
- 10 Gave off
- 11 Pre-lunch reception
- 12 All Cretans, according to Epimenides
- 13 Physicist --- Mach
- 21 Asked nosy questions
- 22 Middle of wine vat is a dry area
- 25 Major Leagues
- 26 The Emerald Isle
- 27 Narrative of heroic exploits
- 28 Fellini's "La --- Vita"
- 29 Castle
- 31 PCs' "brains"
- 33 Baum's Land ---
- 34 Otherwise
- 35 Goes to law
- 38 Maximilian and Charlemagne
- 39 Avowed
- 42 Poster
- 45 --- one: golfers' dreams
- 47 Astern
- 48 Circus center
- 49 Strand
- 50 Professor Henry's protégé
- 51 Portable chair
- 52 Star who wanted to be let alone
- 54 Elliptical
- 55 Reminder
- 56 Fast-food option
- 57 "The Heat ---" (Glenn Frey)
- 58 Crux

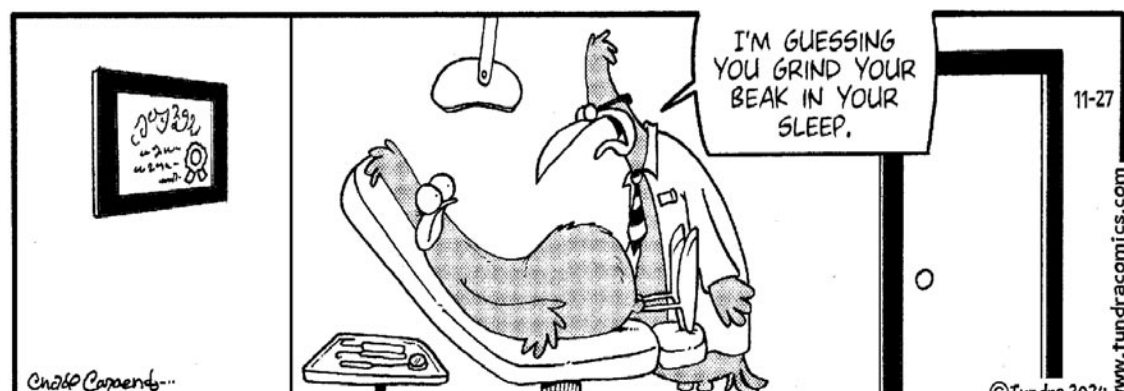
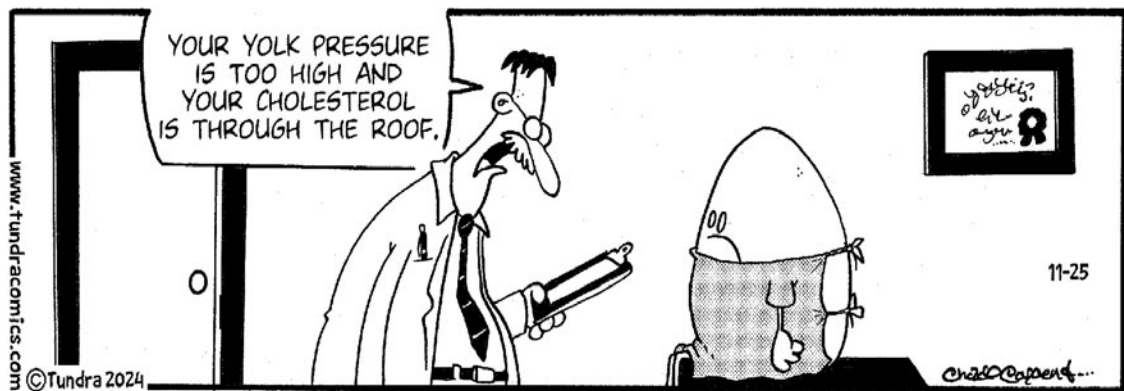
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Begich wins U.S. House seat in final election count

By IRIS SAMUELS
Anchorage Daily News

Republican Nick Begich has won Alaska's sole U.S. House seat, flipping it from Democratic to Republican control.

Results of the final ballot count Nov. 20 showed Begich defeating Democratic incumbent Rep. Mary Peltola, who first won the seat in a special election in 2022 after the death of Republican longtime Rep. Don Young.

Peltola was the first Alaska Native woman elected to Congress, and the first Democrat to hold the seat since Begich's grandfather, Nick Begich, won the seat in 1972.

Begich captured 48.4% of first-choice votes in Alaska's congressional race, leading Peltola by 6,779 votes, after 340,510 ballots were counted. Peltola had 46.4% of first-choice votes. Because Begich did not have an outright majority in the race, the outcome was determined by a ranked-choice tabulation, which placed Begich ahead of Peltola in a 51.3%-to-48.7% split.

Other candidates in the race included Alaskan Independence Party leader John Wayne Howe, who received 3.9% of the vote after campaigning on a platform

of eliminating most forms of federal taxation. Democrat Eric Hafner, who was allowed to run for the seat despite serving a federal prison sentence in New York and never stepping foot in Alaska, received 1% of the vote.

In a prepared statement, Peltola said serving in Congress was the honor of her life. "I'll tell you, working for all of Alaska isn't easy," she said. "The path ahead will not be built by one person or three people working for all of Alaska but by all Alaskans working together to build a future that works for all of us. No one in the Lower 48 is coming to save us. It's up to us."

In a written statement, Begich said "much work remains for Alaskans to fully realize" the state's potential.

The results in Alaska's elections won't be finalized until the results are certified by the state's oversight board, which is expected to complete its review by the end of this month. Once the results are certified, candidates or voters have up to five days to request a recount.

Begich is a member of a prominent family of Democrats in Alaska. His uncle Mark Begich served in the U.S. Senate as a De-

mocrat until 2015. Nick Begich III, who was born in Alaska, was raised by his maternal grandparents in Florida and returned to Alaska as an adult, amassing a personal fortune by founding companies that focused on offshoring information technology jobs to other countries and advising other start-ups.

Begich worked for Young's 2020 reelection campaign, then in 2022 announced that he planned to run against him — criticizing Young's willingness to work on bipartisan legislation and his adherence to coronavirus mitigation steps like mask-wearing — shortly before Young's death.

Peltola was back in Washing-

ton, D.C., on Nov. 20 with Congress back in session.

One year after she began serving in Congress, Peltola faced a personal tragedy when her husband, Eugene "Buzzy" Peltola, died in a plane crash.

Alaska's lone U.S. House seat made for one of the most expensive House races in the nation this year, as Republicans sought to protect their thin majority in the chamber, eyeing Alaska's seat as a likely flip. Peltola was one of a few Democrats who held seats in districts that Trump had carried in 2020.

Ultimately, Trump again won Alaska decisively, carrying the state by a wider margin than he

had in 2020. While Begich emerged victorious, he did so by a much slimmer margin than Trump's. Begich received 24,829 fewer votes than Trump in Alaska.

This marks Begich's first time winning elected office. He first ran for Congress in 2022, finishing third behind Peltola and Republican former Gov. Sarah Palin.

Early in his campaign, Begich was endorsed by the House Freedom Caucus, an ultraconservative group. It was not immediately clear last week if Begich would join the caucus as a member of Congress.

Republicans are slated to retain control of the U.S. House.

OBITUARY

Resident Will Cook Snyder dies at 64

It is with great sadness that the family of William "Will" Cook Snyder announces his peaceful passing on Nov. 4, 2024, at age 64. "Will was an extraordinarily talented and unique human who was loved by many. He marched to the beat of his own drum and lived his life to reflect that mantra," his family wrote.

He was born Feb. 6, 1960, in Cleveland, Ohio.

Early in his life, he earned a bachelor's degree in automotive restoration from the prestigious McPherson College in Kansas and graduated to become a highly regarded specialist in classic car restoration.

Will was extraordinarily skilled with his hands. He became an expert in crafting wood into furniture, building custom-design home decor and repairing



Will Cook Snyder

vehicles. "Will always dreamed of moving to the great state of Alaska — to live a simpler life in tune with nature — and moved to Wrangell almost 20 years ago," his family wrote.

He enjoyed being outdoors and had a great love of ani-

mals. He found joy in working in his yard and cultivating a variety of flowers and fruit trees and communing with the many critters at his cabin property.

At the time of his death, he was fulfilling his lifelong dream of building a remote cabin in the Alaska wilderness.

He was preceded in death by his beloved mother Marion "Marilou" C. Abele and father William Lee Snyder.

Will is survived "and will be greatly missed," his family wrote, by his sisters Julie E. Snyder and Laura L. Theodore; son Justin Bausone Snyder; and beloved pets Gracie and Kitty.

In honoring Will's wishes, he will be laid to rest in the forest where he can truly be at peace and forever be "one with the universe."

CLASSIFIED

HELP WANTED

Wrangell Public Schools is accepting applications for:

- Elementary Library Paraprofessional: This is a part-time, 9-month classified position, working 5.75 hours daily. Salary placement is in Column A of the Classified Salary Schedule. Job duties include but are not limited to working with students individually and in small group settings in the library at Evergreen Elementary School. A

High School Diploma or equivalent and an associate degree or the ability to pass the ParaPro Assessment is required. Start date: Dec. 16, 2024

- Secondary Intensive Special Education Paraprofessional: This is a part-time, 9-month classified position, working 5.75 hours daily. Salary placement is on Column C of the Classified Salary Schedule. Job duties include but are not limited to working with students individually and in small group settings in the Special Education Program at Wrangell High School. A High School Diploma or equivalent and an associate degree or the ability to pass the ParaPro Assessment is required. Start date: as soon as possible

- Middle School Wrestling Assistant Coach: This is a part-time, contracted position coaching wrestling for students in grades 6-8. Knowledge of wrestling is required; coaching experience is preferred. Start date: January 2025

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

HELP WANTED

Johnson's Building Supply is accepting applications for the

following position: Customer Service. Duties include counter sales, freight handling, customer deliveries, stocking and inventory. Full-time position; will require working Saturdays. Valid Alaska driver's license, must be able to lift 50 lbs., forklift experience a plus, starting pay is DOE. Stop by Johnson's for an application.

LOOKING FOR

Wrangell Public Schools is looking for a volunteer crossing guard at the elementary school from 7:40 to 8 a.m. Even one or two days a week will help. Call Kendra at 907-874-2321 if interested.

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.

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Join the Alaska Power & Telephone team Customer Service Representative Wrangell, Alaska

Alaska Power & Telephone is hiring for a **full time Customer Service Representative in Wrangell.**

This position will provide customer service to Wrangell and other communities in Alaska.

If you're passionate about providing exceptional service and want to make a difference in our community, we want to hear from you.

Starting pay for this position is
\$24.00 per hour
plus benefits package.



For a full job and benefit description please see our careers page at:
<https://www.aptalaska.com/careers/>

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF JOB OPENING WRANGELL CAPITAL FACILITIES DEPARTMENT Facilities Maintenance Specialist

Wrangell Facilities Maintenance Department will accept applications for the position of Facilities Maintenance Specialist.

This position performs a wide range of technical maintenance and repairs of building systems, equipment and grounds throughout all Borough-owned facilities and assists other departments with special projects. Independent or cooperative work with others is required under the daily direction and supervision of the Facility Maintenance Specialist Lead. This is a permanent position with all City and Borough benefits. This position is a union position covered under a collective bargaining agreement.

This is a full-time, hourly position with full benefits, paid at Grade 17 with a wage range from \$23.99 to \$30.42 per hour. Applicants must meet the qualifications of the position, as listed in the attached job description. Employment is based on a successful background check and pre-employment drug screening.

Applications and job descriptions may be obtained at City Hall. To be considered, interested applicants should submit their CBW employment application, a cover letter and current re-sume to Robbie Marshall at City Hall, 205 Brueger Street (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929 or via email at payroll@wrangell.com. This position is open until filled. The first review of applications will take place beginning Monday, Dec. 2, 2024.

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

Mason Villarma, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish Nov. 20 and 27, 2024



NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Board of Directors of the Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) will hold a Regular Board Meeting on December 4, 2024 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. AKDT at SEAPA's Headquarters, 55 Don Finney Lane, in Ketchikan, Alaska. During the meeting the board may enter into an Executive Session to discuss an employee, or employees, which discussions may involve subjects that tend to prejudice the reputation and character of person(s). For additional information, please call 907-228-2281.

Publish Nov. 27, 2024

State seeks waiver of Buy American law to rebuild Prince Rupert ferry dock

By SCOTT BOWLEN
Ketchikan Daily News

Restarting Alaska state ferry service to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, is contingent on the state receiving a long-sought federal waiver for renovations to the leased terminal at Prince Rupert and waiting at least until 2026 when the Kennicott returns to service.

That's according to Alaska Marine Highway System staff presentations at the Oct. 23 Alaska Marine Transportation Operations Board meeting.

Shirley Marquardt, chair of the advisory board, said there is a strong push to restore service to Rupert, just 90 miles south of Ketchikan, which would offer a less expensive state ferry connection to the U.S.-Canada highway system than travelers going all the way to Bellingham, Washington.

The Alaska Department of Transportation submitted its second request for a Buy American waiver in September — and is pressing for a reply from federal officials. A waiver would allow the terminal work to proceed without necessarily using U.S. steel or equipment.

"I've told them we need an answer, yes or no," Kirk Miller, preconstruction engineer for the department's South-coast region, told the advisory board.

The nine-member board makes rec-

ommendations for state ferry operations and the development of short-term and long-range plans for the ferry system.

Prince Rupert figures large in the history of the Alaska ferry system. The port town with a population of about 12,500 residents at the western end of Canada's Highway 36 was the Alaska Marine Highway's first southern terminus when service began in 1963.

Even after the southern terminus was moved to Seattle and then to Bellingham, Washington, ferry service to Prince Rupert remained steady between Ketchikan and Prince Rupert for years before declining substantially in the mid-2010s.

That's when state budget woes and the effects of an aging fleet resulted in a service reduction from two round-trip sailings between Ketchikan and Prince Rupert to one sailing per week. In 2016, the first service interruption of at least one month occurred, beginning a trend that would continue until 2019 when service to Prince Rupert ended entirely (except for a brief return in the summer of 2022).

Meanwhile, the ferry terminal at Prince Rupert is in poor condition.

Alaska doesn't own the site, which is on Canadian federal land. The state has a 50-year lease, signed in 2013. The lease

stipulates that the state is expected to rebuild the terminal and its wooden dock structure.

In 2014, the Alaska Department of Transportation prepared a Prince Rupert project that would have used mostly U.S. federal funding to rebuild the dock. The project was estimated at between \$10 million and \$20 million, and U.S. and Canadian companies could have bid on the job.

However, the Buy American Act of 1993 requires projects funded by the Federal Highway Administration to use only U.S.-produced steel, iron and manufactured products. Those provisions caught the eye of Canadian authorities — and a protectionist showdown ensued.

Gary Doer, Canada's ambassador to the U.S. in 2014, wrote a letter to then-Gov. Bill Walker, saying that applying Buy American restrictions to a project on Canadian soil was unacceptable, according to The Associated Press coverage.

The state could have applied for a federal waiver to the Buy American provisions, or the state could have funded the project itself to avoid the federal requirement. But the state did not seek a waiver and canceled the bid process in 2015.

Then, in January 2018, Alaska sent a

waiver request to the Federal Highway Administration for an initial review. It did not receive an answer, according to ferry system officials at the Oct. 23 meeting.

For Prince Rupert to move forward as a port of call, "It hinges basically on obtaining a Buy American waiver," said Dorine Petru, Alaska Marine Highway business manager.

In addition to making needed improvements at the terminal, the state needs a ferry that can serve the international route.

The ferry system has only two vessels that are certified under the International Convention Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) treaty. One of those, the Matanuska, has been laid up since 2022 because of extensive rusted steel and may never sail again for the state.

The expected repair costs are substantially above the \$27.5 million the state has available for the Matanuska project, Marine Highway Director Craig Tornga said Oct. 23. A decision will be made soon whether to seek additional funding for the work or retire the ship.

Retiring the Matanuska would leave the state with one SOLAS-certified vessel — the Kennicott — but that ship will be out of service all next year for installation of new generators and other work.

Alaska continues to report high number of sexually transmitted diseases

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Alaska's most commonly reported infectious diseases, aside from respiratory illnesses such as influenza, are from sexually transmitted infections, according to the state's most recent annual report.

There were 5,118 cases of chlamydia in Alaska in 2023, the largest number among sexually transmitted diseases in the annual infectious disease report issued by the Alaska Department of Health.

The infectious disease annual reports are issued each year by the epidemiology section of the department's Division of Public Health.

The second-highest number in the annual report was for gonorrhea, with 2,280 cases documented in 2023.

Totals for chlamydia and gonorrhea last year are similar to those shown in past annual infectious disease reports. Typically, the two diseases are the top positions in those reports.

Alaska has some of the nation's highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In

2022, Alaska had the nation's third-highest chlamydia rate and fourth-highest gonorrhea rate, according to the CDC.

There were 392 reported cases of syphilis in Alaska in 2023, according to the state report. Alaska's syphilis rates in 2022 were higher than the national average.

Alaska — like much of the country — had a recent surge in cases of congenital syphilis, caused by infection of newborns by their mothers. That increase prompted the Division of Public Health early this year to recommend wider testing for the infection, especially for at-risk populations.

Hepatitis is another commonly reported infectious disease in Alaska, with 645 cases of chronic hepatitis C and 138 cases of chronic hepatitis B documented, according to the report.

The newly released annual infectious disease report does not fully reflect a recent surge in pertussis cases in Alaska and the nation. In 2023, there were 26 known Alaska cases of the disease, also called whooping cough, according to the report. That compares to only two in

2022, according to the report issued last year.

But Alaska case numbers grew substantially this year, with monthly totals that peaked in September at 129, according to the division's epidemiology section.

Separately, the epidemiology section released its annual tally of influenza and COVID-19 cases. That report showed the changes in caseloads over the season that ran from Oct. 1, 2023, to Sept. 30, 2024. It is the first such annual epidemiology summary with both influenza and COVID-19 totals.

An unusual feature of the just-completed season was the early peak of influenza cases, the report said, with a big increase in late fall. "Influenza cases this season spiked earlier than any recent year on record, beginning in October 2023," the

report said. For COVID-19, there was a surge in cases in midwinter, followed by another increase in the summer, the report said. That was similar to national trends, the report said.

Total reported cases of influenza and COVID-19 were slightly lower in the 2023-2024 season than in the prior season, the report said.

During that 2023-2024 season, there were 10 influenza-associated deaths and 80 COVID-associated deaths among Alaskans, the report said. Those fatal cases were identified through clinician reports, hospital records and reviews of death certificate data.

That compares to five influenza deaths in the 2022-2023 season.

Only 23.7% of Alaskans 18 and older were immunized

against influenza during the 2023-24 season, a rate "significantly lower than the national average," the report said. Only 13.4% of Alaskans 18 and older were considered up to date on the COVID-19 vaccine, a rate also well below the national average, according to the report.

The division conducts ongoing tracking of influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) cases and posts weekly updates that show seasonal trends. Total reported cases of RSV have been fewer than those of influenza or COVID-19, but there is a somewhat similar pattern, with increases in winter, according to the data.

The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. Alaskabeacon.com.

E	N	O	N	P	O	O	L	S	D	N	A	H
R	O	G	I	O	B	M	A	R	R	A	Z	C
O	S	O	S	T	R	E	V	O	A	D	I	A
C	I	T	E	N	G	A	M	R	T	C	E	L
S	E	Z	O	O	E	S	P	A	L	A	S	B
E	S	O	H	W	K	C	U	M	P	A	N	S
L	U	F	L	S	O	L	O	P	D	I	G	I
S	E	O	D	T	O	O	C	E	I	R	A	T
T	S	T	E	T	E	D	S	C	R	A	S	S
S	R	S	E	R	T	N	E	C	G	I	N	P
N	A	V	I	O	R	O	N	O	D	B	E	T
R	E	I	R	E	A	R	O	H	O	H	O	H
E	L	L	E	L	C	H	B	I	R	L	T	C

PUZZLE SOLUTION

Don't let this deal pass you by!

25% OFF

all ads in the Dec. 18 issue of the Sentinel that promote Jolly Shopping on Dec 19, 20 & 21.

Deadline for ads is Dec. 13.

Contact Amber at 907-874-2301 or wrgsent@gmail.com to schedule your ad today!

WRANGELL SENTINEL

