



STAYING INDOORS AND IN SHAPE

Community gym fires up workouts for morning exercisers

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Whether you want to incubate a godlike physique during the winter months, brush up on your weightlifting form or just enjoy an early morning sweat session with friends, the community gym's new structured workouts are available to encourage you, regardless of your fitness goals.

On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 6 to 7 a.m., Chadd and Sabrina Yoder have volunteered to guide patrons through a series of lifts and other workouts that they and Recreation Coordinator Lucy Robinson designed together. Starting this month, they will release a "workout of the week" that gymgoers can complete during sessions



PHOTO BY CAROLEINE JAMES/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Sabrina Yoder, along with her husband, Chadd, lead sessions on lifts and other workout routines at the community center gym three days a week. The judgment-free sessions start at 6 a.m. for early morning exercisers.

or on their own time.

The lift sessions are not an official Parks and Recreation program, but they do offer amateur athletes an opportunity to learn more about the weight room, refine their form and get motivated to exercise with

planned workouts in a supportive community setting.

The sessions evolved from discussions that Robinson and the Yoders had been having about the weight room. The couple moved here from Wasilla, where they had been

members of a CrossFit gym, in the spring of 2021 and they shared their ideas about making the Wrangell gym more spacious and social.

"It was kind of a conversation with Lucy (Robinson)

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Holland America schedules Wrangell in 2024

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

As the old saying goes, "Variety is the spice of life," and Wrangell must have made a good impression for Holland America to change its menu for 2024.

The cruise line made a late-scheduled stop near the end of the 2022 season, bringing more than 2,300 passengers and crew members to town aboard the Noordam. Now, Holland America has added two stops in Wrangell for the 2024 season for a more "diverse itinerary."

It's the first time the company has included Wrangell in its pre-season advertising. The cruise line runs six ships on its Alaska tours.

The Nieuw Amsterdam will visit Wrangell on May 16, 2024, as part of a 14-day, roundtrip voyage out of Vancouver, British Columbia. The Westerdam will come to town July 4, 2024. That cruise is a 28-day Arctic voyage running from June 9 to July 7, 2024, stopping in 14 different ports.

"In looking for new ports to combine with familiar stops on the new monthlong Arctic Circle itinerary, we decided to add several ports that we have not typically visited to add variety to the cruise experience and allow guests to experience new locations, like Wrangell, so they can immerse themselves in local scenery, food and tradition," said Erik Elvejord, director of public relations for Holland America Line.

All three ships are 936 feet long and 105.8 feet wide. Whereas the Noordam has a passenger capacity of 1,916, the Westerdam can accommodate 1,964 and the Nieuw Amsterdam can accommodate 2,106. That doesn't include the hundreds of crew members it takes to run the ships. Fred Angerman, the Wrangell port director for Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska, said those ships are within 50 feet in length of what City Dock can handle.

Angerman said a representative from Holland America had come to visit Wrangell after the Noordam's stop last September.

"I thought it was kind of a test cruise," he said. "They wanted to see how the ship fit at the dock, I'm pretty sure." The size of City Dock doesn't matter in the case of the Westerdam's July 4 stop since it would be required to drop anchor farther out due to the holiday activities happening on and around the dock.

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New federal fee on halibut charter customers will enable fleet to buy commercial harvest shares

By SABINE POUX
KDLL, Kenai-Soldotna

The halibut charter boat fleet in Southeast and the Gulf of Alaska will be able to collectively buy quota shares from commercial fishermen under a provision in the federal omnibus budget bill passed at the end of December.

The program would be funded by a fee charged for every angler aboard a halibut charter.

Seward's Andy Mezirow is on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and has been a champion of the program for a while. He said it's a long time coming. The program was vetoed by President Donald Trump in his final weeks in office and had to go through the congressional approval process a second time.

"This language that made it into the omnibus bill has been kicking around Washington, D.C., for like six years," he said.

Mezirow said he expects the new fee could range from \$10 to \$20 for each charter boat client. The fee will not apply to

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2022 in review:

The stories that captivated Wrangell last year

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

From impressive athletic successes and community celebrations to business closures and painful losses, Wrangell's 2022 was full of engaging stories, both triumphant and tragic.

Last January was a month of new beginnings. Issabella and Tawney Crowley welcomed Wrangell's first baby of the year, Ryleigh Rowan Crowley, into the world on Jan. 4 at the Ketchikan Medical Center.

The Decker family established a memorial scholarship fund to honor Sig and Helen Decker, two former Wrangell residents who died in a car crash in Petersburg July 2020.

However, January was also a month of endings. The SEARHC-operated Alaska Crossings program, which guided at-risk teens through wilderness expeditions in Southeast, closed on Jan. 12. The organization had brought year-round and seasonal jobs to the community since 2001 and the story of its closure generated more conversation than 98% of posts to the Sentinel Facebook page, with a total 79 comments.

In February, the Sentinel shared its most widely viewed post of the year, alerting residents that masking in schools would become optional as COVID-19 infections declined.

The beginning of spring brought stories of artistic, athletic and entrepreneurial success. In March, a profile of 16-year-old artist Nick Allen, who sells boat stickers online, became the Sentinel's most-liked post of the year. A photo of Wrangell's Lady Wolves basketball team cutting down a net to celebrate their win against Metlakatla and a story on Sara Gadd's Drive Thru-Brew were also among March's most popular.

April might be the cruelest month according to 20th century poet T.S. Eliot, but for former high school seniors James Shilts and Rowen Wieder-



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Wrangell High School's art program won \$15,000 for its entry into the Vans Custom Culture art contest in May of 2022.

spohn, it was the most altruistic. The pair refurbished two of the benches outside the high school for their senior projects, a task that required lifting and sanding 250-pound slabs of wood.

In May, the community continued to celebrate the achievements of its youth. A pair of shoes designed by high school students became one of four runners-up in the national Vans Custom Culture art contest, winning a \$15,000 for the high school art program. A story on Mia Wiederspohn's Tlingit language podcast, Mia's Gift, was also a favorite among readers.

After 56 years of cruising through the choppy waters around Southeast, the Malaspina left the Alaska Marine Highway System in June to become a privately owned floating museum and bunkhouse in Ketchikan.

Appropriately, the most urgent story of July was fireworks-related. After a particularly dry month, the annual display couldn't be held over land and was moved to a barge in Zimovia Strait.

Anne Luetkemeyer's original BearFest statue, entitled "Honeysuckle," was unveiled outside the Nolan Center and an infestation of western

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Birthdays & Anniversaries

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

Wednesday, Jan. 11: Diana Nore, Steve Helgeson, Steve Henson.

Thursday, Jan. 12: Alexa Lorena Ferris.

Friday, Jan. 13: Sonny Guggenbickler.

Saturday, Jan. 14: Mercedes Angerman, Antoinette Hastings; Anniversary: Einar and Carol Haaseth.

Sunday, Jan. 15: Ava Hay.

Monday, Jan. 16: Austin O'Brien, Josh Toombs.

Tuesday, Jan. 17: F. Iver Nore.

Wednesday, Jan. 18: Hunter Rei Wilson; Anniversary: Ronan and Mary Rooney.

Wrangell Roundup: Special Events

AUTHOR TALK FOR TWEENS AND TEENS, 1 to 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 14, at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Young adult books writer Paul Greci will talk about his books: "Surviving Bear Island" and "Follow the River" are directed at middle school readers, and "Wild Lands" and "Into the Wilderness" are directed at high school readers.

FAMILY FUN DAY from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 15. Parks and Recreation is hosting a free family focused fun day with gym time, board games and potluck food at the community center gym. Parents can bring young children to play with tot toys, for fun on an obstacle course and gym play. Basketballs will be available for older kids looking to shoot hoops. Bring your family and share your favorite snack. Register online for free: <https://bit.ly/WRGPRFR>. Registering in advance will let Parks and Rec know how many people to expect.

WRANGELL SCHOOL BOARD will hold a work session on the draft fiscal year 2024 budget at 6 p.m. Monday, Jan. 16, with the regular board meeting at 7 p.m., via Zoom <https://bit.ly/3Z8Ic8F>. The meeting ID is 850 6358 9317 and the passcode is 314691. Community members can email comments to kpowell@wpsd.us, or can sign up under guests to be heard at the meeting by emailing the same address before 3:30 p.m. Jan. 16. The agenda will be available online four days before the meeting at the school district website.

NOLAN CENTER THEATER is showing the 2009 film "Avatar," rated PG-13, at 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 13. The action adventure fantasy film runs 2 hours and 42 minutes and is free. "Avatar: The Way of Water," rated PG-13, will show at 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 14-15. The action adventure fantasy film runs three hours and 12 minutes, and tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children under age 12. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

STRENGTH TRAINING, with Chadd Yoder offering strength training technique advice, is offered on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 6 to 7 a.m. in the weight room at Parks and Recreation through January. Participants must have a waiver on file and pay the daily entrance fee. For more information visit <https://bit.ly/WRGPRAR> or call 907-874-2444.

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

SWIMMING POOL is closed for maintenance; reopening Feb. 20 (pending no further setbacks). The weight room and cardio equipment will be open for continued use, although there will be one week where the entire facility is closed while carpet cleaning. The locker rooms will be off-limits when the tile floors are being grouted. For more information visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

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

Senior Center Menu

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

Thursday, Jan. 12

Barbeque chicken, mixed veggies, potato salad, corn bread

Friday, Jan. 13

Mac and cheese, carrot raisin salad, peas

Monday, Jan. 16

Closed for Martin Luther King Day

Tuesday, Jan. 17

Moose roast and gravy, steamed carrots in orange sauce, peas and onion salad, mashed potatoes

Wednesday, Jan. 18

Chicken California, cauliflower, carrots and pineapple salad, biscuit

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.

Ferry Schedule

Northbound

Friday, Feb. 3
Matanuska, 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Feb. 7
Matanuska, 2 p.m.
Saturday, Feb. 11
Matanuska, 12:45 a.m.
Friday, Feb. 17
Matanuska, 5:45 p.m.

Southbound

Wednesday, Jan. 11
Kennicott, 8:30 p.m.
Monday, Feb. 6
Matanuska, 6:15 a.m.
Friday, Feb. 10
Matanuska, 8 a.m.
Monday, Feb. 13
Matanuska, 12:30 a.m.

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

Continuing Events

PARKS and RECREATION www.wrangellrec.com

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

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

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

Jan. 11, 1923

M. O. Johnson has ordered a small roadster, which he will convert upon its arrival into a delivery car for his laundry. The car was bought from J.O. Gross, who has an automobile business in Tacoma and who is a brother of W. L. Gross.

Jan. 9, 1948

A short but severe windstorm here Wednesday, in which gusts up to 55 miles an hour were recorded, damaged the City Float in the small boat harbor and scattered fishing boats helter-skelter for a while. No severe damage was reported to any boat. Campbell-House Shipyard suffered the worst loss when a gust lifted the roof of their ways and practically

demolished the structure. The loss is estimated at between \$2,500 and \$3,000, not covered by insurance. The shipyard is covered by fire insurance but not against wind. Maximum high temperature during the week was 44 on Jan. 7 and the minimum was 26 on Jan. 3. The Alaska Coastal plane, bound for Ketchikan, was grounded here yesterday and was still held here by weather until shortly after noon. Hunt Gruening, a veteran war flier, was the pilot.

Jan. 12, 1973

District Ranger Gary McCoy announced this week that timber scaled from the 1.5 million-acre Wrangell Ranger District totaled 57.3 million board feet in 1972. This compares to 65.3 million board feet scaled in 1971 and 44.3 million feet scaled in 1970. Logging operations active on the Wrangell Ranger District in 1971 were Tyler Bros., at St. John Harbor; Galla Logging, at Deep Bay; Nelson Logging, at Sokolof Island; Hamilton Logging, Etolin Island; Southeast Logging, Zarembo Island; and Tidewater Logging, Canoe Pass. McCoy stated that output from the operating camps was as expected. The drop in production was due to the shutdown of Sykes Logging at Bradfield.

Jan. 15, 1998

During the Wrangell City Council on Tuesday, Mayor Bill Privett included some information in his report that pertained to the recent meeting between Petersburg and Wrangell officials, meant to keep communications open about where the border would lie between future boroughs formed by the respective communities. Privett said that while there was a willingness between the concerned parties to continue discussions, "We won't give up one inch of the river." The Stikine River has long been directly linked with the community of Wrangell, and Mayor Privett gave examples as far back as prehistory to substantiate this community's stronger claim. Privett, who cited the victory by Wrangell Tlingits over the upriver Tahltans as a major prehistoric event that set the economic and political environment found by the competing European interests whose activities led to today's boundaries in the area, also says that more recent patterns reinforce Wrangell's claims. He said that Petersburg's plans for the boundary between the future boroughs to run down the middle fork of the Stikine were unacceptable, and suggested instead that the line lie farther north, such as somewhere in the vicinity of LeConte Glacier.

Tides

High Tides

Low Tides

	AM		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Jan. 11	03:34	13.9	03:08	14.5	09:04	4.3	09:29	0.5
Jan. 12	04:06	13.9	03:47	13.6	09:47	4.3	10:04	1.3
Jan. 13	04:42	13.9	04:34	12.6	10:36	4.1	10:45	2.2
Jan. 14	05:24	14.0	05:37	11.7	11:32	3.8	11:32	3.2
Jan. 15	06:16	14.1	06:59	11.1	12:37	3.3
Jan. 16	07:16	14.5	08:25	11.2	00:29	4.1	01:48	2.4
Jan. 17	08:19	15.1	09:39	12.0	01:35	4.8	03:00	1.1

Daylight Hours

Date	Sunrise	Sunset	Hours
Jan. 11	8:17a	3:37p	07:20h
Jan. 12	8:16a	3:39p	07:22h
Jan. 13	8:15a	3:41p	07:25h
Jan. 14	8:14a	3:43p	07:28h
Jan. 15	8:13a	3:45p	07:31h
Jan. 16	8:12a	3:46p	07:34h
Jan. 17	8:10a	3:48p	07:38h

New FedEx surcharge for remote deliveries tags Wrangell

Sentinel staff

Shoppers who have items shipped via FedEx can probably assume higher charges come the end of the month.

On Jan. 30, a surcharge of \$13.25 per package will be added to any delivery the company has deemed "remote." The fee applies to FedEx Express and FedEx Ground services and covers Wrangell and most of Alaska outside of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau and Ketchikan.

Rival delivery company UPS last year instituted its own remote-area surcharge, which increased to \$13.05 per package in the Lower 48 on Dec. 27, up from \$12 last year, and as much as \$38 to remote areas of Alaska, an increase from \$34 last year.

The FedEx remote surcharge is the only new charge implemented on the company's overall list of fees for 2023. About 3 million people reside in roughly 4,000 ZIP codes in the U.S. that the company has placed in the remote category. Of the 235 ZIP codes in Alaska, 210 are in the remote category.

Both residential and commercial deliveries will be charged the remote fee.

It will be up to each shipper whether to pass on all or some of the surcharge to its customers or to absorb the added expense. In addition, some large-volume shippers may have provisions in their contracts with FedEx that address surcharges, such as limiting their application, a company spokesman said Saturday.

It also is unclear from the FedEx announcement how the surcharge might apply to packages brought by FedEx to Juneau or Anchorage — not considered remote — and then turned over to the U.S. Postal Service for delivery to a final remote destination, such as Wrangell.

FedEx did not respond to Sentinel questions for more information.

Separate from the remote surcharge, FedEx and UPS both raised their general rates 6.9% for 2023, their largest annual increase ever.

The rate hikes are due to inflation driving up fuel and other costs, cited in a Sept. 22 FedEx earnings call by CEO Raj Subramaniam: "We did not anticipate ... the tremendous inflation of costs that hit us squarely last year."

Though businesses in the Lower 48 may sometimes have alternative shipping companies to FedEx and UPS, those are often the only two outside of the U.S. Postal Service that deliver to most Alaska communities.

Schools drop COVID testing requirement for traveling athletes

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

As part of its ongoing review and update of the schools' mitigation plan, the Wrangell School District has dropped the COVID-19 testing requirement for athletes traveling for games.

The requirement was dropped at the start of the year. Schools Superintendent Bill Burr announced the decision at the December school board meeting, during review of the plan.

Though student-athletes no longer need to test before going out of town for games, the district still encourages it.

"We are still doing optional testing at all schools on a request basis," Burr said. "We still highly encourage students and staff to test (including athletes before travel). We also have a large number of take-home tests available at all sites."

Before the requirement was dropped, Burr said tests that had been administered in the first four months of this school year didn't yield any positive cases. "However, students have tested positive at other Wrangell locations," he added. "Because the take-home tests do not require results to be filed, it is difficult to declare a specific number."

Members of the community have been pressing for the requirement to be dropped, citing the guidelines put forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and what other schools in Southeast require.

"On Nov. 17, the Parent Advisory Committee voted to drop the student-athlete COVID testing and also drop COVID return-to-play protocol policy from the current mitigation plan," the advisory committee wrote in a letter to the school board. "ASAA, the governing body for Alaska high school sports, dropped both at the beginning of the school year. No other high school in Southeast Alaska has these policies in their current mitigation plans. With our current testing policy, this puts Wrangell student-athletes at a disadvantage in relation to all other schools they compete against. Our current testing policies go against the updated CDC recommendations endorsed by the secretary of education for all K-12 schools."

As of Dec. 22, the CDC reported Wrangell's COVID-19 case rate was low. The agency recommends people stay up to date with vaccines and boosters, maintain ventilation improvements, avoid contact with people suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 and isolate if they have the virus. It also recommends masking for symptomatic people when indoors in public.

About 63% of Wrangell's population had completed their primary series of the COVID-19 vaccine as of Jan. 3, compared to the state average of 57%, according to the Alaska Health Department website.

Despite what other districts in Southeast were requiring, Burr said it is up to each one to decide how to best keep its student population safe. Wrangell's school district is required

to have a mitigation plan in place since it received federal pandemic aid funding which runs until September 2024.

The mitigation plan "includes decisions on a number of different items, including masking, testing and other health/cleaning protocols," Burr said. "We have had one of the highest rates of COVID at times in the Southeast area but have recently kept the numbers of identified cases lower."

Burr said the amount of COVID-19 testing in the schools was reduced by 96% at the start of the school year and changing the athlete testing requirement before travel will reduce that number further. The mitigation plan is reviewed at every school board meeting and changes are made as needed, when CDC or state guidelines change or a historical pattern can be seen.

The district continues to try to make the best decisions to protect the students, Burr said, and it depends on the community for help. "We continue to have one of the worst illness seasons in many years across the district, state and nation," he said. "The (district's) symptom-free schools policy is an important factor in providing our Wrangell students with a well-rounded and successful education."

The symptom-free school policy is aimed at students and staff exhibiting symptoms of any possibly contagious illness such as COVID-19, flu and colds.

Juneau records record rainfall in 2022; Wrangell was just normal wet

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Juneau saw record-breaking levels of rainfall in 2022, but National Weather Service measurements and the observations of local amateur meteorologist Bill Messmer suggest that Wrangell was spared the worst of the deluge.

Juneau's 2022 precipitation totaled 88.31 inches according to measurements taken at the airport. This was three inches wetter than the previous record set in 1991.

The National Weather Service hasn't recorded official stats for Wrangell precipitation in years, leaving the measuring task to curious locals without official government equipment or protocols.

According to the data that Messmer has been collecting in Wrangell since 1984, the community saw average amounts of precipitation in 2022, just over 95 inches of rain and melted snow. The wettest month was October, 18.01 inches, and the driest was April, 2.39 inches, which is also in keeping with yearly trends.

The wettest year in Messmer's records was 1987, at 134.17 inches, and the driest was only five years ago, in 2018, at 56.38 inches.

The variation between Juneau's weather patterns and Wrangell's is typical for Southeast, according to a climate guide compiled by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration office in Juneau. "Climatic variation across Southeast (is) caused by its complex geography," the guide states. Southeast's intricate arrangement of mountains and waterways means that Skagway receives an average rainfall of 2 inches each August while Yakutat, 150 miles due west, receives an average of 14 inches the same month.

The region is filled with "localized climatologies," explained Juneau meteorologist Sean Jones. "Because of the topography, you can have areas that are very sheltered." For example, the record of 88.31 inches that was recorded at the Juneau airport differs substantially from the city's average annual downtown rainfall, which



PHOTO BY CAROLEINE JAMES/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Bill Messmer holds the manual gauge that he uses to track rainfall in Wrangell. He also has a more complex gauge that can record wind speeds and other weather metrics.

is between 100 and 110 inches.

Similarly, rainfall recorded at the Wrangell airport automated weather observing station differs from Messmer's — 51.87 inches in 2022 and 71.71 inches on average since 1918.

Not to be outshined by Ju-

neau, Ketchikan, which has a tourist-attraction rain gauge downtown, measured just under 160 inches of precipitation last year, slightly above normal.

According to Rick Fritsch,

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The American Legion Auxiliary Unit 6 would like to send a huge

THANK YOU

to the following businesses and organizations for donating and helping with the Community Children's Christmas Party and Senior Santa gifts:

- Alaska Marine Lines
- Anchor Properties
- First Bank
- J&W's Fast Food
- KSTK Radio
- LNM Services

- Petro Marine Services
- Santa Claus (Andrew Zeutzius)
- Tongass Federal Credit Union
- Wells Fargo
- Wrangell Chamber of Commerce
- Wrangell Sentinel

Community members who shopped for the seniors and all the other numerous volunteers that donated many hours of set-up, assisting, clean-up, wrapping gifts and delivering them.

This year we served nearly 200 children and over 80 senior citizens. Thank you all again for being so giving of your time and money. These events wouldn't have happened without all the community's support!

Corrections

In the Dec. 21 issue of the Sentinel, Davis Dow's first name was misspelled.

In a thank-you notice and story about a sunken boat in the Jan. 4 issue, the name Wimberley was misspelled.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Alaskans heading south, which is not good

By LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

For the 10th year in a row, more Alaskans moved out last year than new residents moved in.

That's a draining fact, with no real plan to plug the leak.

To confirm the Alaska Department of Labor's statistics about population and persistent out-migration, drive no farther than U-Haul. America's do-it-yourself movers reported this month on its annual numbers for traffic into states and one-way rentals leaving each state. The traffic count for Alaska is not good.

The state fell 25 spots in the nationwide ranking of growth states, from 16th place in 2021 to 41st place last year, as measured by the percentage of U-Haul rentals coming into the state versus the number of one-way moves out of state. People arriving in Alaska in one-way U-Hauls in 2022 decreased 2% over 2021, while departures increased 3% year-over-year.

"While U-Haul migration trends do not correlate directly to population or economic growth, the U-Haul Growth Index is an effective gauge of how well states and cities are attracting and maintaining residents," the company said in its press release. And if anyone is in a position to gauge population movement, it would be U-Haul, with 23,000 rental locations in all 50 states and 10 Canadian provinces.

Not surprisingly, the states that led the nation last year in one-way moves inbound were sunny and economically healthy Texas, Florida and the two Carolinas. The top states for one-way moves outbound were California, Illinois, Michigan, Massachusetts and New York.

You could try to argue that the states most popular for one-way moves out are high-tax jurisdictions, which would be true. But then how do you explain that Alaska is near the bottom, too. We have no state income tax, no state sales tax, no state property tax (except

on oil and gas producers), the lowest motor fuel tax in the nation, plus we gave out more than \$2 billion to residents last year just for living here.

Can't be taxes that are driving Alaskans to drive out of state. A lot of wise people who follow economic and population trends list the factors as inadequate state support for K-12 schools and the university system, lack of available housing, a shortage of child care, and better economic opportunities elsewhere.

"If you're looking at attracting workers, that age group that you want to attract, 20 to 54, frequently has children in tow. And they care about schools," economics professor Ralph Townsend told the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce last spring.

Townsend, former head of the University of Alaska Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research, has long talked about how the state might reverse its population out-migration, recommending investments in education and child care.

Losing more residents than a state gains is an indicator of trouble ahead.

"People do tend to vote with their feet and move to a place that sees more economic opportunity, has more job growth," Nolan Klouda, director of the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development, said in a recent interview with the Alaska Beacon news website. "It's a pretty important indicator of economic health."

Important but largely ignored. After 10 years of losing more residents than we gain, all that many of Alaska's elected leaders seem interested in doing is pushing for a larger Permanent Fund dividend and talking about "economic diversification" as if it were magical political campaign slogan that cures all ailments. Yet they balk at helping schools, housing or child care.

If we don't change the direction, Alaska could slide further to the bottom of U-Haul rankings — an economically costly one-way move.

"People do tend to vote with their feet and move to a place that sees more economic opportunity, has more job growth."

— Nolan Klouda, director of the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development

Halibut shares

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private anglers.

The halibut quota is divided between sport and commercial fishermen, and those slices get smaller in years of low abundance.

For more than a decade, the Alaska charter fleet has pushed for a mechanism so that it could purchase commercial halibut quotas to ease increasingly restrictive limits on charter anglers. The effort resulted in the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's creation of the recreational quota entity (RQE) in 2018, authorizing the purchase of quota shares but lacking a revenue stream to pay the costs.

The December legislation solves that problem by directing the U.S. Department of Commerce to adopt regulations "for the collection of fees from charter vessel operators who guide recreational anglers" in the Gulf and Southeast Alaska.

The earliest the program

could start would be 2024.

"Regulations for Alaska's guided sport fishery are increasingly tight, particularly for halibut in Southeast, and this program should make a big difference moving forward. It could very well serve as a model for resolving allocation frictions between fishing sectors across the country," Forrest Braden, executive director of the SouthEast Alaska Guides Organization, based in Ketchikan, wrote in a thank you letter to Alaska Rep. Mary Sattler Peltola.

All three members of Alaska's congressional delegation supported the provision.

Charter operators like Mezirow say tight catch limits can make doing business difficult.

"If (charter companies) don't have to close any more days of the week, then they can fish for halibut seven days of the week if they want to," he said of the benefit from the charter fleet buying halibut

shares from commercial holders.

Previously, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council was considering a plan that would have transferred quota shares to the charter fleet without paying anything to the commercial fleet. Mezirow said that's traditionally how quota has been reallocated between sectors.

"This way, when you're transferring that value now, you're not taking from one person that pays for it and giving it to others that didn't," he said. "That was sort of the fundamental flaw of allocation as it applies to catch shares."

There were concerns among the commercial fleet when it was first on the table that the compensation would come from public funding, whereas commercial fishermen have to pay for quota shares themselves. But commercial fisherman Matt Alward, who's based out of Homer and heads the United Fishermen of Alas-

ka, said that problem is fixed under the legislation, which establishes a funding source from the charter industry. Fees could be collected from clients, through a conservation stamp-like program for charter anglers.

The provision, which was part of a larger fisheries bill,

was added to the omnibus spending package in the final days of the congressional session after the larger bill stalled out amid disputes over issues unrelated to the Alaska halibut catch.

Larry Persily, Sentinel staff writer, added to this report.

EDITORIAL

The Legislature deserves your attention

There is more to state government in Alaska than just the amount of the annual Permanent Fund dividend. Though voters certainly might think otherwise, judging from the campaigns of many candidates in recent years.

But the campaigns are over — at least officially — and it's time for Alaska's 60 legislators to start work in Juneau. The session opens Tuesday. No doubt one of the final negotiated compromises before adjournment will be to set the amount of this year's PFD. It's become an annual tradition, almost a ritual for lawmakers to politically haggle over the dividend until the final days of the session, much like a bargain-hunting shopper keeps clicking on a website in the belief that the price will go down, not up.

Sadly, the price to Alaskans keeps going up. The fatter the dividend, the leaner the state budget for K-12 education, the university, state ferry system, school repairs and other community grants, mental health services, enough employees to process food stamp and Medicaid applications, and everything else that draws on the same checkbook as the dividend.

But while the dividend debate crops up most everywhere in legislative work, much like skunk cabbage, other important work stacks up.

Maybe this year could be different. Maybe lawmakers — and the governor, if he cares to get involved rather than occupying himself with pro-dividend, anti-tax and anti-federal speeches — could do something to help school districts that have gone six years without a meaningful increase in state funding.

Maybe legislators and the governor will deal with deferred maintenance at public facilities, including school districts — such as Wrangell — that are looking for help in repairing worn-out buildings.

Maybe they will take note and vote to do something about unaffordable and often unavailable child care services. Maybe more funding for university programs, road repairs, employee recruitment and retention efforts to fill vacant desks and missing services. And maybe legislators and the governor will agree on realistic economic development efforts, not the pie-in-the-sky ideas so often barked in Alaska's political oven with thin crusts and watery fillings hidden beneath heavy helpings of whipped-up promises.

The community needs to take an interest in what the Legislature and governor are doing, just like it took an interest 40 years ago against a silly citizens initiative to spend close to \$3 billion to move the state capital. In 1982, Wrangell voters cast their ballots 936-17 against moving the capital out of Juneau and up north to Willow in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Yes, the vote here was 98% against the move.

Wrangell has spoken up strongly in the past and can do so again. Help drive community interest in legislation and the budget by sending in letters to the editor for the Sentinel to publish. Write up your opinions and help your elected officials do what's best for the state.

— Wrangell Sentinel

Policy for Letters to the Editor

- Letters should be typed or clearly written and no longer than 400 words.
- All letters must be signed by the writer and include a phone number and any affiliation with a group which pertains to the letter.

The Sentinel reserves the right to edit any submissions.

The deadline for submissions is Friday at noon for Wednesday publication.

Letters are run on a space-available basis.



P.O. Box 798, 205 Front St., Wrangell, AK 99929
Ph: 907-874-2301 • wrgsent@gmail.com

Oldest continuously published paper in Alaska



ESTABLISHED NOVEMBER 20, 1902
Published weekly by: Good Journalism LLC
PO Box 798, Wrangell, AK 99929
Phone: 907-874-2301

POSTMASTER: send address changes to Wrangell Sentinel, P.O. Box 798, Wrangell, AK 99929

Sentinel staff:

Publisher Larry Persily
Editor Marc Lutz
Office Manager Amber Armstrong-Hillberry
Reporter Caroleine James
Production Marc Lutz

Subscription rates:

Wrangell \$46
Out of town \$70
First Class \$102
Online-only subscription \$40

Wrangell Sentinel (USPS 626-480) is published weekly except the third week of July and the week after Christmas by Wrangell Sentinel, 205 Front St., Wrangell, AK 99929. Periodicals postage paid at Wrangell, AK.

Phone: 907-874-2301; Email: wrgsent@gmail.com; Website www.wrangellsentinel.com. ©Copyright 2022.

Senior believes his survey data could help improve the community

BY MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

It's an ambitious senior project that doesn't involve building something, volunteering, painting or reading to the sick or elderly. But it could help make Wrangell a better place to live.

Will Ashton, 18, wants to gather the community's thoughts on the economic and social well-being of the town and use the collected data to help borough leaders improve the quality of life.

He hopes to survey as many residents as possible covering the areas of subsistence economy, cash economy and the social fabric. Ashton's ambition is to survey the entire population of the island. "Even if I could get half, that would be OK," he said. "This is a really ambitious thing. I'm not entirely sure how it will go, but those are numbers that I hope to reach."

Once Ashton has written questions geared toward his three categories, he will find the best means to distribute the survey, whether in an online format or with physical copies. He'll then compile the results and present his findings to the borough assembly and other agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service.

The idea came when Ashton began brainstorming and approached his dad, Brian, about the possibilities.

"(Will) approached me and said he wanted to do something substantial, take a leadership role and do something unique," the elder Ashton said. "Out of the three things I threw out there, Will has always been interested in social sciences."



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Will Ashton is working on a survey that focuses on the well-being of Wrangell's cash and subsistence economies and its social fabric. The high school senior wants to present the results to community leaders to help make the town a better place to live.

Ashton told his father getting the town's take on the economy, subsistence and social makeup would be a unique approach, wondering what could be needed to improve the quality of life in those areas. The results could aid leadership, Brian Ashton said.

"Our ordinances require the (borough) to have a strategic plan every

10 years," Brian Ashton said. "(We need to) have a meeting and put something out in front of people, but it's not an in-depth look at what people ... should be considering. What it comes down to is what does it require to have a healthy, diverse economy?"

It was Ashton's interest in psychology and sociology that helped him decide on the project, though it was still

too broad of a scope to pursue. High school counselor Julie Williams and Principal Bob Burkhart helped him to narrow things down.

"After evaluating his thoughts and examining his ideas, Will admitted that he needed a much tighter focus to determine the parameters of his project and how a survey might assist in the process," Burkhart said. "He left my office planning to carefully consider the questions, extent and scope of his survey to add more substance and direction to his project."

Ashton credits Williams with helping him sort out the subsistence angle to his survey. "She helped in the subsistence aspect to help narrow down what kind of subsistence because there are so many like fishing, hunting, gathering berries and mushrooms. The list goes on and on," he said. "I think it would be good to highlight the greatest aspect of those."

He's not sure what data will be found with his survey, but he hopes that any "cracks or flaws in the system" will be exposed, making it easier for community leaders to address them.

Though Ashton is looking forward to graduating and being done with the stress of tests, his ambitious nature won't end in May. If accepted to his church's program, he will go to Israel for a year of religious service, tending to the temples and gardens of his Bahá'í faith.

He does admit, however, that he will miss school because of his friends.

"I have a good group of friends," Ashton said. "Also, the teachers are nice here."

Morning workouts

Continued from page 1

back and forth," said Chadd. "It started out with recognizing that there's not a lot of free space here in the gym." The group also talked about his positive experiences at his previous gym, "just interacting, having fun working out. ... I kind of missed that and wanted to bring that aspect here." The gym's new structured workout times are the Yoders' way of recreating that fitness community in Wrangell.

Robinson and the Yoders got together to plan workouts that would engage the whole body, incorporating strength training, cardio, mobility work and more. Each one can be scaled up or down in difficulty depending on the

fitness goals of the participant.

Chadd stressed that the morning sessions are a judgment-free zone, open to beginners and experienced lifters alike. "If you can bend at the waist and reach up and touch the sky, the workout is for you," he said. "It doesn't have to be heavy."

"(The workouts) all have variety," Sabrina added. "Just to keep you from being bored."

After completing a Friday morning circuit of front squats, Bulgarian split squats and core work, participant Hannah Baker said she felt "sweaty."

"It's a good way to start your day," she added. "You feel accomplished before 7 a.m."

Non-morning people can still par-

ticipate in Robinson's and the Yoders' workouts. Their exercise lists are available on the Parks and Recreation website for those who prefer to sweat it out alone.

Because the program is informal, no registration is necessary. Community members can participate with a regular gym membership or punch card.

However, these informal lift sessions are only the beginning of the opportunities Parks and Recreation has in store to keep Wrangell active this winter. Next month, the department will launch its Winter Workout Challenge, a fun, goal-oriented community program that will help motivate residents to get their blood pumping.

"I think working out with a group

when we're all doing the same thing together is so much more fun," said Sabrina. "You get the social aspect of it, the shared suffering. You're all sore in the same way and complaining about the same burn." In her experience, group workouts are a great way to combat the social isolation that is common in Alaska, particularly during the winter months.

Registered participants in the Winter Workout Challenge will be added to a large public bulletin board where they can collect stickers and track their progress alongside their fellow athletes. The challenge will last from Feb. 1 to March 31. Parks and Rec will release additional information as the start date approaches.

Holland America

Continued from page 1

Wrangell could accommodate larger ships like the ones in the Holland America fleet on occasion, Angerman said, but it would need to reevaluate if the town became a more popular destination.

"My feeling is you have to have a balance," he said. "Here in Wrangell, if you had those big vessels coming in every day or four times a week, it might start stressing things. ... You need to be prepared for certain scenarios (like medical emergencies)."

Wrangell's usual schedule of cruise ships typically only carry anywhere around 50 passengers up to almost 700. The 2022 season had ships with accommodations for about 19,000 passengers come to town, a little lower than 21,500 in 2019, pre-pandemic.

This year, ships of various sizes are tentatively sched-

uled to make 101 stops in Wrangell, starting with the first one on May 11 with the 186-passenger Ocean Victory and ending Oct. 8 with the 458-passenger Seabourn Odyssey. The season's schedule isn't finalized yet.

Elvejord said Holland America is working further in advance to announce cruise offerings "to allow guests time to plan and choose their ideal voyage, as trips to Alaska and the Arctic Circle are on many guests' bucket lists."

Scheduling their stops that far in advance is also helping Wrangell's tourism industry when it comes to planning. Caitlin Cardinell, executive director of the Stikine River Jet Boat Association, said they were unable to pitch their offerings to Holland America for last year's stop due to the late scheduling announcement.

Knowing in advance the dates and passenger counts

for the ships aids the association in pitching its services to the cruise lines. For example, jet boat operators can take cruise passengers to Anan Wildlife Observatory or on tours of the LeConte Glacier.

"The amount of passengers we can carry really depends on how long the ship is in port," Cardinell said. "We hope to carry as many as we can offer. At one point, Wrangell got a ship that size once a week, and it was received warmly by the city. I hope that it remains the case for these rare, big-ship stops in the future."

Due to the addition of Wrangell to Holland America's stops in 2024, the cruise line thinks it will entice its passengers to visit again.

"We anticipate many of our guests will be returning to Alaska because of the diverse itinerary," Elvejord said.

2022 in review

Continued from page 1

blackheaded budworm, a moth that feeds on hemlock and spruce needles, impacted trees throughout Southeast. Months later, in November, state entomologist Elizabeth Graham predicted that budworm populations had likely reached their peak and that affected trees have a high chance of recovery in the coming years.

In August, City Market's Benn Curtis retired after 58 years. He had inherited the business from his father and hopes to pass it on

to his son, Rolland Wimberley.

In September, Muddy Water Adventures added a 38-foot catamaran called Island Cat to its tour boat fleet and the Portland Art Museum returned nine objects that had been taken from the Naanya.aayí clan in Wrangell nearly 100 years ago. Shop Groundswell, which had provided the community with fresh flowers and gorgeous gifts for five years, closed down as owner Mya DeLong headed into retirement.

Last October made history. For

the first time ever, the high school boys cross country team became Division III state champions, the first state title for any Wrangell sports program since 1995. Sophomore Daniel Harrison also took home an individual state title.

November was filled with exciting news — swimmer Jack Roberts and the Lady Wolves volleyball team won their respective regional championships, sending them on the path to state.

However, it was also a month of intense grief for many. Former Wrangell residents Kelsey

Leak and Arne Dahl were involved in a boating accident near Point Baker on Nov. 27. Leak was stranded on a rock for 24 hours; Dahl did not survive.

A standing-room-only production of "The Sound of Music" in early December was Wrangell's first community theater event in over 20 years.

Later that month, senior wrestlers Ethan Blatchley and Randy Churchill finished the year strong by taking home Division II state championship titles in their weight classes on Dec. 17.

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New area sportfish manager moved into job from commercial fisheries

By CAROLINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Whether locals or visitors, newbies or experienced sportsmen, recreational fishers who cast their lines in the Petersburg-Wrangell management area have a new resource for all things sportfishing.

After spending the past 18 years working in the commercial fisheries division, Jeff Rice has accepted a new position as the Alaska Department of Fish and Game area management biologist for sportfishing in Petersburg and Wrangell.

Despite his considerable experience with Fish and Game in Petersburg, Rice has found his new role “very interesting” since officially transitioning on Dec. 12. One of his favorite parts of the job so far has been the high volume of new information he’s exposed to each day. He loves “the idea that I could spend so much time working for ADF&G ... and change jobs and have everything be so challenging and exciting.”

He runs a team of employees who inspect the catches of returning sport fishermen to ensure that

state regulations are being met. His team also gathers data on area fish populations so that the state can keep track of key metrics like “catch per unit of effort” a measurement of “how many fish you caught in what time period you had your line in the water,” Rice explained.

But he doesn’t just assist in the effort to keep salmon runs sustainable. He also sees himself as a community advocate for recreational sportfishing.

“I help (fishermen) by answering the questions people have about the management areas,” Rice said. “I encourage people to contact me,” he added, particularly about where and when to fish, which species to fish for and the minutiae of the state’s laws. He’s already gotten lots of calls about fishing regulations, especially from out-of-state fishermen who need assistance interpreting these requirements.

Rice is a liaison between the state and the fishing community, helping as many people as possible get out on the water safely and responsibly, so that fish populations can be maintained for future generations.

Advocating for responsible outdoor recreation

has been a lifelong mission for Rice. Growing up in the Midwest, he developed a love for the outdoors after spending his youth “fishing for everything (he) could catch.” In the early 2000s, he taught environmental education to students in Kazakhstan with the Peace Corps for two years. Today, he still takes advantage of “any opportunity for outreach with encouraging people to fish” in his job with ADF&G. He and his wife are currently teaching the skill to their 12-year-old son.

“My goals haven’t really changed all that much throughout my life,” he said.

For those who may be new to fishing, Rice has words of encouragement. “The learning curve on fishing is pretty sharp,” so patience is a virtue. “Fishing is not always catching,” he said. “Some of the best days I’ve had have not included catching fish but just being out. ... It’s a great way to get outside and spend time with friends and family.”

To learn more about area fishing opportunities and state regulations, email Rice at jeff.rice@alaska.gov or call him at 907-772-5227.

Borough to absorb wholesale electric rate hike until rate reevaluation in spring

By CAROLINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

The Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) has approved an electricity rate hike of a quarter of a cent per kilowatt hour. The additional charge went into effect for its three municipalities — Ketchikan, Wrangell and Petersburg — on Jan. 1, but Wrangell Borough Manager Jeff Good will not consider increasing retail electricity rates until spring, during the annual rate reevaluation period.

“I don’t plan on bringing it before the assembly until we do our normal rate evaluations coming up,” he said. “When we do our other rate adjustments, we’ll discuss it. I’d prefer to wait.”

The borough will absorb the rate hike

for approximately three months, until April or May when the assembly typically approves adjusted utility rates.

SEAPA provides hydroelectric power to Wrangell, Petersburg and Ketchikan.

A year ago, SEAPA unexpectedly increased its rates by a quarter cent per kilowatt hour — the first increase in over 20 years — which motivated the borough to increase the retail cost of electricity by one cent per kilowatt hour for residents and businesses.

The borough increased its retail rates more than SEAPA increased its wholesale rates to save up for future infrastructure needs and ensure the sustainability of its electric utility.

Last year’s full cent price hike gave

the borough a financial buffer that will help it absorb another hike from SEAPA. “There’s definitely a cost,” said Good. But last year’s increase “buys us a little bit of time before we have to do the next rate adjustment.”

He’d like to avoid putting a financial burden on residents “especially during the winter months when everyone’s electric bills are the highest.”

SEAPA has been raising its rates to cover the cost of its ongoing capital projects. In September 2019, a portion of the submarine cable between Wrangell and Petersburg failed, prompting last year’s hike. Since then, SEAPA has taken out a \$13.5 million bond for cable repairs, along with a \$5.9 million bond to con-

struct a permanent office in Ketchikan.

These major capital projects “placed some urgency” on the board’s rate discussions, according to a report to the Petersburg assembly compiled by SEAPA chairman Bob Lynn. SEAPA determined that additional revenue would be necessary to finance the debt service and approved the quarter-cent hike at its Dec. 8 meeting.

“The board has always taken the position of very small increases in rates over time rather than one or two major increases,” wrote Lynn. It “is resigned to the need for wholesale rate increases to cover capital projects and operational needs of the agency after decades of rate stability.”

Federal spending bill includes advance funding for Indian Health Service

The Associated Press
and Wrangell Sentinel

Health care services for Native Americans and Alaska Natives will be bolstered by a provision included in the government spending bill approved by Congress in the final hours of the 2022 session.

The measure provides more certainty for a federal agency that delivers health care to more than 2.5 million people.

A coalition of lawmakers from Kansas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Alaska and elsewhere fought to include advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service in the bill, marking a first for the chronically underfunded agency as a way to ensure that services continue in case of potential funding disruptions.

In addition to authorizing spending for the current federal fiscal year, the bill sets the fund-

ing amount for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1, 2023.

With the legislation, IHS joins other federal health care programs that receive advance funding, including Medicare, Medicaid and the Veterans Health Administration.

“This consistent funding will assist SEARHC in its continued mission to provide the best health care in our communities, as well as offer opportunities for strategic growth in services and facilities,” SEARHC communications director Lyndsey Schaefer said in an email last week.

The SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium is among several Alaska providers that receive funding through the program. SEARHC provides services in 19 Southeast communities and operates the Wrangell Medical Center.

Advance appropriations are

intended to “prevent the interruption of health care services in the event of a government shutdown,” Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski said of the provision.

Before December’s budget bill, “IHS was the sole federal health care provider without basic certainty of funding from year to year,” Schaefer noted. “This package will support significantly needed planning and budgeting stability for the Alaska tribal health system, while meeting the federal trust responsibility. Advance appropriations for the IHS have been a longstanding priority for tribal health.”

IHS, which runs two dozen hospitals and nearly 100 other clinics around the country, repeatedly has been the focus of congressional hearings and scathing government reports that seek reform.

The House Native American

Caucus has urged the Biden administration, IHS and tribal nations to work toward authorizing the shift away from discretionary funding.

The lawmakers pointed to a 2017 report by the Government Accountability Office that showed per-capita spending for IHS trailed by more than two-thirds the \$13,185 spent by Medicare. They said insufficient funding has led to persistent staffing shortages, limited equipment availability, extended wait times and other problems at IHS facilities.

More recently, a GAO report issued in March noted that outdated facilities, few inpatient beds and health care provider shortages made the agency’s response to the coronavirus pandemic even more challenging.

IHS received more than \$9 billion in COVID-19 relief fund-

ing — which it used to address both immediate and longstanding needs — but some members of Congress have argued that the agency’s overall budget needs to catch up with the actual needs in tribal communities.

Advocates have argued that every time Congress passes a temporary continuing budget resolution to avert a government shutdown, IHS has to modify hundreds of contracts to adjust for the available funding. There have been five shutdowns since 1995 amid budget fights in Congress.

During the last government shutdown, a 35-day closure in 2018-2019, the National Council of Urban Indian Health noted that urban Indian organizations reported at least five patient deaths and significant disruptions in patient services as some IHS clinics were forced to shut their doors.

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Southeast Conference will build pellet mill in Ketchikan

By JARED BOEKENHAUER
Ketchikan Daily News

A demonstration project wood-pellet mill is scheduled to be built on Gravina Island, across the Tongass Narrows from Ketchikan, in mid to late 2023 by the region’s economic development organization, the Southeast Conference.

The nonprofit organization, which holds \$1.8 million in grant funding from various sources for the project, is in the planning process toward constructing the mill. More than half the money is from a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant.

Southeast Conference will own and operate the mill. However, it may partner with a private organization in the future to help run the facility, according to Executive Director Robert Venables.

Pellets mostly will be made out of forest waste products, but it

will “experiment” with other biomass products such as cardboard, Venables said.

The demonstration plant would have a capacity to manufacture about 200 tons of pellets per year, he said. The 200 tons could replace about 22,000 gallons of diesel fuel a year, according to a 2016 Forest Service report.

If it is successful, the intent, depending on funding, would be to expand the program with pellet supplies or small operations elsewhere in Southeast.

Various facilities, such as the Ketchikan airport, use pellets for heating, while hardware stores sell them. The idea behind opening a mill in Southeast is that pellets will not have to be imported into town but can be produced locally, according to Venables.

Ketchikan was the ideal location for the demonstration project, he said. Ketchikan has lower energy costs, is close to feedstock

from forest waste, and offers “the opportunities to perhaps take a look at some other feedstock streams like pallets and cardboard,” Venables said.

“This is a demonstration project that we hope will be the first of many in the state that can be community-sized to local demand needs,” he said.

“You can’t do a demonstration project in a community that is off the beaten path, has high cost of energy, and doesn’t have that demand for the product yet (which is another reason why Ketchikan was an ideal location),” Venables said.

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough has approved a lease on a 93,240-square-foot parcel for the mill.

Southeast Conference officials are working on updating cost figures, and are in discussion with a manufacturer about equipment that will be installed at the mill.

Job training program teaches work and life skills to special education students

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

Keely Good excitedly showed her friend Carter Hammer around the thrift store, pointing out where various items could be found. After that, she showed him how to ring up customers with the cash register.

For the past semester, Keely and Carter have both worked at different businesses around town as part of Wrangell High School's special education class on-the-job training program to help them gain work and life skills for after they graduate.

The schools have always had some form of job training for general education students, but last year, Ryan Howe, director of the special education program, began approaching businesses to see if they would be interested in participating.

"We have to ensure, not just the K-12 experience, but the rest of their lives, that they're as productive and happy and independent as possible," Howe said. "Independence is the No. 1 goal, always. I think our students are really digging it."

Though Howe made the inroads for the job training, it was special education teacher Mikki Angerman and paraprofessional Christy Good, Keely's mom, that ran with it, he said. The duo have made a point to have students try different jobs, such as helping customers at River's Mouth Resale thrift store, housekeeping at the Stikine Inn, bagging groceries at Wrangell IGA or working in the kitchen at Sweet Tides Bakery.

"All of us have jobs with things we like to do and we don't like to do, so them being able to find that out about themselves in a safe setting is excellent," Angerman said. "I really want to keep creating strong partnerships (with businesses) so we can keep doing this for kids."

According to the most recent information (2020-2021) from the National Center for Education Statistics, students ages 3 to 21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Act totaled 7.2 million, or 15% of public school students. The law requires public education be available to students with disabilities to receive services until they are 22 years old.

Keely, 21, will age out of special education next year. Good said seeing her daughter find success in the job training program has given her a huge amount of joy and hope for Keely's future.

"Our goal in our jobs is we want to be able to support our kids with disabilities in this community because, really if we don't, they don't have anywhere to go, and I don't know what they would do," Good said. "When they connect with success, the lightbulb comes on."

At first, Keely was excited to work at Sweet Tides. However, after trying it out, she found she didn't like working with textures of the various ingredients. She went over to River's Mouth Resale, where she's been thriving. "Keely's been great. She helps me a lot," said store manager Alexis Fiske. "We've been working with her on organizational skills. She's made big improvements, especially with counting money."

Angerman said the businesses have been very generous in allowing the students to find what jobs they do and do not like.

Carter began getting work experience over the summer before the job training program began. His mom, Holly Ham-

mer, said he was able to do a ride along in a garbage truck and work in maintenance at SEARCH. After graduating, Carter would like to be involved in mechanical work.

"It's his first time today ever (at River's Mouth) and he's also at the Stikine Inn doing housekeeping in the mornings, and now in the afternoons he'll be coming here now instead of IGA," Hammer said. "Last semester he was at the (Parks and Recreation Department) pool in the mornings. I love it. It's a really great experience."

Since the school has laundry facilities, the special education program is working with River's Mouth Resale to wash their incoming clothing. That way, students can learn more basic life skills, like doing the laundry and folding clothes.

Fiske, who is the mother of a special-needs child, sees the benefits in the program.

"It builds confidence for life. I feel like a worry all parents have is, 'How will my children cope in the real world,'" Fiske said. "A lot of people don't realize they need (these skills) to survive. I can't hold my daugh-



Keely Good, right, shows Carter Hammer how to use the cash register at River's Mouth Resale. Both students participate in the on-the-job training program coordinated by the high school's special education department. Several businesses in town work with the program to provide part-time work experience for the students.

PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/
WRANGELL SENTINEL

ter's hand forever. She's going to have to do things on her own. ... I feel that's the work we're trying to do here."

Angerman has also created an evaluation sheet to track student progress, where businesses are able to rate on various areas of students' progress. "Then they let us know if they'd be in-

terested in doing it again," she said. "It's nice having it for the student's file because they can use that for employment later. This gives me a lot of faith in what they will be able to do once they leave here."

But it's not just the special education students who are getting life and job skills out of the

training program, Angerman said.

"I've learned, especially this year, that these kids enrich the people around them," she said. "The joy that they can find in some of the things we might find monotonous, just being around that really does make you feel lighthearted."

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WRANGELL SENTINEL

State Senate leader lists school funding, teacher retention as priorities

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

As the Alaska Legislature's 2023 session approaches, a state Senate leader last Thursday highlighted the potential benefits of that body's newly formed bipartisan majority coalition.

Incoming Senate Majority Leader Cathy Giessel said the nine Democrats and eight Republicans in the coalition have shared values.

"This coalition formed with a goal, and that is working together to keep Alaska a producing state - not a consuming state, but a producing state," the Anchorage Republican told the Resource Development Council for Alaska at a breakfast forum.

The across-the-aisle collaboration contrasts with hostility that has stymied progress within Alaska and elsewhere, said Giessel, who mentioned the weeklong stalemate in the U.S. House to select a speaker. "We see a lot of political division right now, not just in Alaska but nationally."

The 17-member Senate majority that was announced on Nov. 25 makes official what had been an informal working coalition in recent legislative sessions that enabled practical legislation and budget decisions, Giessel said. "This coalition that you see, 17 members, bipartisan, is actually an acknowledgement of what's been going on for the last four years in the Alaska Senate," she said.

It also reflects the will of the Alaska public. "The prevailing message that I hear from other folks in our coalition that they heard from Alaskans was, 'We're tired of the fighting. We want you to get along and get something done,'" she said.

One is education, which "is going to be a key issue," she said.

School districts are stressed with funding and inflation problems that must be addressed through the state budget, she said. But there are deep problems beyond that, she said. The experience with COVID-19 isolated children and caused educational setbacks, even for straight-A students, she said.

"The pandemic was devastating for our kids," she said. The health and economic impacts took tolls on students' mental and behavioral health, too, she said. "Our kids are living with worries, anxiety, bringing depression that you and I never had to deal with."

Another priority will likely be recruitment and retention of qualified teachers, Giessel said. She noted that Alaska teachers are not entitled to Social Security retirement benefits, which the Senate coalition might address. "It's quite likely that we're going to be looking at some kind of a pension retirement-type program," she said.

More broadly, workforce development is a priority for the coalition, both in the private and public sectors, Giessel said.

In the public sector, there are possibly three departments in state government "that are on the verge of being nonfunctional because so many state employees have left service to the state." That means "profound" delays in services like permitting and licensing, she said.

In both the private and public sectors, there is a need to ensure that workers have access to child care, she said. "How do you solve that problem? This is a very low-compensated job that is critically important to businesses, to your employees," she said.

On energy, priorities are likely to concern lowering costs to Alaskans - seen as necessary to helping to diversify the economy - and addressing potential Southcentral natural gas shortages. Coalition members are also interested in

developing renewable and alternative energy, including potential for hydrogen and more hydroelectric power.

Food security is a broad issue of concern to the coalition, Giessel said. There might be some action to enhance the state's agricultural opportunities, she said. And coalition members hope to respond to dire problems in fisheries and the decline in caribou numbers, problems that are connected in part to climate change. That points to budgeting issues, she said. "Fish and Game, as a department, needs to have the funding it needs to do the science it needs to help it manage our resources," she said.

Those and other priorities depend on budgeting, which will be extra challenging in the coming session, Giessel and Sen. Click Bishop, the incoming majority whip, told the audience.

Falling oil prices have dampened expectations for oil revenues to the state. And the outlook is diminished for investment earnings from the Alaska Permanent Fund, which has become the top source of revenue for the state. Investment losses have taken a big toll on the fund, which has declined by about \$6.5 billion in value since mid-2021.

Neither Giessel nor Bishop presented themselves as fans of big Alaska Permanent Fund dividends.

Giessel said the huge dividends that some Alaskans are demanding are unaffordable. "We've got to bring that dividend subject under control," she said. "We need to protect the fund itself."

Bishop said much of the \$17 billion that has gone "out the door" in dividends since 2002 could have been better used, as infrastructure investment that would have helped build the state's economy, for example.

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Alaska House still without leadership coalition a week before session starts

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

As Americans watched the U.S. House struggle to elect a leader, Alaskans may soon see a similar situation develop in the state House of Representatives.

"These proceedings back east, it's a stark reminder to a lot of us that we could be going through the same thing," said Independent Rep. Bryce Edgmon, of Dil-lingham.

With just a week before the Legislature convenes in Juneau, the state House has yet to organize, with both the House's existing mostly Democratic-led coalition majority and the Republican caucus short of the required 21-vote majority.

Legislators say their goal is to avoid what happened in 2019 and 2021, when the House didn't elect a leader until a month after the start of the session.

For the moment, said Independent Rep. Dan Ortiz, of Ketchikan, "we're still in the probing phase. When we talk from one side to the other, we're still filling each other in as to what groups could live with, and relationships and numbers."

Lawmakers say it's too early to

tell whether the Alaska House will definitely resemble the U.S. House on Jan. 17, the first day of session. Most members will arrive in Juneau this week, allowing in-person leadership negotiations.

Legislators say their goal is to avoid what happened in 2019 and 2021, when the House didn't elect a leader until a month after the start of the session.

While those numbers give Republicans a minimal majority, the reality is more complicated. One Republican, Kodiak Rep. Louise Stutes, has been speaker of the House for the past two years, overseeing a 21-person coalition majority that included independents, mostly Democrats and two Republicans. One of those Republicans, Kelly Merrick, of Eagle River, is now in the Senate.

Since the November election, Stutes hasn't caucused with the other 20 Republicans. Another Republican, Wasilla Rep. David Eastman, has also been excluded from the Republican caucus. Eastman repeatedly criticized his Republican colleagues during prior legislative sessions and recently survived a legal challenge that threatened to have him disqualified from the Legislature for alleged disloyalty to the United

States. He's also defending himself against an ethics investigation.

"We're basically at 19 and 19," Ortiz said of the two groups, excluding Stutes and Eastman from the Republican total. "I just don't see either side effectively moving forward without the help of the other side," he said.

The coalition's total also isn't certain. Including Stutes would raise it to 20, but several independent representatives-elect said they're willing to consider offers from the House Republican caucus and shouldn't be considered a guaranteed vote for the existing coalition.

Ortiz is one of those. Sitka Rep-elect Rebecca Himschoot is another. Elected as a nonpartisan, she said she supports "looking at organization from all angles."

Several lawmakers are looking more closely at organizing around particular legislation or a particular goal, rather than the traditional party divide.


Reps. Josiah Patkotak of Utqiagvik and Calvin Schrage of Anchorage are independents who said they are keeping an open mind.

"What are you going to get 21 people to unify around?" Schrage said, suggesting that agreement on issues like education funding and resource development could lead to agreement on a House leadership structure.

"My general assessment is that at the end of the day, with whatever happens with organization, you're going to be left with a moderate group that isn't going to be able to do everything that some of the most progressive or conservative members might want to achieve. I think the political realities - and the numbers - necessitate a moderate agenda," he said.


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State forecasts continued jobs recovery in Southeast this year

By MARK SABBATINI
Juneau Empire

Southeast Alaska saw a “stronger than expected” 6.5% increase in jobs in 2022 compared to the previous year, due to ongoing recovery from being one of the state’s hardest-hit regions during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Alaska Department of Labor.

A slower 2.5% increase in jobs is forecast for 2023, with a record cruise ship season plus growth in several industries including construction and a partial rebound of seafood processing.

Tourism-related industries and transportation had the highest rates of growth in Southeast Alaska as the region added 2,400 jobs instead of the 1,400 forecast in 2022, according to this month’s Alaska Economic Trends report from the department.

Seafood processing jobs saw the largest decline at 20%. Wrangell’s largest seafood processing plant, owned by Tri-

dent Seafoods, did not operate in 2022, its third shutdown year in a row.

“Southeast’s rebound over the last couple of years was more dramatic than other areas, but its economy also suffered more than most in 2020 when the pandemic eliminated nearly two years of tourism and closed many businesses and schools,” the report states. “Jobs began to return in 2021, with gains in eateries, transportation and seafood processing, and the recovery picked up steam in 2022.”

Among the most eye-catching numbers for Southeast Alaska in the report is the assumption there will be an all-time high of 1.6 million cruise ship passengers in 2023, assuming 100% occupancy aboard ships. That’s more optimistic than the 1.4 million visitors that local government and industry officials say is likely, based on occupancy rates that increased throughout the season last year and peaked at about 80%, said Meilani Schijvens, director of Rain Coast Data,

which publishes annual economic assessments for the Southeast Conference.

“The real answer is nobody knows for sure,” she said.

Seafood processing is expected to see the highest percentage increase in jobs in 2023 at 8.3%, but that’s less than half of last year’s drop. Schijvens said the region’s worst seafood harvest on record occurred during the pandemic, and pink salmon harvests tend to alternate up and down years, with the coming year expected to be an up cycle.

The infrastructure bill, along with other federal funding such as the just-passed \$1.7 trillion omnibus budget package, is also why another of the fastest-growing workforces during the coming year is expected to be a 6.3% increase in professional and business services, Schijvens said.

“We’ve got a lot of federal money on the ground right now, so there’s a lot of local governments and groups that can go after funding,” she said. “It’s not just

studies. You’ve got design teams, architect drawings and all these different pieces so you can show you’re ready to build a building or build a port.”

Other top Southeast employment growth industries in 2023 compared to 2022 are forecast for construction at 6.7%, and leisure and hospitality — generally related to tourism — at 7.1%.

Statewide, a 1.7% increase in total jobs is forecast in 2023, led by resource industries including oil, gas and mining.

“Mines weathered the pandemic downturn well, and their growth will come from small workforce expansions across the board,” the report states. “Oil and gas, on the other hand, was hammered during COVID, losing nearly a quarter of its jobs in 2020,” but the industry’s gradual recovery is expected to continue this year.

A 4.1% increase in leisure and hospitality, and 4% increase in manufacturing are the other leading growth industries statewide.

Birth rate helps make up for loss of residents who left Alaska last year

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

Alaska’s population rose in 2022 according to new estimates released Jan. 5 by the Alaska Department of Labor, marking a second consecutive year of increases after four years of declines.

The new Alaska population estimate, 736,556, is the highest since 2018, but the state continues to see more people moving out than moving in, and 2022 marked the 10th consecutive year of negative net migration, said state demographer David Howell.

The state gained about 450 people despite that migration loss because the number of births was greater than the number of deaths and the out-migration.

Nolan Klouda, director of the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development, said the “glass half-full” argument is that the outmigration rate is dropping. “We could say that’s a good thing. But it’s still a far cry from being in neutral territory or net positive migration,” he said.

Population figures are a gauge of the state’s economy and are critical for measuring future demand for services like hospitals, ferries, roads and schools.

“It’s a pretty important indicator of economic health,” Klouda said. “People do tend to vote with their feet and move to a place that sees more economic opportunity, has more job growth and more opportunity in general.”

In Anchorage, arguments over school closures have

included discussions of the state’s declining school-age population, something that may also feature in legislative discussions of the state’s student-funding formula.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant effect on state demographics, according to the new demographic report, which is published annually in January and estimates population as of July 1 the preceding year.

“During the pandemic, just less and less people moved,” Howell said.

The report shows last year had the most in-migrants since 2012-2013 and the most out-migrants since 2016-2017. Subtracting the departures from the arrivals results in a loss of 2,489 residents in 2022.

Despite that loss, the state gained population because there were 9,364 births and 6,424 deaths, a natural increase of 2,940 — more than the number of people who left.

Twenty-four states had more deaths than births, and Alaska is trending in that direction, too. The state’s fertility rate — the number of births per woman of reproductive age — is above the national average but has been declining for years.

Conversely, the state’s death rate has been climbing as the state’s average age rises. In the new report, the number of deaths is the most on record, jumping by almost 1,000 from the previous year, which also was the record.

Deaths from COVID-19 account for some of that rise, but not all of it. This month, the Department of Labor’s

monthly trends report shows elderly Alaskans — those at least 71 years old — now make up more than 7% of the state’s population, an all-time high.

Children — those under 15 — are now just 22% of the population, down from 29% in the early 1990s.

Most cities and boroughs recorded small population declines between 2021 and 2022, the state estimated. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Kenai Peninsula Borough were notable exceptions.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough is down by more than 1,000 residents.

Anchorage, which remains the state’s largest city, dropped below 290,000 residents, in part because of out-migration and because of residents moving to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, which has a lower cost of living and more available housing.

Some rural Alaska communities have had stable populations because a high birth rate counteracts long-term outmigration. But with declining birth rates, that effect is fading. The Nome Census Area, North Slope Borough and Northwest Arctic Borough all posted lower populations.

Wrangell’s population continued its steady decline, the state report said, from 2,369 in the 2010 U.S. Census to 2,127 in the 2020 census, down to 2,084 in the state estimate for July 2022.

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Average wait time 90 to 120 days for state to process Medicaid applications

By SEAN MAGUIRE
Anchorage Daily News

Alaska has violated state and federal law by failing to process Medicaid applications in a timely manner, according to an Anchorage-based civil rights law firm that settled a class-action lawsuit in federal court with the state three years ago.

The Alaska Department of Health’s figures last week showed that there are 8,987 outstanding Medicaid recertifications and applications to be processed by the state Division of Public Assistance, which is contending with a major backlog in application processing that officials attributed to a staffing shortage and other issues.

“This number includes new applications, recertifications, and duplicates for all Medicaid categories,” Dr. Anne Zink, the state’s chief medical officer, said by email Jan. 4.

She said that health officials believe the majority of those cases are recertifications, meaning that many can be processed automatically and that “the individual will not lose coverage while the case is being reviewed.”

In 2019, Jennifer Spencer, then a social work student at the University of Alaska Anchorage, filed a class-action lawsuit against the state on behalf of herself and thousands of Alaskans who had not had their claims processed on time. Spencer had applied for Med-

icaid in December 2018 but was still waiting for an eligibility determination to be made two months later when the suit was filed, Alaska Public Media reported in 2019.

State Medicaid law requires that claims be processed within 30 days, and federal law has a 45-day deadline. For disability claims, an eligibility determination must be made within 90 days under both state and federal law.

In August 2019, the state settled with Spencer and agreed to pay her attorneys’ fees at the Northern Justice Project, an Anchorage civil rights law firm. The settlement stipulated that by the end of 2020, the state would process at least 92% of Medicaid applications in a timely manner and issue regular updates on the progress it was making.

By January 2021, a report showed some improvement: 76.7% of applications were processed in November 2020 by the federal deadlines and 58.4% were meeting the stricter state rules.

But then the Department of Health’s figures from December 2022 showed a backslide — since last July, 54% of initial applications were processed on time. The current average wait time for Medicaid applications to be processed is between 90 and 120 days, state health officials said.

“It’s just incredible, to be honest with you, 50% of the time they’re complying with the law,

jeepers creepers,” said James Davis Jr., an attorney with the Northern Justice Project.

Zink said there are several reasons for the current Medicaid application backlog: There had been a plan in 2021 to reduce staffing through attrition, move away from paper applications and use a more automated processing approach. A cyberattack later that year hit the state health department and crippled its IT systems, Zink said, which scuttled that plan and created long-term challenges.

The department — which oversees the Division of Public Assistance — faced difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, including anticipating staffing needs, according to Zink. Recruitment has posed another challenge.

Davis isn’t convinced. A large backlog of Medicaid applications, and long processing times, predated the pandemic and the cyberattack.

In 2015, the year that then-Gov. Bill Walker expanded Medicaid eligibility, the state was processing 42.6% of applications on time.

In February 2019, when the class-action lawsuit was filed, court documents stated there was a 15,000-person Medicaid backlog and 10,000 low-income Alaskans had been waiting for coverage since filing for assistance in 2018.

Many of the reasons Zink gave for the Medicaid backlog also extend to the Division

of Public Assistance’s severe backlog in processing applications for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, often known as food stamps. SNAP benefits for thousands of Alaskans have been delayed for months, without a clear timeline for when they can expect relief.

Addressing the current backlog of applications to the Division of Public Assistance is a top priority, Zink said. The department filled 10 vacant positions to support processing and customer service in October. It is recruiting for 30 permanent positions and another 45 long-term non-permanent positions, she added.

“The benefit of these addi-

tional staff should be felt by staff and Alaskans in weeks not years,” Zink said.

Davis is focused on what he calls the Health Department’s continued failures. He said his law firm held off on challenging its “abysmal” Medicaid processing rates because attorneys believed a judge would be loath to punish a state agency for misconduct during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, though, the pandemic is firmly in the rearview mirror, Davis said, meaning the law firm is preparing this week to argue that the state of Alaska is continuing to violate state and federal law.

“It’s déjà vu all over again,” Davis said.

Christine Jenkins

passed away peacefully,
surrounded by family
on Jan. 4 in Wrangell.
Memorial service is
planned for Feb. 19

Obituary to follow at a later time.

Federal spending bill includes fisheries disaster funding for Alaska

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Aid to Alaska fishermen, seafood processors and marketers and communities was included in the year-end congressional appropriations package that won final passage last month.

The \$300 million in aid follows official disaster declarations issued by U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo for Alaska salmon and crab fishery failures dating back to 2020, as well as some salmon failures in Washington state dating back to 2019.

"This will be relief for commercial, recreational, subsistence harvesters, all those who were directly impacted by the fishery stock crashes," Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who helped write some sections of the legislation, said in an online news conference Dec. 23.

The disaster aid also supports additional fisheries

research and helps communities that lost fish-tax revenues. In addition, it includes a provision, the Fishery Resource Disaster Improvement Act, which aims to improve administration of disaster funding and get money to people and businesses, Murkowski said.

"We recognize that it's one thing to get the disaster declaration. It's another thing, then, to get the funding. And it is yet another step to get the funding out to those who have been impacted," Murkowski said.

The \$300 million in disaster aid "is a great start for much-needed money to help fishermen and communities pay their bills," Jamie Goen, executive director of Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, said in a statement.

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers is one of the groups affected by this winter's first-ever closure of the Bering Sea snow crab fishery and the second consecutive year of closure for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery. In

both cases, stocks are too low to support any harvesting.

In addition to the Bering Sea crab industry shutdown, the Commerce secretary has declared disasters for:

2021 Alaska Kuskokwim River salmon, Norton Sound chum and coho salmon fisheries

2021 Chignik salmon fishery

2020 and 2021 Alaska Norton Sound red king crab fisheries

2020 Copper River/Prince William Sound coho and pink salmon fisheries

Aside from the disaster relief, there is money in the bill for fishery initiatives, including research and monitoring in the Yukon and Kuskokwim river drainages and in the Bering Sea.

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Ketchikan police chief on paid leave after indictment on assault charge

By SCOTT BOWLEN
Ketchikan Daily News

Ketchikan Police Chief Jeffrey Walls has been placed on paid administrative leave after being indicted for felony third-degree assault and five lesser charges related to an incident Sept. 10 at Salmon Falls Resort.

"Chief Walls is currently on administrative leave while we complete our internal review," Ketchikan City Manager Delilah Walsh wrote in a Jan. 4 email. "Deputy Chief Eric Mattson has assumed the role of acting chief."

"We will do an internal investigation," City Manager Delilah Walsh said in a telephone interview with the Ketchikan Daily News on Jan. 3.

Walls had continued to work as police chief through Jan. 3 after having been indicted on Dec. 29 by a Ketchikan grand jury on the one Class C felony and five misdemeanor charges related to the Sept. 10 incident.

Walls, who started work as Ketchikan police chief last March after a nearly 25-year law enforcement career in Louisiana, was at the Salmon

Falls Resort restaurant with his spouse on the evening of Sept. 10 when a 36-year-old Washington man who court documents described as intoxicated and causing disturbances throughout the evening "intentionally bumped" into Jeffrey Walls' bar chair and knocked Walls against the bar.

The man apologized. He and Walls shook hands, and the Wallses "believed the incident was over," according to the court document. About an hour later, however, the man was on his way to the restroom when he "stum-

bled into" the chair of Walls' spouse, "causing both Walls to hit the bar and each other."

As the man continued toward the restroom, Walls is alleged to have gotten up from his seat, ran after the man and pushed him "head first" into a wall, then placed him "into what multiple witnesses described as a chokehold" that allegedly lasted between one and two minutes before other people were able to pull Walls away from the man, according to the court document. The man later received stitches on the side of his head.

Walls' attorney, Jay Hochberg, wrote in an email to the Ketchikan Daily News on Dec. 29 that Walls was "simply detaining an individual who had committed a crime — and using reasonable force to do so."

After the grand jury indicted Walls, he appeared at an arraignment before Ketchikan Superior Court Judge Katherine Lybrand. Hochberg entered a plea of not guilty on Walls' behalf.

"To these false and defamatory allegations, we enter a plea of not guilty and demand a jury trial," Hochberg said during the arraignment.

Lybrand released Walls on his own recognizance, setting conditions of release that included no contact with the alleged victim, no discussion of the case with witnesses, and prohibiting Walls from departing Ketchikan without written approval from the court.

Walls' next court scheduled appearance is an omnibus hearing set for Feb. 7 in Ketchikan Superior Court. A jury trial is scheduled to start on March 13.

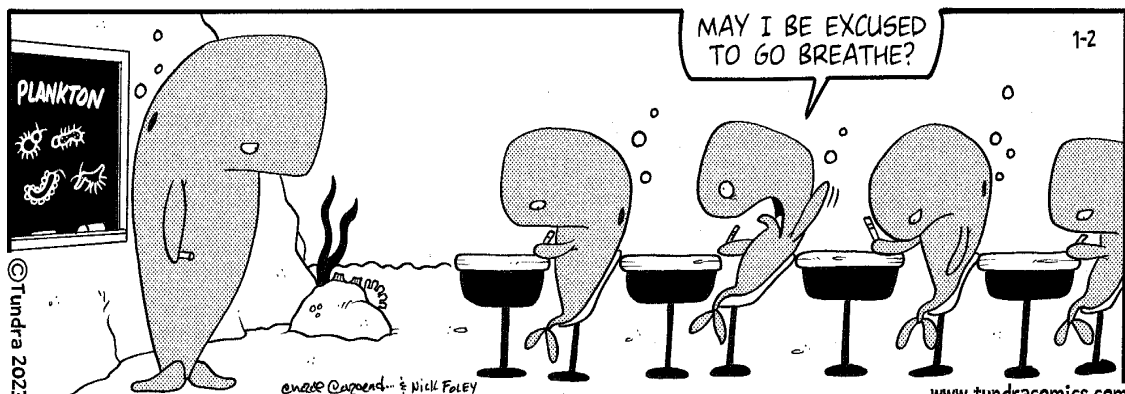
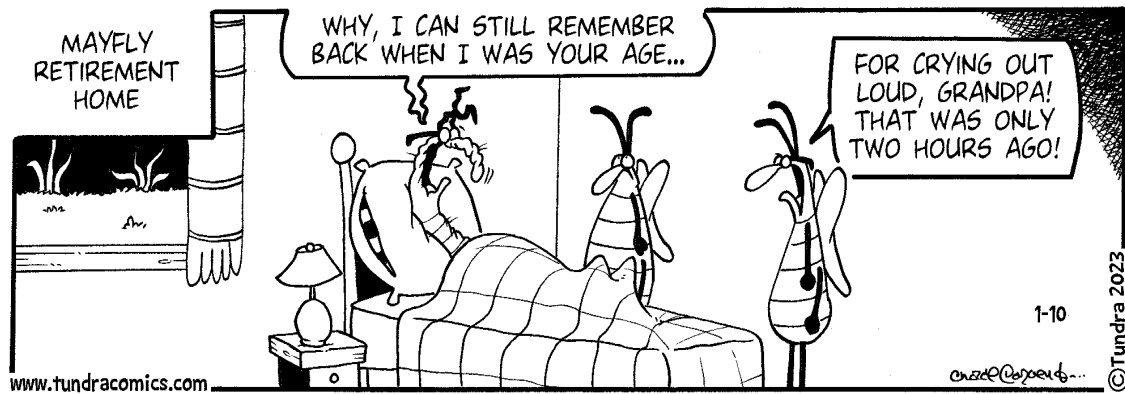
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Rainfall

Continued from page 3

lead meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Juneau, the town has been trending wetter, though it is difficult to verify the extent to which recent weather patterns are related to climate change.

"Although 2022 was a record wet year, you cannot contribute one record wet year to climate change," he told the Juneau Empire. "Based on the past 20 years, the wettest years recorded have been dominated by the years since the turn of the century — so there might be a signal here, or a trend that could be evidence of the influences of climate change."

Since installing his rain gauge, Messmer has learned firsthand how the geography of a place can influence the amount of rain it receives. He installed his

rain gauge to settle an argument with his friend, Dick Crockett, in the 1980s. Messmer, who lived downtown and Crockett, who lived by the 6-Mile sawmill, had different opinions about Wrangell's annual rainfall levels.

Crockett "was a fellow that I worked with and he lived out by the mill," recalled Messmer. "We always argued about the rain because it was so much different. That's what started it. He's long gone but I kept it up."

By comparing the results of their rain gauges, Messmer and Crockett found that the area near the mill gets a lot more rain than downtown. "The hill ... stops the clouds and catches the rain," said Messmer. His gauge is located near Mount Dewey and the schools, meaning its rainfall readings are more reflective of the weather patterns that in-town residents experience.

Police report

- Monday, Jan. 2**
Agency assist: Bank.
Found property.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Paper service.
- Tuesday, Jan. 3**
Missing person.
Abandoned vehicle.
Traffic stop: Failure to stop at stop sign.
Traffic stop: Expired registration.
Arrest: Violating conditions of release.
- Wednesday, Jan. 4**
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Civil matter.
- Thursday, Jan. 5**
Citizen assist.
Citizen assist.
Courtesy transport.

- Friday, Jan. 6**
Dog at large.
Noise complaint.
Citizen assist.
Traffic stop: Warning for failure to use turn signal.
Subpoena service.
Subpoena service.
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.
- Saturday, Jan. 7**
None.
- Sunday, Jan. 8**
Noise complaint.
Noise complaint.
Traffic stop: Citations issued for plates must be properly attached and displayed, and no proof of insurance.
Agency assist: U.S. Forest Service.
During this reporting period there were four other traffic stops.

Loss of Bering Sea crab may be ‘poster child’ for climate change damages

BY YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

Less than five years ago, prospects appeared bright for Bering Sea crab fishers. Stocks were abundant and healthy, federal biologists said, and prices were near all-time highs.

Now two dominant crab harvests have been canceled for lack of fish. For the first time ever, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game canceled the 2022-2023 harvest of Bering Sea snow crab, and it also announced the second consecutive year of closure for another important harvest, that of Bristol Bay red king crab.

Part of the reason is likely a sustained marine heat wave that prevented ice formation in the Bering Sea for two winters, thus vastly altering ocean conditions and fish health.

“We lost billions of snow crab in a matter of months,” said Bob Foy, director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Alaska Fisheries Science Center, at a public forum held Dec. 12 in Anchorage. “We don’t have a smoking gun, if you will. We don’t have one particular event that impacted the snow crab — except the heat wave.”

That heat wave is now over, but its effects linger. A NOAA survey showed an 80% decline in Bering Sea snow crab, from 11.7 billion in 2018 to 1.9 billion

this year. It could take six to 10 years to recover, experts told members of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which wrapped up a 10-day meeting in Anchorage last month.

Snow crab may be the “poster child” of climate change, council member Bill Tweit said during deliberations on a rebuilding program that was ultimately approved at the meeting, but much more will be affected by the long-term changes in the ocean.

“It’s going to be more and more a problematic question for us among a broader range of species than just snow crab,” Tweit said.

In the short term, loss of the snow and red king crab harvests is devastating. Direct losses from harvest cancellations this year amount to \$287.7 million, according to state estimates. Local governments are suffering, too, like the Aleut community of St. Paul, which relies on the crab harvests for more than 90% of its tax revenue.

There are limits to what the North Pacific Fishery Management Council can do to manage crab stocks. Crab harvests are managed by the state, even for stocks existing in federal waters, though the council and federal agencies provide support and scientific information to assist and cooperate in that management. However, the council

and associated federal agencies do have the power to regulate other fisheries that might affect the crab — and that is what crab fishermen and crab-dependent communities asked them to do.

Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers, a nonprofit trade organization, petitioned the council to use its emergency powers to ban all fishing for six months in areas designated as protected zones for red king crab. In those areas, crabs mate and molt, spending much of their time in a vulnerable soft-shell stage. That puts the crabs at high risk for being crushed and killed by trawl nets that hit or scrape the seafloor, the organization argued.

Warm temperatures may have wiped out much of the crab population, but that is not something that can be corrected immediately, said Jamie Goen, Alaska Bering Sea Crabbers’ executive director.

“Our concern as crab fishermen is we need to focus on the things we do have control over, and that’s really fishing impacts and habitat protections,” she said at the museum forum.

The council declined to take such emergency action, which critics said might not be effective and would have unintended consequences. They include pushing the trawl fleet into different territory, where there might be higher incidental catch of salmon or other problems.

Instead, the council opted for

a plan to study alternatives that include possible fishery closures in the key red king crab mating and molting areas. And the snow crab rebuilding plan it approved leaves open the possibility of a small harvest conducted as the stock recovers, which is important to industry representatives who voiced concerns about losing their position in the wider seafood markets.

“Once you lose that space at the buffet table and they fill it with shrimp or lobster, it’s really hard to get that back,” said John Iani, president of the North Pacific Crab Association, a Seattle-based organization of processing companies.

There is plenty of competition for the market slice held by Alaska snow crab and red king crab.

Stockpiles of Russian king crab are still being sold — even recently at an Anchorage Costco — though the U.S. government has banned further imports of Russian fish due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Snow crab is harvested in eastern Canada, where stocks remain healthy, and in the Barents Sea off Scandinavia, where it is a relatively new species.

There is other Alaska crab on

the market, too, though not as celebrated. Harvests of golden king crab, a species smaller than red king crab, are proceeding, and a relatively small harvest of red king crab in Norton Sound, in the Nome area, which is expected to open in 2023, though in two recent years it was shut down because of low stocks. Dungeness crab harvests continue in Alaska, as in other West Coast states.

The future of the Bering Sea appears to depend on whether humans take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are warming the planet, NOAA fisheries biologist Elizabeth Siddon told the council on Dec. 11.

A “high-mitigation” scenario, with big reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, will result by the end of the century in “a Bering Sea that’s only slightly warmer but pretty similar to current conditions,” Siddon said. But under a business-as-usual scenario, with very little progress to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the Bering Sea will be “much warmer than we would have observed to date,” she said.

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

Governor bans TikTok on state-owned computers and smartphones

Anchorage Daily News

Gov. Mike Dunleavy issued a memorandum last Friday prohibiting the use of social media platform TikTok on state-owned devices. In doing so, Alaska follows in the footsteps of more than a dozen other states.

Several predominantly Republican-led states have banned the Chinese-owned social media platform on publicly owned computers, tablets and smartphones, citing national security concerns.

Former President Donald Trump first attempted, unsuccessfully, to ban TikTok in 2020. Several states began banning the use of the app on state-owned devices last year after news broke that the Chinese-owned parent company of TikTok was accessing information on American users. Congress passed legislation last month to ban the use of the social media platform on devices owned by the federal government.

Friday’s memorandum from Dunleavy to state department commissioners and executive staff states that TikTok “poses a clear risk to any network or user it touches.”

“Use of TikTok on state-owned electronic devices or on private devices that are connected to state networks poses a risk that a foreign government may access confidential or private data from state agencies and employees,” Dunleavy said in the memo, explaining his decision to ban the use of the app on state-owned devices or while using the state network.


Despite longstanding concern, TikTok has become an immensely popular social media platform, with 100 million users across the U.S.

CLASSIFIED

HELP WANTED
Wrangell Public Schools is accepting applications for the following position for the 2022-2023 school year:

- Paraprofessional: This is a part-time position working with students in Grades Pre-K-5, 5.75 hours per day in the Special Education Program at Evergreen Elementary School. Salary placement is Column C on the Classified Salary Schedule. A high school diploma or equivalent is required. An associate degree, equivalent credits, or the ability to pass the para-pro assessment is also required.

For more information and a detailed job description, please contact the District Office at 907-874-2347. Position is open until



The Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) is seeking proposals from qualified firms to clear, trim, and cut 38.37 acres of transmission line right-of-way on SEAPA's Swan-Tyee Intertie located on Revillagigedo Island north of Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska. Bids are due February 16, 2023 at 4:00 p.m. AKST. For a complete set of bid documents with additional details, please navigate to:

<https://www.seapahydro.org/opportunities/bids-projects>

or interested respondents may call the SEAPA office at (907) 228-2281 for a copy.

Publish Jan. 11, 2023

filled. It is the Wrangell Public School District’s policy to not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, national origin, sex or disability.

PEGBOARD FOR SALE
Pegboard with metal frame around it and some hooks. 43 inches by 36 inches. Just \$20. Call 907-874-2301.

FREE PAPERS
Stop by the Sentinel to pick some up.

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



The Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) is seeking proposals from qualified firms to clear, trim, and cut 100.37 acres of Swan-Bailey transmission line right-of-way located on central Revillagigedo Island north of Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska. Bids are due February 17, 2023 at 4:00 p.m. AKST. For a complete set of the bid documents with additional details, please navigate to:

<https://www.seapahydro.org/opportunities/bids-projects>

or interested respondents may call the SEAPA office at (907) 228-2281 for a copy.

Publish Jan. 11, 2023

PUBLIC NOTICE

Hungry Beaver, Inc., dba Marine Liquor Store located at 640 Shakes Street, Wrangell, is applying for transfer of a Package Store AS 04.11.150 liquor license to Hungry Beaver Pizza LLC.

Interested persons should submit written comment to their local governing body, the applicant, and to the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board at 550 West 7th Ave., Suite 1600, Anchorage, AK 99501, or alcohol.licensing@alaska.gov.

Publish Jan 4, 11 and 18, 2023

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Publish Jan 4, 11 and 18, 2023

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Cheryl L. Hamley, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Christopher J. Hamley has been appointed personal representative of the above named estate. Pursuant to Alaska Statute, Title 13.16.450, all creditors are hereby notified to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be filed with the court or be presented to:

Case No. 1KE-22-168PR
Christopher J. Hamley
c/o Keene & Currall, PPC
540 Water Street, Suite 302
Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

Publish Jan. 4, 11 and 18, 2023

**CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL
NOTICE OF JOB OPENING
HARBOR DEPARTMENT
Harbor Administrative Assistant**

The City and Borough of Wrangell will accept applications for Harbor Administrative Assistant through Jan. 20, 2023, at 5 p.m. This is a permanent position with all City and Borough benefits and is part of the IBEW collective bargaining agreement. Applicants must have a valid Alaska driver’s license, be proficient with Microsoft Office programs including Excel, Word, Outlook, and Access and have excellent customer service skills.

For a complete list of duties and responsibilities, a job application may be obtained and returned to City Hall, 205 Brueger Street (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929, or emailed to rmarshall@wrangell.com.

Applications will be reviewed, and interviews may be conducted, beginning January 23, 2023.

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

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

Publish Jan. 11 and 18, 2023

Skagway Puppy Bus video romps to 44 million views on TikTok

By CHRIS BIERI
Anchorage Daily News

The dogs of Mo Mountain Mutts have caused a stir before. Not by howling or barking, but by warming the hearts of canine lovers around the world.

The Mo Mountain Mutts dog walking business, owned and operated by Skagway resident Mo Thompson, has produced a few viral videos over the past year. But a video of four dogs being picked up by the Puppy Bus last month has become an undeniable sensation, receiving more than 48 million views on TikTok alone, not to mention other social media platforms.

The video, shot from the perspective of the bus driver, starts when a black and white German shorthair pointer mix named Jake hops on, meets Thompson, greets a few canine friends and finds his seat before his harness is secured.

Amaru, a malamute mix, is waiting alone in the snow when the bus arrives, and quickly hops on and takes a seat. Bama, a black Lab, is next to be picked up and seated. Slade, a young St. Bernard mix, appears to be the most excitable but, after a few licks, takes a seat.

The whole scene unfolds in about a minute as the handful of dogs already on the bus excitedly wait for their friends and walking partners.

Thompson said people connect with the videos on a lot of levels. But the most recent one has taken on a life of its own, with celebrities like "Schitt's Creek" actor Dan Levy sharing it on Instagram.

"Somebody has a Lab or somebody has a pointer and they're like, 'That looks like my dog or that looks like their family's dog,'" Thompson said. "It's kind of like relatable because there's so many different dogs on there, and then there's just like, the super-mutts — all different shapes, sizes and ages. So I feel like there's a dog to identify with (for everyone)."

The dog onboarding is remarkably orderly, which Thompson said comes with

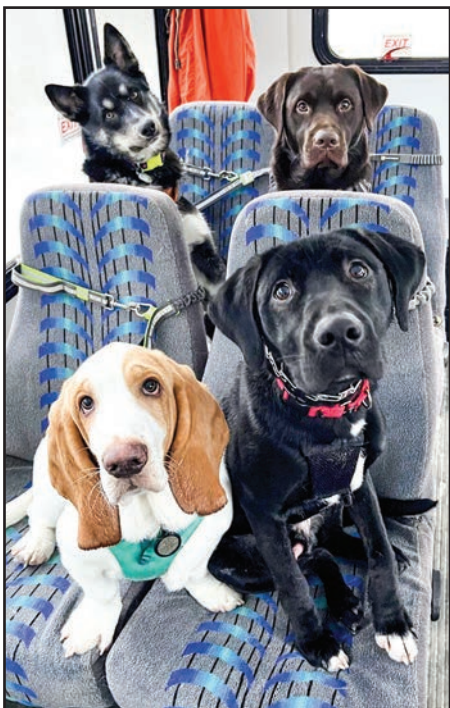


PHOTO COURTESY MO THOMPSON

Skagway's Mo Thompson operates Mo Mountain Mutts, a dog-walking business that picks up its customers with a bus. A TikTok video of dogs boarding the Puppy Bus received more than 44 million views and 88,000 comments as of last week.

the routine of the daily walk. "Why can't teenagers in high school act this way on a bus?" asked one TikTok user.

"The ones that come regularly, they know the drill," she said. "They know that they'll get to do what they want faster if they're calm and polite. So the newbies, like, you can see the older dogs basically rolling their eyes like 'Come on, sit down so we can get our treat.'"

Those who watch the videos have also picked up on the dogs' wide-ranging personalities. Some appear very business-like, while others are more curious

and playful. Many of the dogs in the video bypass Thompson altogether to hang with their friends.

"Some of them care about, like, saying hi to me, and some of them do not," Thompson said with a laugh. "Some of them are like, 'I'm here for the dogs and like, we don't really care about you Mo.'"

The videos started organically, as a way for Thompson to share the dogs' daily routine with their owners.

"I've been posting on Instagram and Facebook since the beginning because people will be like, 'Where did you go? Who was my dog with? What did they do? How were they?'" she said. "So if I just posted a video of them on their walk and take a group photo at a destination, they'll know where we went and what they were doing. Instead of answering the same question ... I just started using social media."

Before the business took off and long before the Mountain Mutts became a social media sensation, Thompson was at a crossroads. She had initially made the decision to take on one group of dogs to walk, which she sandwiched between two jobs. She eventually took on a second group and continued more of her focus on trail dog walking and puppy training, which is also one of the business specialties. She started mostly walking dogs for seasonal workers, but as more dogs were adopted during 2020 and 2021, she expanded.

"I worked at my job less and less and went from full time to like, four days a week, down to two days a week," Thompson said. "Every year it was just a little less. It started out as a seasonal thing only. And then COVID hit, and all of the dogs were needing to get socialized, and I kind of had a new niche. And that's really what pushed me into it being a set job with the actual local community that lived here all year-round."

Now she's up to five groups a day. Last year she hired her husband, Lee, to drive the bus and assist with other aspects of the business. At first they had a van, but

when that broke down a little over a year ago, they upgraded to what is known as the Puppy Bus.

Thompson said she put out an SOS for a vehicle, and in the interim, they were walking from house to house to pick up the dogs. Temperatures dipped below zero, and they had to put a temporary halt on the walks. Finally, they found the bus through Jeff Hamilton, who operates Hamilton Construction Skagway.

"He gave us a really good deal on it," she said.

And that's when they started finding larger audiences with their social media videos. One featured Lee Thompson as a city bus driver only to reveal the cargo of dogs at the end. Another showed Mo Thompson doing an impression of a flight attendant, handing out complimentary liver treats to all of the passengers. While some posts have neared 20 million views, none have approached the popularity of the bus pickup video.

With so many groups to walk, Thompson mixes up where she takes the dogs depending on a number of factors. She avoids taking large groups on trails with tighter passages or blind corners, opting instead for wide-open places. Puppies and younger dogs likely can't go on more rigorous hikes, and there's always an element of matchmaking that goes into the groups.

"You can't just put any dog with any dog," she said. "You really have to find the right energy matches and put dogs who are good with each other. Finding the right group setting, the right vibe and making sure the dogs have the training that they need to be successful out on these walks, too, is very important."

Lee Thompson said that while they're creating more content for social media, they try to keep it as genuine as possible. "For us, it's something we were really just already doing. So we don't go greatly out of our way to make certain types of videos or anything. We just kind of do what we're already doing."

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