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# The Leader

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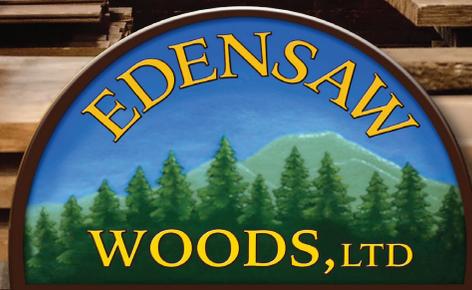
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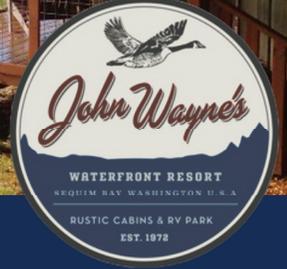
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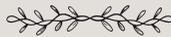
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# A CONNOISSEUR OF FINE MUSIC

(AND WINE)

BY TOM MULLEN

Joe Euro recalls his beginnings as a wine enthusiast.

“It goes back to almost my childhood and my Italian grandparents,” Euro said. “You always had wine with the big family feasts, and as a kid you’d get watered-down wine. I liked it, and if I asked for more they’d usually say no — but once the adults went off to play cards and what have you, I’d finish off the wine they left.”

Today the owner of Port Townsend’s Wine Seller looks back with contentment at a career in hospitality and as a classical musician.

“When I was poor I’d go buy the cheap Italian wine you could buy at the supermarket,” he admitted. Soon though, he was pressing sommeliers for information about his changing palate.

“I started studying. I bought a pocket encyclopedia as I became more and more fascinated with the regions of the world.” He

visited the vineyards of California before they were acclaimed, where he recognized the miracle happening there. He landed a job at McCormick and Schmick’s Harbor-side Restaurant in Seattle where, like all its employees, he could purchase bottles of wine at a 40 percent discount.

“It was an old East-coast-style place: black pants, white sport coats and bow ties,” he said. “I learned not to go out with the staff. Instead I’d go play guitar with one other friend, and we’d buy some nice wines and work on whatever piece we were working on.”

His classical guitar work improved alongside his knowledge of more expensive, pedigreed wines.

“Good old Bill McCormick asked one of his waiters about this Bordeaux or that Burgundy, and found out to his horror that the waiter didn’t know the difference, so he set up these monthly classes on wine.”

Waiting tables paid the rent in those days, while playing live allowed Euro a certain kind of freedom.

“Restaurant gigs are a great way to practice in front of an audience,” he explained.

Euro’s career as a musician in Port Townsend started Uptown. Soon he was playing corporate gigs and weddings, and somehow his two great loves, classical guitar and wine, began to intertwine. He found that more and more his good-paying gigs were in the afternoons, so he began a search for a way to work around that. Thus, The Wine Seller was born.

“I started about a week before Thanksgiving in 1982,” Euro said. “I had to sell everything I owned, a banjo, everything. I was out of money and my first location was where that Thai restaurant sits across from The Leader. It was a little tiny shop, but I had my sign, the one that I have today, in this little 300 square foot shop.”

The rent then, he said, was fairly cheap, but the naysayers were plentiful.

“It started against a lot of negativity,” Euro said. “Friends would say, ‘Joe, I wouldn’t do that. America is not a wine-drinking nation.’ But I thought, what’s the worst that could happen? Bust up the shelves for firewood and I’d have a lot of wine to drink.”

What Euro knew from his own experience is that, “profit margins on wine and beer are pretty slim, but it’s a consumable: You run out and you have to go get some more.”





# WITH THESE RINGS

EMPOWERS COUPLES TO TIE THE KNOT

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

What started as Stephanie Selle's passion for passing on her insights about handcrafted jewelry became a way to help other couples celebrate their love.

Selle taught students at North Seattle College about jewelry before she started With These Rings in Seattle in 2012. The business moved to Port Townsend nine years ago.

Selle was drawn to Jefferson County after frequently visiting friends who live in Port Hadlock-Irondale, and she's found Port Townsend to be a cozy community that benefits from

being a wedding destination for a number of her clients. Guiding engaged couples through the process of making their own wedding rings allows Selle to relive the joy she experienced when she and her partner crafted their rings together.

If you're a couple who's looking to tie the knot with distinctive wedding rings, Selle can help you fashion your own bands in a single day, through a workshop lasting between three to five hours. Booking a workshop requires an average of one to three months of lead time, and setting stones into a ring might require an additional four to six weeks after that.

“Some of my couples are so proud of their work that they’ll actually get married, and then come back to have their stones set in their rings,” Selle said.

While those couples wait for workshop appointments, Selle requests they perform the “homework” of selecting what types of metals and bands they’re interested in, after which she works with them patiently to ensure their work yields the rings they want. “I make sure we go one step at a time,” Selle said. “I don’t ever want the process to overwhelm anyone. After they’ve selected the sizes and shapes of the bands, we can work on refining it according to what they want. Just about anybody can do it.”

At the same time, Selle as a teacher attested to how much she’s learned from her students, who not only have interesting tales to tell of their courtships and lives, but also wind up selecting combinations of different elements in their rings that Selle would not have anticipated.

“I get to see them choose some of the most interesting textures, or conversely, even if they’d expressed interest in more flamboyant or ornate designs at first, I get to see them settle on more basic designs, because they’re so proud of their own craftsmanship,” she said.

A number of couples create rings that conceal shared secrets between spouses-to-be.

“Historically, of course, jewelry has always been used to show off,” Selle said. “But what’s touching is when couples come in who request inscriptions or gemstones on the inside of their bands, where no one else will be able to see them.”

While she spoke with The Leader, Selle welcomed a couple who took a two-hour ferry ride from Seattle just to see her. Hanyuan Chi and Xiayu Feng discovered With These Rings on the Chinese “Little Red Book” social media app.

“I’m apparently super-popular in Seattle,” Selle said. “But I’ve also gotten more local couples than ever this past year.”

The Seattle couple confessed to being “a little nervous, but a lot more excited,” as Selle guided them through steps such as measuring their ring fingers both before and after working with their hands, since increased circulation through their fingers, due to physical activity, would provide a more accurate size range.

“I do get to live vicariously through them, during an especially happy time in their lives,” Selle said.





# MISTAKES ARE OUR BEST TEACHERS

BY TOM MULLEN

You've probably run into Mark Ennis at the Farmers Market Uptown. He's the founder of a new wave of doing business. He calls it Flutter by Pizza Pie.

"I'm a skate boarder and this all came from building skate board ramps and on a really small scale, realizing how you can create your own environment," Ennis said, "growing up in suburban New Jersey and learning how to build little ramps and to take our ideas and bring them into this plane of existence."

It's not just about making pizzas, or even making pizza ovens. It's more about building a safer, more sustainable world.

"I want to teach and do community outreach and make it possible for other people

to have a small business in which the variables have already been worked out — not just the cost, but I've worked out a design. In skateboarding it's okay failing. You understand the risks you take.

"Because of the state of this world, especially in business, things have gotten out of scale. When they fail, they hurt communities across the world. There is a social aspect to the business I'm trying to create and I hope I can provide a different example of what is possible."

It's easy to see why someone would want to make pizzas for a living, but pizza ovens? The concept started in Santiago, Chile, where Ennis met a friend's grandmother who taught him to make simple breads and doughs.

“She had a garden and it was my first experience with this. I was close with a Chilean family there who introduced me to another grandmother who built mud ovens and would make little pastries,” he said.

When he returned to the States, he took a job at a you-pick blueberry farm. Then fate knocked on his door.

“I had nurtured my obsession with wood-fired ovens and the dream for me was making sourdough bread, which 15 years ago, really wasn’t happening,” Ennis said. “But there was a workshop to build a mud oven, a week after I got there.

“I was obsessed. I was making 300 dollars a month. Me and my girlfriend had a place to live and I was desperate to learn farm skills, building skills, how to can food, to make bread, to live off the grid.”

Being broke was the mother of invention.

“I was on food stamps, so I would get a bunch of meat and cheeses and sell pizzas to the you-pick-em blueberry people, and I quickly learned that was much more profitable than farming.”

Making pizzas, and pizza ovens, has become a metaphor for skating.

“Skateboarding is a culture and the process is failure-based. You have to be willing to try things that seem impossible to you, but by trying them they become more possible. If it’s way out of my abilities, I fall and hurt my own elbow. Prototyping is like skateboarding, falling, changing the position of your feet and then you try again.”

The pies he sold at the farm, he admits, weren’t very good. He found mentors and eventually developed something delicious.

“Our dough is something that really sets us apart. I’ve done a lot of things with wheat, water, salt, and sourdough yeasts. A lot of it is desperation of the moment. That’s how I figured out my recipe — I started trying different things because I had committed to catering a friend’s wedding.”

His obsession with the craft led him to build at least a dozen ovens for people, while continuing to sell his own pies and working on a prototype for a modular commercial oven. To that end, he’s signed a lease in Port Hadlock.



“It used to be a bakery 10 years ago and I’ve been waiting a while for this building to come up, near my art studio,” Ennis said. “It will be a little pizzeria and an oven show room, and more or less an unofficial school for those who want to learn my way of making pizza, learn more about fire and the forests, and also small-scale farm and food systems.”

The key, he said, is simple ingredients that he is continually changing.

“The main ingredient is the time to develop the pizza. There’s my time but also the time for flavors and textures to develop. It’s such a slow, consistent effort. In some ways it is crescendoing right now. I’m getting ready to release another two prototypes,” Ennis said.

Time is on his side while he searches for perfection.

“Perfect is when there is nothing else you can take away from the design,” he said.



# TREASURED CONNECTIONS

at CHIMACUM CORNER FARMSTAND

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

Nicole Witham, general manager of the Chimacum Corner Farmstand grocery store, loves being able to connect local farmers and food producers with the surrounding community, and sees her job as but one link in the chain of agricultural advocacy.

With a background in family farming herself, Witham recognizes that one of the most essential steps is getting farmers' produce out to prospective customers, which she credited Katy McCoy and Phil Vogelzang with doing by co-founding the Chimacum Corner Farmstand in 2010.

For Witham, the Farmstand is a means not merely to provide a venue for produce and other goods, but also to work with local farmers, to find ways of selling their produce at the right volumes and prices, and thereby help grow their businesses in turn.

Although Witham transitioned out of family farming in 2015, she became involved in the Chimacum Corner Farmstand's marketing and branding through social media, even going so far as to start its first Instagram account, which she saw as yet

another means through which the grocery store could build relationships between farmers and the surrounding community.

In 2017, Witham added to those duties when she became a coordinator for the Washington State University Food Systems Program, which she described as likewise playing into "my passion for farm systems and helping out agricultural businesses." She worked with all 39 of the state's counties to understand each agricultural region's economic and ecological issues.

When the COVID pandemic hit in 2020, Witham went into emergency response mode, as food supply chains were disrupted, and both individual sales and entire markets were lost. This also prompted what she regarded as some needed reevaluations regarding how food is distributed. By 2021, Witham was ready to step back from some of her big-picture obligations, especially as she parented from home, so she returned to the Chimacum Corner Farmstand, where Rob Story was retiring after a decade as general manager.

PHOTOS BY DAN DEPEW.

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“I was getting a bit burnt-out, and I wanted to return to more of a grass-roots level, so I reached out to Katy and Phil,” Witham said. “Produce is a seasonal business, so I wanted to experience a full cycle as the grocery store’s operations manager.”

After a year of observing the Chimacum Corner Farmstand’s trends and patterns firsthand, complete with its peak periods of tourist traffic, Witham stepped in as general manager, bringing her broader knowledge of statewide agricultural systems to bear. She’s sought to promote sustainable food production and local farming businesses in a post-pandemic environment.

“It’s a cliché to say this, but the work of helping to feed others feeds me on an emotional level,” Witham said. “An essential aspect of agriculture is always going to be providing food growers and consumers with access to each other.

What the Chimacum Corner Farmstand does is provide a hub for the farmers and food producers in our community, in addition to supporting close to 50 employees throughout the year, in a friendly work environment with low turnover.”

And there remains part of Witham who simply wants to be “farmer Nicole,” as she once was.

“I prefer to be hands-on,” she said. “I was never cut out for a corporate gig. I still start my mornings by feeding goats, and I like walking in muddy work-boots, with alfalfa in my hair. I get to work alongside all sorts of different people, in a place where our leadership isn’t segregated or disconnected from the rest of our amazing team.”



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# TURNING MOMENTS INTO TIME

BY LLOYD MULLEN

Last year a bride's father had a heart attack while getting ready for the ceremony.

While shooting closeups of the family getting ready, Melissa Jentzsch looked down her lens and watched as he knotted his bowtie.

"I thought, 'something's not right.' I got the wedding planner and had her call 9-1-1. "It was this traumatic, horrible experience." Jentzsch said. She and other vendors stayed with the family as the wedding became a wake.

In the winter months that followed, Jentzsch reevaluated whether or not she would continue working as a wedding photographer.

"It's such an intense job. You're a part of it. You're sharing in all of the good moments and you're also sharing in all the hard stuff. I felt like I was carrying the weight with them," she explained.

Spring sprung and Jentzsch decided to continue on in the business.

"It's like a backstage pass to people's lives,"

she explained. "You have access to all of this important stuff. It feels like a real privilege. I love the variety."

Like the kind of variety found at the poly-amorous wedding she photographed.

"Really embracing how different everyone is and how fun it is to celebrate all of those differences. The exposure to things that I wouldn't be exposed to in my everyday life. You get these behind-the-scenes views of what everything is like." Jentzsch said.

The spark was lit on her 15th birthday when her father gave her a Pentax and a roll of film. After school and on weekends, she'd roam the sidewalks of Seattle, taking pictures of buildings, wildlife, and passersby.

"I just felt so alive," Jentzsch recalled. That camera was just the beginning.

In her 20s, Jentzsch married and moved to the Rocky Mountains. It was there that she nurtured a fondness for the outdoors and nature photography.

PHOTOS BY MJ PHOTOGRAPHY





“I’d sit for hours in Yellowstone after a dusting of snow and wait for a fox to prance around,” she said.

A baby son diminished both her time and her desire to be away in the mountains, waiting for wildlife to appear.

“A couple of friends got married and asked me to document their weddings,” Jentzsch said. “I shot a few and I think, for me, it was amazing to see how different everyone is. That’s my favorite thing about weddings: there’s so many different kinds.”

Artificial intelligence and social media are a cause for headaches in the industry. From planned portraits with artificial lighting to keeping up with fashionable online trends, Jentzsch said customers have a hard time finding quality wedding photographers.

“I’ve had couples send me inspiration galleries. What they don’t know is that golden hour could be 9 p.m. in the summer. I think their expectations versus what’s realistic and what they saw on social media may not be true. Especially with AI-generated galleries and portfolios,” she explained.

During many of Jentzsch’s shoots, guests stand on the docks in downtown Port Townsend, squeeze inside childrens play sets near Point Hudson, and run along the tide on North Beach.

Beyond the photography work, Jentzsch said it’s her experience with vendors that sets her apart.

Destination weddings in the Pacific Northwest have been on the rise in the past decade. For those looking to become newlyweds, Jefferson County has everything, according to Jentzsch. “You don’t need to import vendors from Seattle. We have a solid community of vendors,” she insisted.

“I feel like a lot of the time photographers get the glory because we end the day with these beautiful images, but it took all the vendors to get that image. It’s important to me to tag all the vendors even if you can’t see them in the photos. They all took part in creating a great day for the couple.”



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# KALMA

## DEATH POSITIVITY FOR *the* DARKLY-INCLINED

BY VICTORIA KELLOGG

"Death is a natural and inevitable part of the human experience; it shouldn't be shameful to acknowledge, to be curious about, or to work with our relationship to death and dying."

This is the vision of owner AJ Hawkins as she shapes the essence of her brain child and online business, KALMA, into Port Townsend's newest retail shop and gathering place.

With plans to open on Water Street this spring, new downtown PT space KALMA will not only serve as a store stocked with goods made by women-owned and minority-owned businesses, but will also serve as a welcoming, inclusive, and creative community space where people from all walks of life can feel comfortable being themselves and connect with one another on topics related to death.

Founded in 2018, online retailer and advocacy platform KALMA is the hub of Hawkins's work with death positivity, woven from a vision to use art and creativity to facilitate open and honest conversations on death, dying, and grief.

It is a common misconception that the term "death positivity" invites a positive outlook on death. Rather, the movement serves to create a space where human beings can safely come together and acknowledge the complex web of feelings surrounding death and mortality. The philosophy serves as a guiding force for Hawkins in her everyday life as an artist. It also influences her role as a business owner living with a disability, which took hold shortly after KALMA began.



"The primary root of my disability is in chronic illness, navigating fluctuating levels of pain and fatigue," Hawkins said. "During a lot of the early years of KALMA, there were days where it was hard to even walk across my house, let alone stand and pack orders."

Hawkins recalls the beginning of her small business journey, noting that designs and orders were often fulfilled from her bed or couch, and that there were periods of time where marketing, making sales, and overall brand development were intentionally scaled back in order to shape her workload into something her illness would allow her to manage. "My body is not always an ally in achieving my goals," she said.

For Hawkins, death work and death positivity is not just about supporting oneself or others through grief and loss. It is also the confrontation of what can be an uncomfortable reality: that we all live in a mortal body, and the mortal body is a finite thing. It is a reminder that feelings of grief do not only result from the loss of a loved one. For Hawkins, as someone who was born able-bodied and became disabled later in life, grief also manifests itself in the loss of versions of yourself that could do things you no longer can. It was in the wake of the loss of her former self that the mission behind KALMA was truly born.

As Hawkins looks ahead to her newest chapter, her personal bridge between illness and death positivity guides all of her decision making, from the physical tasks on her to-do list, to utilizing purchasing power as a business, to supporting people who may have less access to employment in the traditional workforce.

“If I am advocating for us to think more critically about the impacts of our bodies on the earth after death, then what are the impacts of my body on the earth during my life?” she asked. “If I am advocating for people’s rights to empowered, compassionate, and culturally-relevant deaths, am I helping people to live empowered, compassionate, and culturally-relevant lives?”

Today, those who visit KALMA’s social media channels will note the themes of these questions and their subject matter in Hawkins’s eloquently written posts, and in her enchanting style of photography. Those who visit her online store will

find a beautifully-curated collection of clothing, beauty products, and home decor among other offerings, and many items designed and printed by Hawkins herself.

“My goal is to use income from the business to help subsidize advocacy work, education, and social work around our relationships to death, dying, and grief,” Hawkins said of the upcoming brick-and-mortar space. “The income from the retail shop will support the rent and facilitation

of a community space for hosting a range of death-positive and creative programming, such as grief support groups, end-of-life planning workshops, and living funeral ceremonies.”

Furthermore, she is committed to creating a space that is physically accessible, noting that one in four Americans have a disability, and many of Port Townsend’s downtown historic buildings are currently not ADA accessible. Hawkins is driven by a desire to see her own personhood reflected on Water Street, in a space where all can gather to represent themselves and their lived experiences.

With Hawkins at the helm of its brick-and-mortar concept, KALMA strives to be a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible space for all to foster their curiosity for the death-positive movement. It’s a space where she and her community can feel comfortable being different, being “weird”—being more authentically and unapologetically themselves.

“If I only have one life to live, I should live it as myself,” she said.

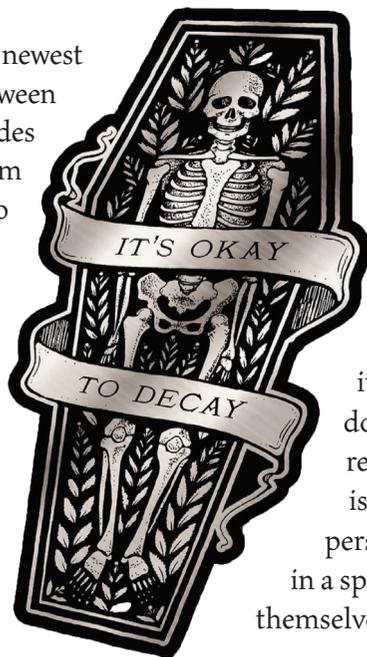


IMAGE BY AJ HAWKINS

# BRINGING THE COMMUNITY

## COUNTRY-HOME COOKING

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

**M**ike Harbin, owner and pit-master of Mo-Chilli BBQ at 1980 W. Sims Way in Port Townsend, started cooking to recapture a taste of home, when he was far away from Texas in the military, and he's kept on cooking as it's become the foundation of his family.

Harbin's nine-year hitch in the U.S. Marine Corps included a stint in the Far East, where taking part in weekend cook-outs planted the seeds for later culinary collaborations with his sister and brother-in-law, as he realized how much he missed the Texas home-cooking he grew up with.

Harbin admitted that it took some trial and error to get the end result just right, but when his father-in-law passed away, Mike and his wife, Heather, left not only Texas, but also their old corporate jobs, to return to Heather's home town of Port Townsend and be with her mom, while she and Mike also built their first food truck.

Mike Harbin is quick to credit the assistance of friends, family and even fellow veterans with helping Mo-Chilli BBQ get started, as he's made connections with organizations such as the Small Business Development Centers and the local Economic Development Council. He's also put in the time, effort and attention to detail that was required to turn what was once a recreational pastime for him into a rigorous process.

"It definitely takes patience," said Harbin, who has diligently solicited customer feedback, and charted the progress of his cooking in logbooks. "When you're figuring out the right prep times for your meats, you also have to factor in the temperature and the weather."

At his brick-and-mortar location, Harbin constructed a shed exterior for his barbecue equipment, to shield it from the direct force of the wind, so his fires don't have to burn as hot to compensate for the elements. A stovepipe chimney circulates fresh air through the smoke tank, to foster the proper flavors in his meats.

PHOTOS BY DAN DEPEW



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The winter months nonetheless take their toll on his cooking times, and ever-increasing customer demand has led Harbin to bring in additional smokers, made from retired propane tanks for additional volume, as Mo-Chilli BBQ serves between 500 to 900 pounds of meat per day during its busier months, Harbin needs to trim his brisket the day before he serves it, if he wants to avoid starting his workday at midnight.

According to Harbin, one of the secrets to Mo-Chilli's barbecue flavor, even more than the smoke, is the meat rub, which he makes himself.

However, Harbin sees the key to Mo-Chilli's business success as its enthusiastic, industrious employees, and he expressed pride in being able to hire as many as 15 employees during the summer months, since it allows him to help others in a fashion similar to how his fellow vets helped his business get started.

And as long as Harbin can pay his bills, he considers Mo-Chilli BBQ to be its own reward.

"I do it because I love it," Harbin said. "When people tell us our barbecue is the best they've ever had, that's a win. That gets me out of bed in the morning, even when my mornings are still at night. It's amazing to hear that we've become a household name in other towns."

Technically, that household name combines the nicknames of Mike and Heather's two sons, "Mo" and "Chilli," both of whom have worked shifts at the family business, just as Mike said, "I couldn't have done it without Heather," whose side dishes and desserts are always in demand.



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