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FESTIVAL CITY

BY MEREDITH JORDAN

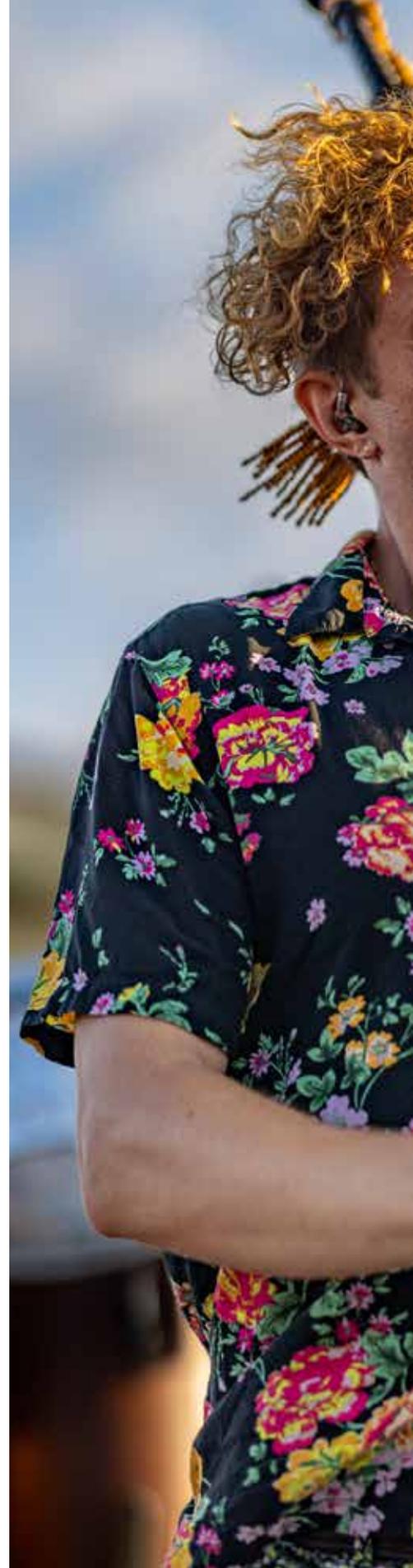
Port Townsend has more significant and creative festivals and events than most other cities its size — and quite likely, any city its size.

As festival season kicks off, we stop to consider the breadth and originality of some of the top celebrations ahead. Collectively the festivals draw thousands of visitors to the area while holding true to the communities they represent. These are opportunities for fun and learning and entertainment that embrace history and nature and boats, ingenuity and imagination.

Festival season kicks off April 26-28 with the Victorian Heritage Festival, with its period costumes, historical reenactments, carriage rides, and other activities. Founded in 1996 by locals, it reimagines the long-ago era vividly enough that you might just think it's 1886.

The oldest festival in terms of local longevity follows May 15-19. The Rhododendron Festival — known as the Rhody Fest — is 89 years young this year. The Grand Parade is on Saturday with the festival concluding with the Rhody Run and Golf Tournament on Sunday. The ultra-family-friendly celebration includes a trike race, pet parade (5/16), kiddies' parade and cake picnic. There's even a bed race.

RXMBLER (ELISE TROUW) PLAYS AT CONCERT ON THE DOCKS IN DOWNTOWN PORT TOWNSEND. PHOTO BY LLOYD MULLEN





Brass Screw Confederacy and Steampunk Hootenanny returns June 14-16. Steampunk is a style of design and fashion that merges history and creativity with science fiction. “This Pacific Northwest immersive Steampunk Festival is a celebration of extraordinary people in an extraordinary place embodying a world that never was,” is how its website summarizes it. Friday night features steamy burlesque ala “Den of Iniquities” while the Grand Hootenanny dance hall anchors Saturday. This year’s theme is Monsters & Monster Hunters. It’s hard to define unless you’ve been there.

The Uptown Street Fair & Parade, which celebrates the business district and neighborhood, is back and bigger than ever, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Aug. 17. It showcases amazing local art ala the PT Arts Guild Arts & Crafts Fair amid music, local food and of course the Farmers Market. Think street fair with a mix of activities and performances and vendors, many of them offering unique goods. The Port Townsend Main Street Program helps coordinate the event on Lawrence Street, which is expected to draw 2,000 people.

The Wooden Boat Festival marks its silver anniversary September 5-8, which means the largest wooden boat festival in North America is likely to be even bigger this year. It’s a staggering array of beautiful traditional boats, large and small. Getting out on the water is made easy for kids and adults alike, and opportunities to learn from seafarers and wooden boat experts abound. The festival honors the maritime culture of area, capped by the awarding of the Wooden Boat Community & Spirit lifetime achievement award.



The Jefferson County Farm Tour runs Sept. 14-19 with locally grown food, fiber and farm-made products. It's county-wide and provides opportunities to explore local farms and homesteads and meet the farmers helping to feed us. The Production Alliance teams with WSU Jefferson County Extension and local farmers to organize various events, which also happen at farmers markets. The full scope of happenings will be available the ProductionAlliance.org website.

The Port Townsend Film Festival, Sept. 19-22, is also marking its 25th year this season. The event was founded in 1999 by four friends who were used to traveling to another city for a film festival. They decided there should be one much closer to home, an event that had something for everyone. It's been growing ever since. The weekend draws about 2,000 people who watch more than 50 films. In the mix are 30 or more filmmakers, some of them quite famous.

The Great Port Townsend Bay Kinetic Sculpture Race happens Oct. 5-6. Ingenuity abounds at what is the third oldest kinetic race in the country, which centers the larger festival. Participants engineer human-powered works of art

hardy enough to traverse road, water, mud and sand as part of the race. It's a mix of whimsy, engineering and art in which humans defend their innate ability for motion, creativity and originality in a world that seems intent on artificial intelligence. It also promises some good food this year, given its shout-out foodies and chefs.

This isn't a complete list — not even close! Many other events happen through the year. Some run over a matter of weeks, like Concerts on the Dock, which start July 11 and run through August.

Other events are more focused, like Centrum's host of musical offerings. That includes Fiddle Tunes Festival, which runs from July 1-8, and Jazz Port Townsend, which runs from July 22-28, with faculties of musician artists and lots of learning.

Check online event calendars, including the Leader's, the websites of hosting organizations, and bulletin boards around town to get more information about these events and others.

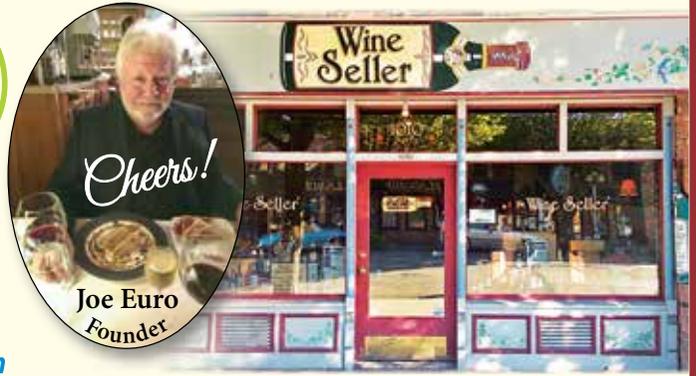
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HISTORY OF RHODY FEST

FOSTERS GROWTH AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG WOMEN

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

As the Rhododendron Festival of Jefferson County embarks upon the 89th year since it was started, Bliss and Lori Morris shared some of its history with *The Leader*, while recalling their own years of service to this local tradition.

The Morrises noted that the Covid pandemic marked the second global history-making event to interrupt the festival, which was previously suspended from 1942 through 1945 due to World War II, before resuming in 1946.

Although Covid yielded a similar suspension in 2020, Bliss Morris noted that the Rhody Fest managed to “sneak into” 2021 by delaying its festivities until August, whereas the festival is traditionally celebrated the third week in May.

“In 2022, the only parade we were able to attend was our

own, due to travel restrictions and a lack of revenue from the carnival,” Morris said. “By last year, we were able to attend a few other festivals throughout the state, but this year, we’re attending nearly all of them.”

“This year also marks a first for our festival, as Paige Govia, our princess from last year, became this year’s queen,” Lori Morris said. “We haven’t done that before, and she had to go through the whole process all over, but she’s excited to be representing our community again.”

The Rhododendron Festival grew out of a short film, shot by Hearst Metrotone News for theaters across the U.S. after local businessman Clive Buttermere persuaded the Hearst organization to film wild rhododendrons in bloom in Jefferson County in 1935.

Buttermere and his fellow local merchants then organized a competition, so that a court of young women could be filmed with the rhododendrons by Hearst, and the community could vote for their favorite candidates by spending money at various participating businesses, which resulted in Myrtle Olsen being crowned the first Rhododendron Queen.

The American Legion, keen to perpetuate the popular pageant, made it an annual event with the first Rhododendron Festival in 1936, when it was celebrated with a single day of activities, including a parade.

As the festival’s royalty continued to be chosen through community members patronizing participating businesses, the Chamber of Commerce took over leadership of the festival during the early 1950s, and



CONNIE OKERT RECEIVES A CONGRATULATORY KISS FROM WASHINGTON STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN J. O'CONNELL, WHO, MOMENTS BEFORE, HAD CROWNED HER QUEEN OF THE 1961 RHODODENDRON FESTIVAL. DONNA BOWMAN (RIGHT) IS, 1960 RHODY FEST QUEEN. COURTESY PHOTO

the number of events associated with the festival steadily multiplied, until the length of the festival itself expanded into a full week of events.

The festival's schedule of activities grew to include golf and baseball tournaments, air and car shows, a "cow chip" throwing contest, a succession of boat, bed and trike races, a beard-growing contest, a kids' parade and a "queen's ball," as the candidate who sold the most buttons was crowned queen.

The 1980s saw the Rhododendron Festival go nonprofit, so that vol-

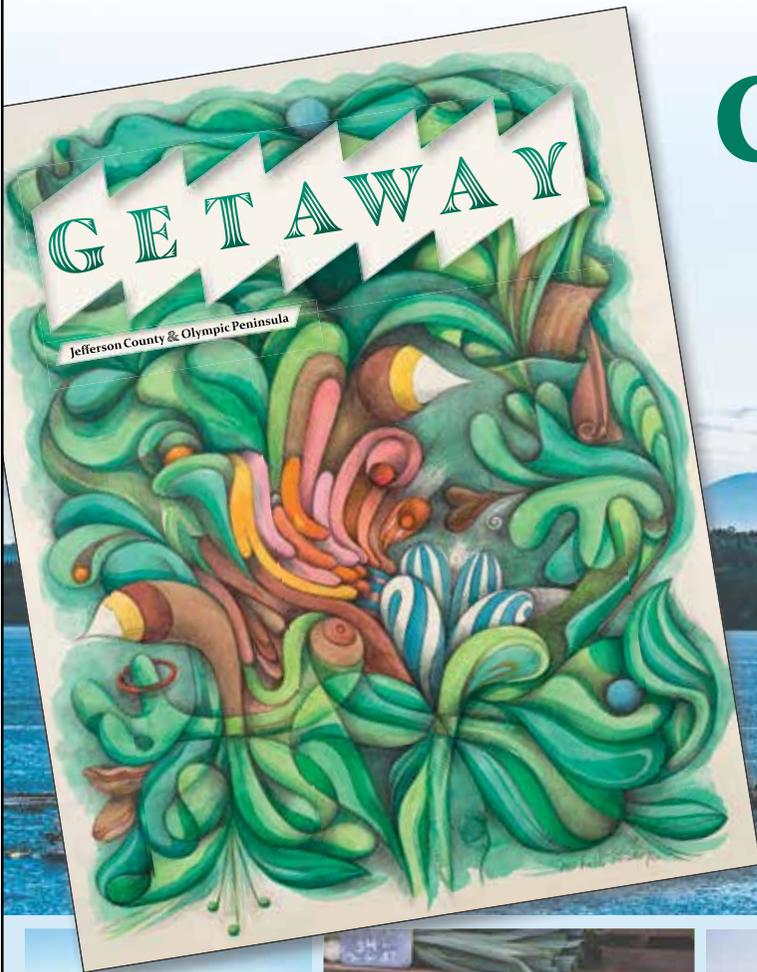
unteers would chair the festival and serve as its board members, while royalty would receive scholarships from the association to pursue their education, and button sales and other contributions from the community would help fund the festival.

"But what we've loved about being part of the Rhody Fest, even after our daughter was crowned princess in 2015, has been the opportunity to watch all these girls and young women learn and grow and develop, through their training and coronations, while serving as their chaperones," Lori Morris said.

Lori and Bliss Morris agreed that the festival provides its royalty with professional skills such as public speaking, poise and etiquette, that will serve them in good stead as they enter the adult working world.

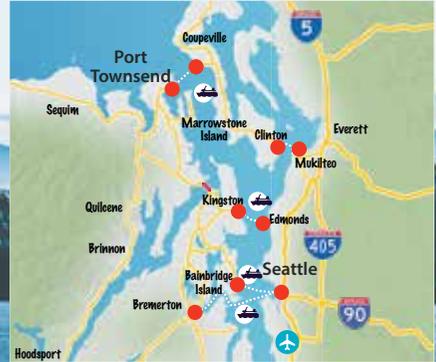
"These are the skills that get you hired in job interviews," Bliss Morris said. "Royalty candidates who start as shy little girls wind up speaking confidently to the press and public across the state."

To that end, the Morrises would welcome more community members to join them as Rhody Fest volunteers.



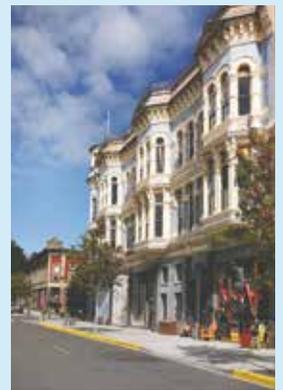
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YEAR IN AND YEAR OUT

FLOATS REQUIRED TO LIVE UP TO
STANDARDS FOR SAFETY & ENTERTAINMENT

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

After nearly a decade of helping to furnish the annual Rhododendron Festival of Jefferson County with parade floats, Bliss Morris can reduce much of his job to numbers.

Using the chassis of a wrecked 2009 Ford Focus, Morris has been aided by varying numbers of helpers, each year since 2015, in producing floats that span roughly 28 feet in length, 10 feet in width and as many as 12 feet in height.



PORT TOWNSEND MAYOR, DAVID FABER WAVES TO THE CROWD.

Morris noted that those physical dimensions have to be able to compact themselves enough to fit in a trailer, to take the float to as many as a dozen different parades across the state, from mid- to late-spring to the early fall.

This year's Rhody Fest parade float is slated to travel to the Washington State Apple Blossom Festival in Wenatchee and the Sequim Irrigation Festival in May, followed by the Shelton Forest Festival, Marysville Strawberry Festival and Port Orchard "Fathoms O' Fun" in June.

July should see the Rhody Fest parade float trek to the McCleary Bear Festival, Capital Lakefair Olympia and Seattle Seafair, while late September's itinerary includes stops at the Quilcene Parade and the Leavenworth Autumn Leaf Festival.

Of course, all of this comes after the Rhody Fest parade float's unveiling at noon on Saturday, April 20, on the Port Townsend Golf Course, and while Morris declined to spoil this year's float design, he did hint that it would be related to this year's festival theme of "Rhody Soars Around Washington."



MARITIME CENTER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JAKE BEATTIE BLOWS BUBBLES.



“It’s usually around September or October when we select a festival theme, but there have been years when we’ve picked out a parade float design, then tailored the theme to match it,” laughed Morris, whose work with the Rhododendron Festival began when his daughter advanced to the ranks of the princesses for the festival.

After the last parade in September, Morris typically rebuilds a new framework on the existing chassis from October to April, although he emphasized that he paces out his work to “a couple of nights a week” on average, and since he’s working at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds, he’s limited in when he can apply glue or paint to the float, depending upon how cold it gets outside.

At the same time, Morris noted that any float which appears in parades throughout the state is governed by strict guidelines, intended to ensure the safety of the float’s driver and passengers, as well as any parade-goers in the vicinity.

“We get inspected by fire departments about three to four times a year, often on the spot at whatever festivals we’re attending,” Morris said. “We have to carry two fire extinguishers on board, and we’re required to have stanchions for our festival royalty to ride the float. We need a tow rope, in case our engine gives out, and the driver has to be able to see and get out of the float, with effective ventilation.”

Moving from safety considerations to aesthetic effects, Morris pointed out how many float features require their own power to run, necessitating the installation of multiple motors and generators, for everything from the float’s music and lighting to unique animated mechanisms, such as turning waterwheels and merry go rounds, the likes of which have won the Rhody Fest float awards from fellow festivals, such as Seafair, in the past.

ARTISTS RALLY THROUGH COVID



ON MARCH 12, 2020 ROB BIRMAN CALLED A STAFF MEETING. "I HAD A CALENDAR GRID ON A LARGE-SCREEN TV IN MY OFFICE AND WE WERE TRYING TO GRASP WHAT I CALLED A DECISION MATRIX. IT WAS AN EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO THE UNIVERSE OF DECISIONS THAT HAD TO BE MADE, AND DATES BY WHICH THEY WOULD BE REQUIRED." PHOTO COURTESY OF CENTRUM

On January 20, 2020, a Snohomish County man who had recently returned from Wuhan, China, was declared the first case of Covid-19 in the U.S. Over the following weeks, public health agencies reported more than a dozen additional cases, all thought to be related to travel in China.

"I just knew, in that moment, this is a big deal. Of course, it was way worse than anything we had imagined," Centrum's Executive Director, Rob Birman, told *The Leader*

"I remember it well: we took a photo. We all gathered in my office one day. I was trying to put together a grid to get our heads around, what does this mean

for our year?"

In a strange way, Birman said, the timing of the pandemic was fortuitous. Centrum had early registration deposits for its summer workshops but it hadn't yet published a brochure. "So we didn't have to refund tickets," Birman said.

His team relied on Jefferson County Health for advice because the information coming from higher up the government chain proved confusing in the early weeks of the outbreak.

Centrum furloughed 40% of its staff, mainly the summer, hourly event production team, and their

part-time personnel. This, on the heels of a fiscally stellar 2019.

“We raised an extra \$750,000 in 2019 for a cash reserve, not knowing what was around the corner. Hence the big surplus that year. We have sustained that reserve and have been 100% debt-free since 2016. I’m proud of that,” Birman said, adding that 2020 revenues fell by 65%, forcing Centrum into full cancellation mode.

As Independence Day rolled around, Birman noticed a change in the tides.

“The community itself refused to go a year without fiddle tunes so the participants themselves, not Centrum, put on online fiddle tunes, and we had musicians from all over the country that tuned in.”

The phenomenon sparked its own nickname, Covid-dletunes.

“That was the first time in my life I realized we could do these online and I thought, ‘This could work if this pandemic continues.’ Our own customers showed us, and we went to the Murdoch Trust and asked for funding for technology,” Birman recalled.

At a time when video conferencing was still in its infancy, that funding laid the groundwork for the survival of Centrum during the pandemic.

“With PPP and other pandemic relief, we were able to retain our full-time staff, shift our programs to an online platform, and continue operations literally virtually for the better part of two years. In 2021, we elected to bring our faculty here for the broadcast of

DIANA KRALL AND CREW PERFORM ON STAGE AT FORT WORDEN. PHOTO BY LLOYD MULLEN





EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROB BIRMAN SPEAKS BEFORE THE CENTRUM GALA AT FORT WORDEN. PHOTO BY LLOYD MULLEN

our workshops, but no participants,” he explained.

Without in-person workshops, Birman and his team began inventorying and repairing its extensive volume of staging, sound and lighting equipment as well as making simple interior repairs to artist cabins.

“Emotionally it was kind of convenient because we hadn’t staffed up for the summer - we were able to maintain our administrative staff: We made a big list of projects we could do if the Fort was closed, and Greg Miller did the lion’s share of the maintenance work, but we all pitched in and found things to do that, in a normal year, we wouldn’t have time to do.”

By 2022 Centrum pivoted to a hybrid ap-

proach, with a blend of faculty and students together under social-distancing protocols.

“Last year, we began to get back to normal, in terms of scale. The last time I measured, we had customers from 17 countries, all 50 states, and 77% of the counties in Washington,” Birman said.

Centrum signed new 25-year leases in 2022 whereby it assumes all of the maintenance obligations for its buildings at Fort Worden to provide relief to the PDA and Parks for the more than \$100 million in deferred maintenance concerns at the fort.

In 2023, Centrum’s revenues surpassed those of pre-pandemic levels and are expected to rise again this year.

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CONNECTIVITY FAIR

Judith Alexander watched as the pandemic took the wind out of her relational sails.

While talking with a friend about what they agreed was a community (if not world-wide) problem, her friend suggested that she meet with local filmmaker Rose Madrone.

“Rose spent 10 years making this beautiful three-part movie called *The Connectivity Project*,” Alexander recalled.

After discovering a like-minded soul, the two set about forming a group to find solutions to the problem of connecting communities and non-profits.

“That team represented a span of five or six non-profits, and we got permission from First Federal Bank to use their conference room, and met there every week,” Alexander recalled.

Starting from scratch, the group didn’t know what form their invention might take, but they were in agreement that the project to reconnect their community was timely, if not overdue.

The first Connectivity Festival in 2023 was a smash hit but exhausting for Alexander.

“We got a fair amount of financial support from asking people to be sponsors, but this year, we have people asking us to be sponsors - there’s been a lot of buzz,” Alexander said.

By the time of the 2023 festival, Alexander’s team had commitments from dozens of non-profits.

“By dedicating our collective efforts toward the support of our non-profits, we convened an event that brought together the heart and the soul of our community,” she said.

Representatives filled the gymnasium, their tables divided into like-categories.

“So people who had their heart set on helping with the housing crisis, we could tell them right where to go - and there were several organizations representing housing.”

The collection of housing non-profits proved a

boon of its own. With 13 different housing organizations sitting in a circle, they introduced themselves to each other and discussed what they were good at and what they needed help with, while fair attendees watched and listened.

“Habitat was running short of volunteers and reached out to another organization who had volunteers.”

After that roundtable, the talks between the organizations became a regular occurrence.

“Those meetings have continued all year, to talk to each other and to support each other.” It was heartening, Alexander said, to see walls crumble. “Sometimes it seems like a competition for dollars.”

This year’s fair will showcase nine presentations with at least five involving panel discussions.

“This year, instead of talking to each other, the housing organizations will be talking to the audience because now they’re talking to each other,” said Alexander. Also new for this year’s festival is preparing for resilience.

“Emergency preparedness, the Red Cross, 9-1-1 and the airport will talk about transportation for food in the event of an emergency. We’ve also invited the government agencies to come this year to connect with people who have decision-making power.”



NELIA SWAYZE OF THE EDUCATION FOUNDATION MAKES A POINT. PHOTOS COURTESY ROSE MADRONE AND JUDITH ALEXANDER.

Alexander, one the founders of 20/20 in 2006, used that organization to launch the Connectivity Fair.

“It doesn’t take a hundred people to make a change, there’s a ripple effect,” she said, echoing the theme of Madrone’s film.

“I think people are going to have a hard time choosing which seminars to go to,” she said. “People are aching for ways to find common ground, to come together for a common purpose.”

Alexander promises thoughtful and engaging breakout presentations hosted by organizations supporting local housing, local youth, our local food system, emergency management at both county and neighborhood levels, mental health offerings and more.

The Connectivity Fair is Saturday, April 20, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Chimacum High School. Everyone is welcome and admission is free. Food trucks and free childcare will be available.

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GREAT PORT TOWNSEND BAY



KINETIC SCULPTURE RACE KEEPS IT ‘KAOTIC’

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

The Great Port Townsend Bay Kinetic Sculpture Race is one of many around the world to be inspired by the original kinetic sculpture race in Ferndale, California, in 1969, but its current coordinators agree that Port Townsend’s take on the event likely owes part of its longevity to the culture of this area.

When Ferndale artist Hobart Brown made some artistic modifications to his son Justin’s tricycle and displayed it as a “pentacycle” in front of his art gallery, nearby shop owner Jack Mays created his own kinetic art sculpture, and challenged Hobart to a race

down Main Street.

As other area artists heard about and joined in the race, it led to a dozen human-powered art sculptures entering that first race, which neither Brown nor Mays won.

The first Great Port Townsend Bay Kinetic Sculpture Race was held in 1983, making it the third-oldest such race of what event chair Ric Peregrino and event president (and “Top Kop”) John Lizwacko estimated to be roughly a dozen different kinetic sculpture races, which have spread not only to Oregon, Col-

orado, Massachusetts, Maryland and other towns in California, but also to England, Germany, Poland, South Africa, Japan and Australia.

“It’s possible we’ve kept at it as long as we have because of our community’s artistic nature and kookiness,” said Peregrino, who noted that the Port Townsend race remains one of the few such races to escape corporate ownership.

Lizwacko credited the Port Townsend race’s ability to retain its independence to the support of its surrounding community, including the generosity of a host of local businesses, as well as to the frugality of its volunteer organizers.

The Port Townsend race takes place the first full weekend in October, which in 2024 falls on Oct. 5-6, with Saturday devoted to performing a circuit in the waters adjacent to the Northwest Maritime Center from Union Wharf looping around Point Hudson Harbor, while Sunday tasks racers with traversing the sands of Fort Worden beach and the muddy terrain of the Jefferson County Fairgrounds.

“Over the years, we have made some minor adjustments to the course,” Peregrino said. “Our racers are no longer required to proceed on Highway 20. In exchange, we added a few miles.”

Saturdays have also included art contests for adults and children, with each age category judged according to whose submissions are “Most Kreative” and “Most Kinetically In-

clined,” before their parades proceed at noon and the days’ events culminate in the crowning of “RoseHips Kweens.”

Peregrino says he believes it’s important to provide younger contestants with their own opportunities to shine, as well as those entrants who wish to focus more on artistic creation, without being bound by the engineering requirements of creating a kinetic sculpture.

“There are a lot of different disciplines involved in completing the kinetic sculpture race, from mechanics to teamwork,” Peregrino said.

However, Peregrino and Lizwacko both emphasized that, even for the more engineering-minded racers, the point is to appreciate the experience, rather than strive to complete the courses in the quickest times, which is why each kinetic sculpture race requires at least three racers, so the racer who finishes in the dead-center middle of the pack can receive the “Mediocrity Award.”

“We’re supposed to be doing this to have fun, and if you finish the race the fastest, that means you spent the least amount of time doing it,” Peregrino said.

“None of this is meant to be taken too seriously,” Lizwacko said. “We want this to serve as an example for children, of how even adults can still have fun.”

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MATTHEW ZALKIND, CELLIST, PROFESSOR OF CELLO AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER'S LAMONT SCHOOL OF MUSIC.

STELLA CHEN, VIOLINIST, GRAMOPHONE YOUNG ARTIST OF THE YEAR, CURRENTLY TOURING WORLDWIDE AS A SOLOIST.

SEQUESTERED ORCHESTRA CONJURED MAGIC

"When the pandemic hit, my husband and I were living in a tiny house, but a home became available just as the pandemic was shutting the door. We snagged this house at Kala Point," Tracy Wirta told *The Leader*.

The happy homeowners weren't quite sure what the pandemic would mean for them or the community, but they had secured their dream of a three-bedroom, three-bath house.

Then they decided, rather than move into the home, it could serve a higher purpose, at least temporarily.

"It's empty. Let's donate it to the music festival for the summer.

So in August of 2020, Scott Rovanner and Tracy Wirta donated their yet-to-be-lived-in home to the Olympic Music Festival (OMF) to house three musicians.

"We furnished the house for them, and a nine-foot Yamaha CFX concert grand piano was moved to the OMF House for Julio Elizalde's use," Wirta said.

"Julio, Matt (Zalkind) and Stella (Chen) lived in the OMF house for a month, sequestered in their



JULIO ELIZALDE, PIANIST AND OMF ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, CURRENTLY ALSO SERVES ON THE FACULTY AT THE SAN FRANCISCO CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC.

Covid bubble. We were lucky enough to have Stella Chen and her Stradivarius, which she had been gifted to use for four years.”

During those rehearsals and performances, Wirta and Rovnpera delivered food on the porch. When the time came to stream the music, their generosity had gone viral.

“Our artistic director (Elizalde) said, ‘This is such a difficult time, let’s just make it free for everyone,’” Wirta said.

In August the concerts were streamed live and free.

“In some ways it gave us a larger audience,” said Wirth. “We had people all over the world viewing this and we received donations. It was magical; those donations kept the festival alive. If we hadn’t done this, there’s no way it would have survived. It strengthened relationships between us and enriched our lives.”

In August 2022, OMF returned to a Fellowship season at the Wheeler Theater at Ft. Worden.



VICTORIAN FESTIVAL

In 2019 Tracy Wirta and her husband Scott Rovanpera volunteered to take the helm of the Victorian Festival not knowing that fate was about to intervene.

“It was the last festival the former organizers planned on hosting,” Wirta recalled. “We were volunteers for the Jefferson County Historical Society, so had already been dressing Victorian and we were involved in sharing Port Townsend history.”

In December 2019 Wirta “started getting wind of this Covid thing,” and by February she knew she was dealing with something that might jeopardize the festival. Tickets were on sale, the website was up and running,

presenters were lined up and a band had been secured. Tracy and Scott had even invested their own money for publicity when she got a call from a band member.

“She was elderly and wasn’t comfortable being in groups. So the band pulled out,” she said.

By the end of February people were falling out left and right, Wirta said. The situation was untenable and the festival was cancelled. Ticket-holders were contacted and asked to either donate the funds to the festival or take a refund. As the pandemic worsened, Tracy and Scott began to realize the chances for a 2021 festival were slim.



IN AN ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE FESTIVAL ALIVE AFTER A CANCELLED 2020 VICTORIAN FESTIVAL, IN 2021 ORGANIZERS STROLLED AROUND PORT TOWNSEND DRESSED IN VICTORIAN ATTIRE, "JUST TO ADD COLOR TO THE TOWN," TRACY WIRTA TOLD THE LEADER.

DISTANCED ITSELF TO STAY ALIVE

"It was in a precarious position when we took it over and we didn't want it to die so we created a non-profit. The idea was, it would host the festival and focus on Port Townsend, as opposed to Jefferson County Historical Society (JCHS) which focuses on the county." Wirta said they sought out people who felt the festival was important to them.

"It was hard because of the pandemic, but we knew names, and we created the non-profit, and as 2021 went along we thought, 'We're in good shape,' and we believed 2022 could happen," she said.

To help with social distancing, the traditional date of the festival was moved from March to the last weekend in April, giving them another month to organize and prospects for better weather.

Those moves, she said, translated into a successful and rejuvenated festival which is now more education-focused.

"The pandemic gave us the opportunity to slow down, step back and to look at the community as a partner. The pandemic gave us a way to reinvent and reinvigorate," she said.





SUMMER BAND PLAYED WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE

Tracy Wirta also oversaw operations as the crisis hit the Summer Band. She is in her fourth year as president of that organization.

“In 2019 we hired a new conductor. Marge Rosen is amazing.”

As with her work on the Victorian Festival, by March of 2020 Wirta realized the band could not come together for the coming summer.

But Rosen had other ideas.

“To her credit she came up with us meeting online, and she would have us play our individual parts,” Wirta said. “We’d send her an audio file and she would blend the files together.”

Those blended files were posted online for people to enjoy during the pandemic.

“It was daunting to learn the digital world. Some of our members are older but probably half the band participated.

What it did was give us connection.”

The following spring the band began to rehearse together, albeit outdoors. Chimacum’s Elsie Lopeman welcomed the Summer Band to play in her gazebo.

“We started doing our rehearsals out there, spaced ourselves out, brought our own chairs,” Wirta explained. “We couldn’t have public concerts but we were able to play together. If you don’t play a wind instrument you lose your muscle memory and we were afraid we might lose some of our older members.”

By 2022 the band began using covers for instruments and returned to indoor rehearsals, courtesy of the American Legion Hall.

“It kept us together playing. It kept the social group together and that was so important. Our members range from 90 years old all the way down to teenagers.”



THE SUMMER BAND RETURNS AGAIN IN 2024, MORE RESILIENT AFTER THE PAN-
DEMIC ELIMINATED COLLECTIVE REHEARSALS FOR TWO SEASON. IN 2022 THE
BAND PLAYED WITHOUT AN AUDIENCE JUST TO STAY CONNECTED.





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