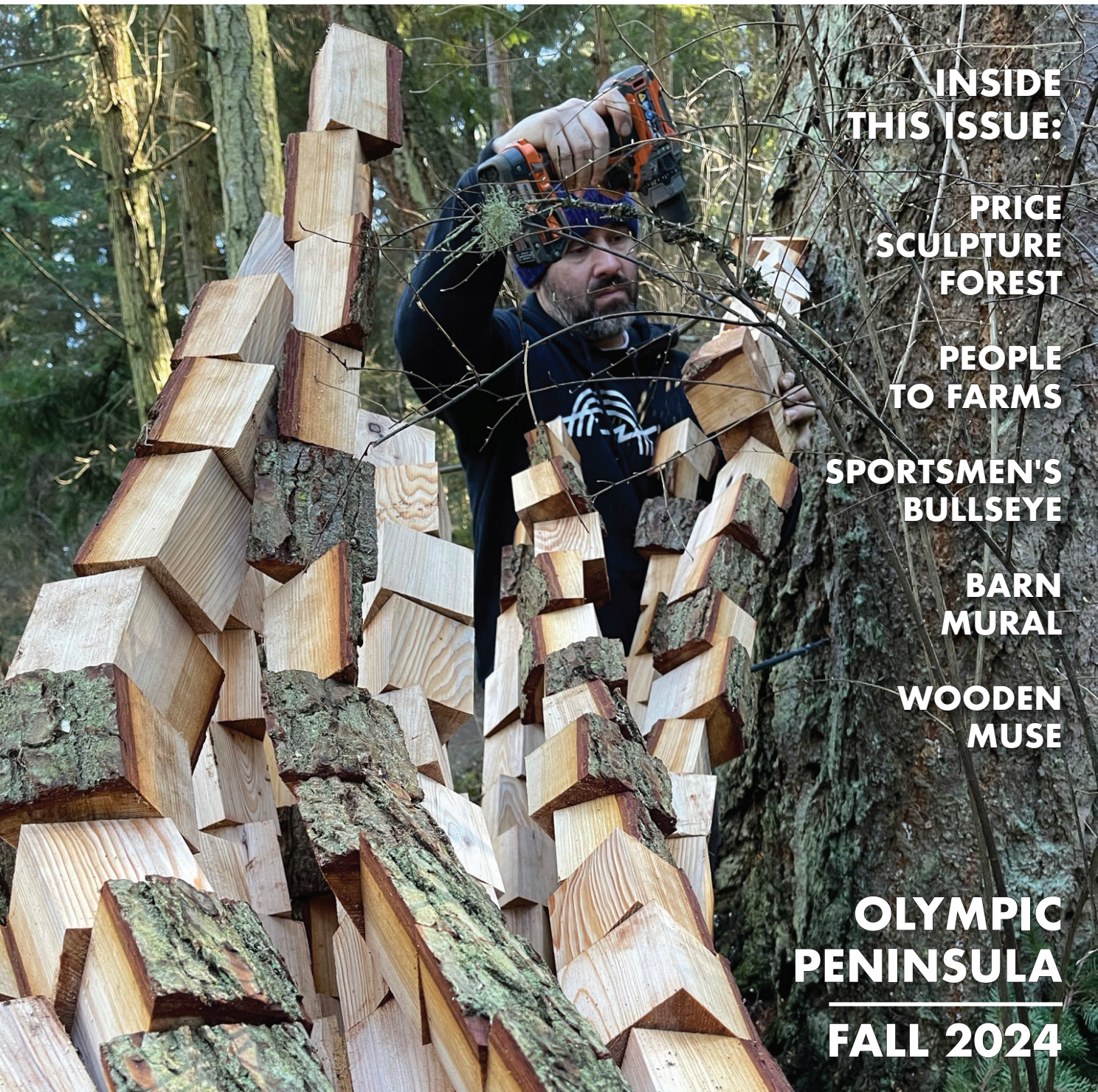


# LIFESTYLE



**INSIDE  
THIS ISSUE:**

**PRICE  
SCULPTURE  
FOREST**

**PEOPLE  
TO FARMS**

**SPORTSMEN'S  
BULLSEYE**

**BARN  
MURAL**

**WOODEN  
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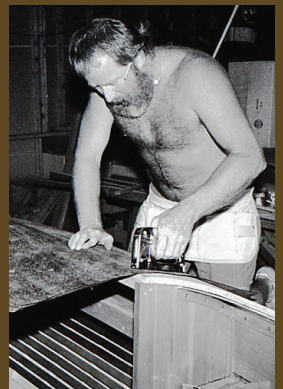
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**PUBLISHER:** LLOYD MULLEN

**MANAGING EDITOR:** MEREDITH JORDAN

**MARKETING DIRECTOR:** CYRUS GUBELMAN

**STORIES AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY:**

KIRK BOXLEITNER, MEGAN CLAFLIN, MEREDITH JORDAN,

HAILEY LAMPE, LLOYD MULLEN, JAMES ROBINSON

**LAYOUT & DESIGN:** NICHOLAS JOHNSON

**MARKETING:** CYRUS GUBELMAN, KACHELE YELACA

**CONTACTS:**

LLOYD MULLEN

*lloyd@ptleader.com • ptleader.com • (307) 275-0698*

MEREDITH JORDAN

*editor@ptleader.com • ptleader.com • (360) 385-2900*

CYRUS GUBELMAN

*cgubelman@ptleader.com • ptleader.com • (360) 385-2900*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **MARRIAGE OF SCULPTURE AND NATURE**

Price Sculpture Forest on Penn Cove outside of Coupeville, which opened in 2020, is an experience that happens over two trails and 36 peices of art.

Story by Meredith Jordan, 6-13.

### **PEOPLE TO FARMS**

The power of Jefferson County Farm Tour is people reconnecting with the sense of community, not just healthy, locally produced food. Story by Megan Claflin, 16-19.

### **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FARMER**

Letting tour visitors see the real thing is part of the charm. Story by Hailey Lampe, 20-23.

### **ABOUT THE COVER:**

ANTHONY HEINZ MAY AT WORK ON "NATURE'S KEYSTONE" IN FEBRUARY 2021 AT PRICE SCULPTURE FOREST ON WHIDBEY ISLAND. SEE STORY, 6-13.

PHOTO BY SCOTT PRICE

### **HITTING THE BULLSEYE ON INCLUSIVITY**

The Jefferson County Sportsmen's Association has been going on since 1962. Today it has 500 members throughout the peninsula and operates as a practice facility for law enforcement. Story by James Robinson, 24-28.

### **MURALIST COMES HOME TO THE FAMILY FARM**

Blaine Fontana returns to his family's farm to put a massive mural on the barn. Story by Kirk Boxleitner, 28-31.

### **WOODEN MUSE**

Woodcarver Terry Tessmer's artistic sensibility lies between fantasy and the mystical. Story by Alex Frick, 34-38.

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# A MARRIAGE OF ART & NATURE

PRICE SCULPTURE  
FOREST ON WHIDBEY  
ISLAND: NEARLY FULL,  
NEVER FINISHED

BY MEREDITH JORDAN

It was a breathtaking piece of property with a forested view of Penn Cove, well suited for the family home. That's what Scott Price thought in 2008 when he bought the 15-acre parcel just outside of Coupeville. Aside from the house, his plan was to keep most of the property natural.

Instead he found another place to build the house, so he looked at selling the land on Penn Cove. There was interest from residential real estate developers who could see its commercial value. If they bought it they would subdivide the land, clearcut the trees to create a view of Mount Baker, put in roads and infrastructure, and build homes or sell lots for a tidy profit.

That didn't feel right to Price. He wanted to find a conservation buyer, someone who would put a single home on the property or otherwise limit its development, but there wasn't anyone like that.



"NATURE'S KEYSTONE"  
BY ANTHONY HEINZ MAY  
STRADDLES TWO SIDES  
OF THE TRAIL.

PHOTO BY  
MEREDITH JORDAN



Price reached out to the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, which advised him the options for the conservation easement were raw forest or preservation. The trust helped secure the easement, a legal action that voluntarily removed commercial development rights and prohibited clear cutting, which simultaneously dropped its value.

“For me it was worth it to preserve it,” said Price. His first thoughts were about putting a trail on the property, and he traveled to a few sculpture parks around Washington. It came to him as he was walking through one of those spaces.

“Could I personally create a sculpture park?” He described it as a “lightbulb” moment followed by the realization that “the answer was yes.”





## Concept to plan

Price said he saved his money over the next few years and formed a non profit 501(c)3. He also acquired two side parcels, making the overall park 16.3 acres.

In the process he honed the art-in-nature concept with guidelines. The installations needed to have space, far enough from one another to be considered separately. And there could not be more than two pieces by the same artist.

He designed every foot of the trail — actually two trails — within certain parameters.

“Nature Nurtured” and “Whimsy Way,” the names of the two main trails, work as themes. “Nature is about the natural world, with local elements. You won’t find an elephant,” explained Scott, but eagles and wind. Whimsy Way is more open ended “fun and festive.”

In 2019 Price started actively working on permits, security and infrastructure and utilities. “I reached out to a lot of people and did a call for artists, especially to get it open. It was a wide net when it came to the art itself.”

With a design in place they were ready for a professional trailmaker, who traveled to Whidbey Island to put in the paths, said Ken Price, Scott’s father. He was impressed with the unusual skillset. The paths needed to sustain the footprints of many visitors and be sturdy enough for sculptures to be delivered and installed. “His job is creating hiking trails to get the right surface, with angles so the water runs off,” he said. “It’s really an art form and a science.”



KEN PRICE AND MICHAEL HAUSER ASSEMBLING THE WELCOME ARCH.  
PHOTOS BY SCOTT PRICE

Ken Price, a woodworker, said it took a little while for him to grasp his son's idea for the park, but before long he became “head volunteer.”

He teamed up with his neighbor, Michael Hauser to build the entrance arch and the kiosk. The welcome arch is built out of Pacific madrone. It reads “Wander in Wonder.” The kiosk is made out of 60 pieces of cedar. Each piece is one-eighth of an inch thick and 17 feet long.

All the while, Scott Price was collecting sculptures for the park, a process that grew easier with time. He pursued art, rather than specific artists. “Before we opened, nobody knew about the Sculpture Forest,” he said. “I reached out to people I knew about already — people I was aware of, not that they knew me,” he said. “And I started researching beyond that.”



"ANILLOS" BY MOUNT VERNON ARTIST MARIA WICKWIRE, INSTALLED IN APRIL, 2024. PHOTO BY MEREDITH JORDAN

He explained the vision when he talked to people. “It was a complete risk to them — an unknown,” he said. “There wasn’t any budget, all volunteer, no paid staff,” said Price. Instead of turning away, they embraced the vision. “It was just people who wanted to participate with what we wanted to create.

There is a wide variety of artists with pieces in the park, some of them quite well known, but that isn’t the point. “I have never once selected something because of the name of someone well known in the gallery circuit,” said Price.

“Wind Sheer,” a tall, aluminum kinetic sculpture, is visible from the parking lot through the arch, helping to lure past the kiosk and onto the trail. The strong-looking piece needs less than two miles an hour of wind to move.

It’s a sculpture by Jeff Kahn, perhaps one of the best known artists featured in the park. Pennsylvania-based, he has been exhibited in places like the Philadelphia Museum of Art, New York Botanical Gardens, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and the National Air and Space Museum.



SCOTT PRICE AND KEN PRICE  
CHECK THE DIRECTION OF  
THE COMPASS ROSE.  
PHOTO BY ROBERT DAVENPORT

“Jeff is internationally exhibited, and I had no idea who he was,” recalled Price. “I called him, told him I loved his work, and the vision for integrating art with nature. And he was inspired.”

“I’m so excited to have that caliber of work.”

Price’s process has been to look for striking sculptures rather than scouting for people well known in the gallery circuit.

“Playa Flowers” is a good example of being struck by art. Price said he was in Port Townsend for a doctor’s appointment. On the

walk from the ferry to the office he saw an installation of large flower-like metal blue and red circles and drums on stalks in a yard. Price said he went and knocked on the door. That’s how he met artist Jeff Tangen, who had just returned from showing it at Burning Man, the well-known festival and cultural movement in the Black Rock Desert in Nevada.

Different sculptures have different stories, including some that change in process. Anthony Heinz May, an Oregonian now based in New York, had a specific sculpture planned but nature intervened.

A major windstorm had toppled trees in the park about two weeks before May arrived, some of them landing on trails.

“We were still doing clean up when we took him on a tour,” recalled Price. May stopped in his tracks when he saw the tree trunks. “He walked around the logs, which were still sticking up in the air. You could see the sparks flying for about five minutes.”

May’s vision played out in the coming days

as he used wood taken from that mid-section of the tree to reconstruct the tree into a piece of art, rebuilding wood cut from the tree and turned into blocks and then re-installing them in the order in which he had cut them out.

The work happened at Ken Price’s woodshop, the blocks coming and going to the sites in the sculpture garden wheelbarrows. The sculpture is positioned in a way that the sculpture can be viewed from multiple angles.



Price Sculpture Forest opened to the public in 2020, and “it’s been a wild ride ever since,” said Scott Price.

There are currently 36 sculptures with “only a few spots” remaining. So far, just one has rotated out, but it was replaced by work by the same artist. Greg Neal’s “Attacking Eagle,” made of stainless steel. It joins another of his sculptures called “Soaring Eagle,” which was donated to the park by a neighbor, David Young, in honor of his wife, Pam Young, who had been taken by COVID.

Given nature’s proclivities it is expected that some of the installations — perhaps “Points of Departures ACT II,” an installation that is a limb that ends with a chair — will deteriorate with time. Price said that striking piece has held up better than expected.

The latest effort is on augmented reality exhibition where the sculptures are displayed virtually displayed via an app. There is an ongoing call for artists for the next AR exhibits.

VISITORS TO THE FOREST CONTINUE ON AFTER SEEING “FLYING FISH,” BY DANIELLA RUBINOVITZ.  
PHOTO BY MEREDITH JORDAN



KAREN PRICE, NIC WASIK, WENDY WASIK, KEN PRICE, SCOTT PRICE, GREG NEAL, SKY LEWIS AND STEFFAN SOULE RAISING “FLYING FISH.”  
PHOTO BY ROBERT DAVENPORT

“The quality bar will continue to go up,” Price said.

Ken Price maintains the park, doing the trails at least once a week. “The responses I get are incredible. People often have come from far away. It’s such a positive place.”

He said he’s proud of his son. Often men in their 50s who have achieved a degree of success “end up with a \$200,000 car in the garage. The sculpture forest is Scott’s legacy.”

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# PEOPLE TO FARM GROWS COMMUNITY

VIBRANT LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM  
HAS WIDE RIPPLE EFFECT





ANNA MOLITOR, OF PORT HADLOCK, BUILDS A BOUQUET OF FRESH-CUT FLOWERS AT WILDERBEE FARM & MEADERY DURING THE JEFFERSON COUNTY FARM TOUR. PHOTOS BY NICHOLAS JOHNSON

Delivering clean, high quality food to the community is at the core of the mission, even as shopping locally remains an individual choice. It's a choice that has immediate and long lasting impacts.

With 80 small- to mid-sized regional farms operating in Jefferson County, it's easy to take for granted the benefits of living in a vibrant agricultural community. Beyond the benefits of healthy meals, a vibrant local food system also impacts larger issues like preserving land and open spaces for wildlife habitat and carbon absorption, providing jobs and supporting the regional economy, protecting food security and promoting community health.

Since the early 2000s, expanding education and communication programs have bolstered awareness around the essential role working farms play in our regional economic and cultural landscapes.

One such program is the Jefferson County Farm Tour. Established in 2002, this annual event is presented by The Production Alliance in partnership with the Washington State University Jefferson County Extension and local farmers, and in collaboration with Jefferson County Farmers Markets, Jefferson Land Trust, The Food Co-op, and Chimumacum Corner Farmstand.

## BY MEGAN CLAFLIN

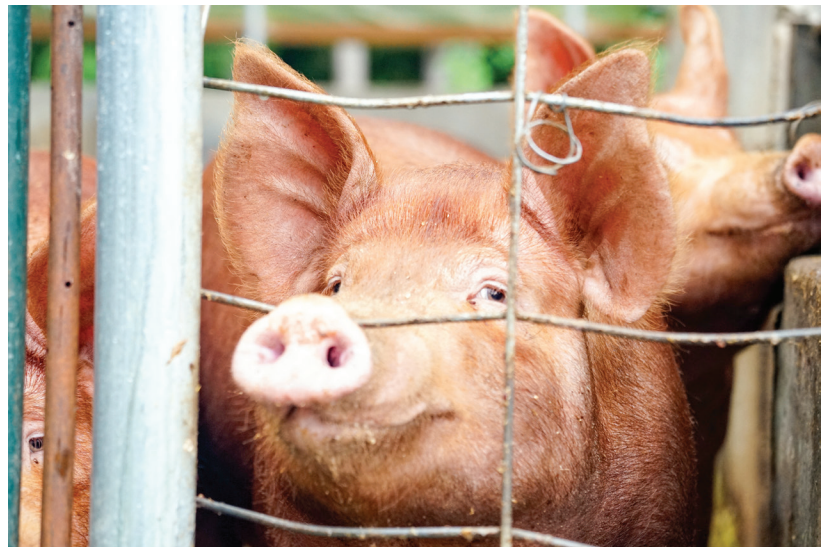
In Jefferson County, a cornucopia of options await consumers seeking locally grown and raised foods. Local grocers, farmers markets, roadside farm stands, and community assisted agriculture (CSAs) delivers a robust selection of produce and value-added products at competitive prices.



PEOPLE RELAX IN THE GRASS AT KODAMA FARM & FOOD FOREST AS TAYLOR LUCKENBACH SINGS AND PLAYS GUITAR.

The 22nd annual Jefferson County Farm Tour, hosted the second weekend of September 2024, welcomed more than 1,750 visitors to tour 20 featured locations and connect with 30 local farms. Visitors report traveling from all of the Puget Sound region to attend the event and tour goers range in age from infants to elders.

Participating farmers open their hearts and their homes to the community, excited to share their passion, ideologies, and methods with the public. Visitors are likely to encounter expansive fields, gardens and greenhouses ripe for harvest, as well as a variety of livestock.



HERITAGE BREED HOGS GREET VISITORS FROM INSIDE THEIR PEN AT EGG AND I PORK DURING THE JEFFERSON COUNTY FARM TOUR.

TOMATOES GROW ON  
THE VINE IN A HOT HOUSE AT  
KODAMA FARM & FOOD FOREST.

Many of the farms on this year's tour are family- or cooperative-ly-owned and -operated by farmers in their 30s to 50s, individuals who have either taken over for aging relatives or who've purchased a farm from a family retiring out of agriculture. As with this year — and next — visitors can expect to be met with enthusiasm and special onsite maps, activities, and offerings as each individual farm pulls out all of the stops to welcome the public.

Keen to ensure that all visitors have a positive experience, I am also adamant that farmers “leave a little dirt under their fingernails” and at least one pile of compost or manure in sight. As much as Farm Tour is about the public enjoying their time on the farm, it is also imperative that they leave with a realistic understanding of the physical, mental and emotional endurance that agriculture requires. The realities, challenges and setbacks experienced by farmers are a part of daily life and should be appreciated by those benefiting from the fruits — and vegetables — of their labors.

*Megan Claflin is a freelance writer and manager of the Jefferson County Farm Tour, [GetOnTheFarm.org](http://GetOnTheFarm.org).*



BY HAILEY LAMPE

Removing another thistle thorn from my finger, I glanced around at one of the many prickly patches on the farm. Most of the plants weren't flowering, so they got to stay for a few more weeks. But, some of them, like the one that left the microscopic sliver in my hand, were showing purple buds. Those get pulled as I stroll the space.

Folks taking the Jefferson County Farm Tour visited the farm on Sept. 15. As I worked to prepare to host, I had an internal debate with myself over just how much I should share with them about my thistle philosophy. If I drew attention to the thistles, would it be a valuable lesson in the challenges that farmers face? Would it create empathy and a common-place to speak from, as they likely battle thistles at home, too? Surely, seeing a work-in-progress project is valuable, right? Or, would my work look messy, irresponsible, and unorganized?



FOOD FORESTS BRING IN ALL KINDS OF LIFE. PHOTOS BY HAILEY LAMPE



# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FARMER

This was just one of many chats I had with myself as I prepared to open The Hedgerow to the public. To find out what discussions other farmers on this year's tour had with themselves, I reached out to Logan Fields of Heartwood Nursery.

One of the big decisions Fields faced was how to make the Nursery look inviting after an unprecedented summer of deer damage. Heartwood looks quite different this year compared to other years because of the severe damage, which can be really uncomfortable to let the public face. However, she still worked hard to get the space ready for visitors because, she hoped, "folks will learn how much energy and time goes into producing fruit and nut trees and understand the extraordinary circumstances of this particular season."

ECHO, THE HEDGEROW HUSKY,  
SUPERVISING FARM TOUR PREP.



LAMPE IS USING SHEET MULCHING TO SUPPRESS SOME OF THE THISTLE IN THE HEDGEROW.

A lot of work goes into preparing a farm for the public and it can be really vulnerable to show folks the reality of a challenging year. Additionally, all of the extra prep is done on top of the normal, daily tasks producers engage with this time of year. To Fields, though, facing these uncomfortable moments was worth it as they help foster connection between growers and the greater community. "I (was) looking forward to being an example of how easily a farmer can lose their entire crop almost overnight. I think it's important for folks to understand what it's like to have one's livelihood subject to the unapologetic whims of nature," said Fields.



HEALTHY SOIL, LIKE THAT BEING CREATED IN THE HEDGEROW, GROWS ALL KINDS OF MUSHROOMS.

Viewed through the lens of fostering greater connections, the Tour is bigger than seeing where your food and plants come from. Relationships are cultivated when folks can ask their farmers questions, see the systems in place, and take a moment to share in the wins and losses of the people tending the land. The Farm Tour helps strengthen community wide-systems, creates resiliency, and fosters empathy, something we should all be growing much more of these days. Seeing where food and plants come from not only helps you appreciate the products more. It also lets you see the land and its stewards more clearly, too.

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ONE OF THE MANY NATIVE PLANTS IN THE HEDGEROW.

To continue to build on strengthening networks, I decided to be transparent about the thistle patches with those who visit The Hedgerow. Much like the realities highlighted in Heartwood Nursery, their presence gave me an opportunity to talk about short- and long-term weed suppression tactics, what I've done so far to remove them, and why I've chosen to occasionally let the thistles stay, using their deep taproots to help me care for the soil (so long as they don't go to seed!) And, while some may have been disappointed by this decision, I believe many others gained vital insight from seeing some of the challenges their local producers face.

*Hailey Lampe is a regenerative landscape designer and farmer who runs The Hedgerow by Cruising Climate, one of six farms based at Natembae. She participated in this year's Farm Tour.*

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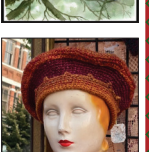
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JOHN MURREN FIRES A PISTOL AT A TARGET AT THE JEFFERSON COUNTY SPORTSMEN'S ASSOCIATION SHOOTING FACILITY ON GUN CLUB ROAD JUST SOUTH OF PORT TOWNSEND. PHOTOS BY LLOYD MULLEN

# HITTING THE BULLSEYE ON INCLUSIVITY

BY JAMES ROBINSON

Since 1962, local shooting enthusiasts have enjoyed the Jefferson County Sportsmen's Association (JCSA) 43-acre outdoor shooting facility on Gun Club Road, just south of the city.

With more than 500 members, the facility, divided into a variety of shooting ranges, offers members and visitors opportunities for regularly scheduled trap shoots, action pistol matches, high-power rifle matches, long range shooting, a wilderness trail for archery practice and open range hours for pistol, ri-

fle and archery shooters to hone skills on their own and at their own pace. Scheduled events are open to the public with a nominal match fee.

"We host a pistol match every Saturday, ranging from steel matches where competitors shoot at steel plates, to International Defensive Pistol Association (IDPA) and the United States Practical Shooting Association (USPSA) matches," said Robert D'Arcy, president of the sportsmen's association. "Every Wednesday, we have a pistol practice where members and the public alike can come to learn handgun safety, beginner and advanced handgun techniques."



Shotgun enthusiasts also have opportunities at the range.

“JCSA can boast a shotgun trap range which has instruction on Wednesday and Sunday mornings,” D’Arcy said. “The JCSA trap team has won the Olympic Interclub League Championship three years in a row.”

In addition to a shotgun trap shooting range, three, short-range pistol bays and an archery trail, the facility features covered shooting bays, shooting rests, target stands, a 50-yard multi-purpose range, a 40-yard pistol range, a 100-yard rifle range and a 200- and 300-yard rifle range.

“Jefferson County Sportsmen’s Association is, by far, one of the most inclusive ranges in the Pacific Northwest area,” D’Arcy said. “Many who visit to shoot on the range, take training, or attend pistol matches comment on how friendly and helpful the members are, how clean the range is kept and the relaxed vibe on the range.”

In addition to supporting the shooting interests of more than 500 members across the Olympic Peninsula, JCSA provides accommodations for classroom training and range qualifications required for law enforcement personnel and agencies, such as the Port Townsend Police Department, Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, U.S. Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration and others. The Jefferson County Sportsmen’s Association also provides training facilities for National Rifle Association (NRA) firearms safety and shooting programs and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Hunter Education programs.



CAROLE NELSON AND STEVE BLAZINA LOOK OVER A SCORING TABLET.

BELOW: DEAN HENNEN, LEFT, SHOOTS AT STEEL PLATES OF DIFFERENT SIZES AND SHAPES AS HIS BROTHER, JAY HENNEN, CONTROLS THE COURSE OF FIRE AS THE RANGE OFFICER.





MIKE GREEN FIRES A PISTOL CALIBER CARBINE DURING COMPETITION AS RANGE OFFICER JAY HENNEN HOLDS A TIMER.

The association also hosts a Port Townsend chapter of A Girl & A Gun Club (AG & AG). A Girl & A Gun is a firearms training club founded by women, for women and taught by women. The Port Townsend facility is just one of hundreds of ranges nationwide that hosts AG & AG club events.

“The chapter is run by Erin Hubbard who is the JCSA range master, she is in charge of all shooting activities on the range and is part of the executive committee,” D’Arcy said. “We also have women who regularly compete in the pistol matches.”

In addition to events for women, the association offers a biannual event for family training and marksmanship.

“Twice a year, the Appleseed project is hosted on the range and that is a family-oriented beginner-friendly marksmanship event that is rich in the history of our country and marksmanship,” D’Arcy said. In addition, some association members, he said, train with their children and spouses.



FATHER AND DAUGHTER KRIS, LEFT, AND MERCY MCGAUGHEY LOAD MAGAZINES TO PREPARE FOR THEIR NEXT STAGE.



MERCY MCGAUGHEY'S RACE GUN, DESIGNED FOR FAST TARGET ACQUISITION AND RECOIL MANAGEMENT, IS HOLSTERED ON HER HIP.



While the Port Townsend shooting range primarily serves JCSA members, the range is also open to the non-members during select hours. Non-members pay a range fee and are asked to check the club calendar carefully before arrival to ensure their desired shooting activities don't conflict with a scheduled event. The association's website features a full calendar of events and lists non-member shooting hours. Non-members may participate in Saturday competitions, Glock Sport Shooting Foundation matches, NRA classes, Apple Seed events, and use the archery trail during public hours.

"One unique factor is the scenic and serene beauty of JCSA," D'Arcy said. "Our strength rests on the various disciplines offered and the high level of safety training practiced on the range. The main driving force for our members is the belief that the 2nd amendment is a right that comes with great responsibility and part of that responsibility is to create a safe place to learn to shoot safely and legally," D'Arcy said.

JCSA is affiliated with the National Rifle Association, the Washington State Rifle and Pistol Association, the Pacific International Trapshooting Association, the Civilian Marksmanship Program and other national and international shooting sport associations.

The Jefferson County Sportsmen's Association is a 501(c)(7) members club. It operates under a special license from Jefferson County.

*James Robinson is a staff writer for The Leader.*

# MURALIST COMES HOME TO PAINT THE BARN AT THE FAMILY FARM

## FRIENDLY FACES

BY KIRK BOXLEITNER

**B**laine Fontana has worked for more than 21 years as a full-time muralist, designer, sculptor and producer of fine art, but it was his 30th high school reunion that led him to create his first mural for the place where he grew up, at his parents' alpaca farm near Poulsbo.

Fontana, a graduate of Bainbridge High School's Class of 1994, spent his senior year commuting to Poulsbo High School to study design, photography and illustration, and while he's created several murals for the city of Seattle, he's been talking for three years about rendering what became the roughly 75-foot-wide by 25-foot-tall mural at the Sawdust Hill Alpaca Farm.

Fontana's family has maintained property on Agate Point, Bainbridge Island, since 1976, where a number of them now live with their own families, having entered their own creative business fields — "my brother's an architect, and my sister's an interior designer" — so he kicked off the trip for his class reunion on Aug. 9 in South Lake Union.



BLAINE FONTANA WANTED HIS MURAL TO BE PROMINENT ENOUGH TO GREET VISITORS TO THE SAWDUST HILL ALPACA FARM. PHOTOS BY KIRK BOXLEITNER



By Aug. 12, that trip had led to his father Steve and stepmother Candace’s farm, nestled between Kingston and Poulsbo, off Port Gamble Road, which Fontana described as “a charming and immaculate property,” that typically includes around 20 alpacas, “several” llamas, dozens of chickens, a number of kittens and two Great Pyrenees farm dogs, Sunny and Butch, who are also brothers.

The Sawdust Hill Alpaca Farm, at 25432 Port Gamble Road NE in Poulsbo, is a registered agritourism site that hosts daily farm tours. Fontana boasted that it even hosts “an adorable farm store,” complete with scarves, socks, hats, hides, leggings and more, all made out of alpaca fiber.

Although Fontana’s murals have adorned the SeaTac light rail in Seattle’s SoDo neighborhood, as well as the King County Children and Family Justice Center, he wanted to create a mural to greet visitors to the farm where his father worked the land for years before retiring.

With family in mind, it’s perhaps unsurprising that Fontana described the mural’s theme as “Your Friends Are Already Here,” because in addition to sporting ferns, rhododendron and a sunflower, the mural also features a cat, a goat, a rooster, a great horned owl, a Gypsy Vanner horse, a Great Pyrenees dog and some other particular favorites among the farm’s animals.

In addition to one of his “signature” monarch butterflies, Fontana added to the mural a resident female alpaca, “Mocha,” who gained a new baby brother as of noon on Aug. 22, while “Maynard,” the farm’s first and “most cherished” llama, was added to the mural’s foreground, just as he’d already appeared on the front of Steve and Candace’s wedding invitation years before.

“At the last minute, we discussed including our family’s registered tartan pattern, in the bowtie worn by Maynard,” said Fontana, who estimated he’d expended between 500-600 cans of aerosol paint on the mural, using a brisk method that combines application approaches.





BLAINE FONTANA APPLIED THE MURAL WITH HEAVY EQUIPMENT AFTER EMPLOYING A "DOODLE GRID" METHOD TO MAINTAIN ITS PROPORTIONALITY.

THE ARTIST HAS PRODUCED A NUMBER OF MURALS OVER THE YEARS, BUT THIS WAS THE FIRST HE DID FOR THE PLACE WHERE HE GREW UP.

Fontana noted there's a limited number of techniques to create a mural on the scale of what he painted at his folks' farm, from projecting a design on the surface during low light, to working either freehand or by a grid, but a "doodle grid" can strike a balance between freehand illustration and following a more precisely outlined grid.

Rather than measuring a grid, or tracing a projected shape, Fontana drew shapes, letters, numbers and other designs onto his backdrop, "doodling" anchor reference points to ensure his

final art would scale proportionally, and affording him time enough to complete the mural by the close of August, in spite of intermittent inclement weather and unpleasant discoveries such as wasp nests.

"I couldn't believe I pulled it off," Fontana said. "But now, this will be the first thing anyone sees when they pull up to the farm."

*Kirk Boxleitner is a staff writer for The Leader.*



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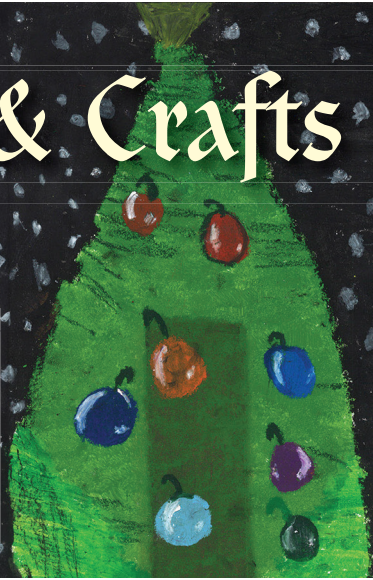
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BY ALEX FRICK

"You are wasting your time and my time. Take general business classes next year or something else, but I don't need you back here."

A young Terry Tessmer sat wide-eyed as his art teacher poured sawdust on his future. He didn't think too much of it.

A typical young man, he putzed about. Tessmer hadn't considered much about life in the arts but was more curious than most. He liked to whittle.



TESSMER USES VARIOUS TOOLS BUT LITTLE BRINGS THE SCULPTOR MORE JOY THAN PULLING THE CHORD ON HIS FAVORITE TOY – HIS CHAINSAW. PHOTO BY ALEX FRICK

# WOODEN MUSE

## TERRY TESSMER IN A ZONE BETWEEN FANTASY AND THE MYSTICAL

For more than 45 years, Tessmer made a career of transforming the ordinary into the whimsical. His unique craft of carving wood sculptures into the bizarre and unusual is made from salvaged trees from the forest. At 75, Tessmer is hanging up his chainsaw — but not before he carves his magnum opus.

Tessmer's current art studio is in the parking lot of Cove RV & Country Store at the corner of U.S. Highway 101 and Bee Mill Road in Brinnon. Often, his studio will be where the lumber is delivered. Tessmer is coy about what the final product will look like, but he said his process is heavily influenced by emotion.

"In creative minds, there's another part that's separate from the logical person and the emotional person; it's actually a different type of emotion," Tessmer said. "In a sense, I become isolated from everything around me. My brain stays right on this focus. It's like I got this creativity coming out, and it's coming out, and it's like I can't go fast enough to get it done."

Many years down the road, Tessmer was celebrating yet another art show honor when a familiar face caught his eye. He approached his former art teacher and said, "I think I was one of your students; my name is Terry Tessmer." The abashed teacher's cheeks filled, becoming a warm beetish-red.



TERRY TESSMER IN 1986 IN FRONT OF AN EARLY COMMISSION AT FAT SMITTY'S. COURTESY PHOTOS



"I CARVED THIS BIG FOOT IN 1986," SAID TESSMER, REFLECTING ON HIS LONG CAREER WITH THE CHAINSAW.

Aesthetically, his style is influenced by fantasy and the mystical. Often, his work features larger-than-life troll sculptures that demonstrate Tessmer's emotions as he crafts them.

"If I'm having a really, really good day, a lot of times I don't even think about it, but the face ends up being this real happy one," Tessmer said.

His process is anything but quiet, but somehow, Tessmer finds tranquility. His style heavily uses power tools — angle grinders, power carvers, and his personal favorite, his trusty chainsaw. The son of a carpenter, carving wood has always been a part of his life, in one fashion or another.

In 1979, Tessmer was clearing roads in a subdivision when his father asked him to take down a tree. He had previously seen a man in Montana carve mushrooms out of a fallen tree and thought he would give it a shot. He carved nine mushrooms and gave them to a friend who operated a gift shop. By the next morning, there were only two left on the shelves.

Tessmer later began working at Troll Haven Bandy Farms in Gardiner. He said Gary Bandy gave him the idea to begin carving troll sculptures and offered him total freedom to create and explore.

"There is where the fantasy stuff really took off," Tessmer said.

Tessmer said his style came together at Troll Haven, but there were clues that crafting the bizarre was always a part of his subconscious. After Tessmer had established himself as an internationally renowned artist, his mother found a notebook of his sketches from grade school. Looking at his drawings, he was shocked to find that many of the illustrations were trolls, not so different from his work as an adult.

Tessmer works in anonymity. Unlike most artists, he does not sign his work — this is done purposefully. His work is hidden in plain sight around the world, including in France, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and many other countries. He has sculptures scattered around Wisconsin and Minnesota, in Cannon Beach on the Oregon coast and around Washington State. Many Jefferson County residents cruise past his work every day — without thinking twice.



THE SCULPTOR CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN HIS DIFFERENT WORKS OF ART AT FAT SMITTY'S. COURTESY PHOTO

Fat Smitty's is a landmark establishment in Port Townsend. The classic burger joint has been a staple of the community since the 1970s. In 1986, Tessmer was commissioned to create something for the business. In his typical style, he carved the infamous 'big burger' that is synonymous with the restaurant's history. Today, the pavilion is a showcase of his talents.

The restaurant is owned by Casey Carson, a family friend of Tessmer's for over 40 years. He said that Tessmer's sculptures have made the burger spot a memorable roadside attraction. The "big burger" sculpture, in particular, has become a symbol of the restaurant's history and a popular photo spot for visitors.

"It's the best piece of advertising ever done," Carson said. "His work has made this place just as famous as a burger flying out the door. Peo-

ple may not know the history behind the burger, but they know of it and have drove by it." Now retired, Tessmer has little interest in practicing art commercially.

"I'm having fun. You know, this is more fun than going and sitting on the beach somewhere around the world, because it really is. It is who I am, what I am, and it is this magical world that I can go into. I'm going to do this here," said Tessmer.

The choice to do one final large piece is made with more than art in mind. Community is paramount for Tessman; with this carving, he wants to give back. Without revealing much about the final image, Tessmer said that he wants to give opportunities for the communities' youth to leave their mark.

Along with Summer Ventura, owner of Cove RV and Country Store and a Brinnon School District board member, Tessmer is proposing hosting a writing contest for students. He is calling the project "Modern Mythology."

The idea is that students would write an essay about how the creature came about in a fantasy world. The students who tell the most captivating mythical legend stories will have their works printed on quality paper with the image of the sculpture in it and will be sold in the store. Proceeds will be donated to the schools.

Tessmer said he wants to host a fundraiser for Brinnon schools, which recently lost grant money. However, exposing students to the arts and into nature is a priority.



"I hope the younger people today take their hands and their mind and work on creating, you know, whatever it is," Tessmer said. "Take and combine the two of them. Get their fingertips off their creations and get their hands dirty. Find things ... get into nature."

There is no exact timetable for the project's completion, but Tessmer thinks that the carving will be completed in October, with a reveal following shortly after.

Ventura is a close friend and has been working closely with Tessmer to further the project. She said that while Tessmer is 75, he's really a big kid at heart.

"He's 75 going on 20," Ventura said. "He's incredibly artistic, funny, positive, energetic, curious. One of the things I love about Terry is that he's so curious about life, and he just never stops wanting to learn and never stops wanting to understand."

While Tessmer believes that this will be his final large piece, carving "Modern Mythology" has reinvigorated his desire to create. "Even though I'm 75, I still feel I've got what it takes to probably do many more," he said.

"Maybe not that big, but I definitely think I'm going to do more, and I'm going to focus on more unusual, more bizarre."

*Alex Frick is freelance writer based in Port Townsend.*

TERRY TESSMER POSES IN BRINNON NEXT TO THE WORK OF ANOTHER SCULPTOR. COURTESY PHOTO

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