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THE INDEPENDENT VOICE OF THE KEY PENINSULA

November 2026 Vol. 53 No. 11

Key Peninsula News Goes to State Comp, Brings Home 20 Awards

Six columnists swept two categories while writers Eddie Macsalka and Ted Olinger received top honors.

STAFF REPORT

Key Peninsula News staff and contributors won 20 awards Oct. 3 for their reporting, opinion, and feature writing in the statewide 2026 Better Newspaper Contest administered by the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association.

Now in its 139th year, the WNPA represents 70 community and regional newspapers, from small nonprofits to The Seattle Times, the largest paper in Washington. It also recognizes outstanding newspaper work published over the preceding year in an annual contest adjudicated by outside industry peers.

Forty-seven newspapers across the state submitted 1,012 entries for the 2026 contest. KP News competed against publications in markets with a circulation of 7,501 or more. The competition is judged by a different state news organization each year. This year, it was the Texas Press Association.

KP News took home some of the top awards.

Eddie Macsalka won second place for Sports Writer of the Year, following up his first-place win last year. That was in addition to a first-place finish for his Lifestyle Feature story "For Scare Actors in the Forest, Fear Sets the Stage for Halloween" (October 2025). The judges called it "a descriptive and engaging story of not your regular run-of-the-mill scare venue. It sounds terrifyingly wonderful."

Associate Editor Ted Olinger earned third place for Feature Writer of the Year.

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Gjertson has earned league co-MVP honors, won district championships and helped set a school record in the 200-yard freestyle relay. *Veronica Foley*

PHS's Lee Gjertson Commits to Swim at University of New Mexico

Former Minter Creek Elementary and KPMS student makes her mark in the pool, marching band, and classroom.

EDDIE MACSALKA, KP NEWS

Lee Gjertson was 9 and already done with her swim club.

The practices were exhausting, the workouts demanding, and just splashing around in the water was way more fun than racing.

Her father, Scott, offered her a deal: Beat him in a 50-yard flutter-kick race, kickboard in hand, and she could quit.

Scott won the first race, but a second one wasn't needed. By the time she was fast enough to beat him, quitting was the last thing on her mind.

"I'm so glad I stuck with it because all the things I didn't love about swimming then, I love about it now," she said.



PHS Seahawks Marching Band members (Lee Gjertson, third from left) in costume for "Rach & Roll," combining 19th-century classical music by Sergei Rachmaninoff with the high-energy drive of modern rock.. *Shannon Bundrick*

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The Angel Guild
Fund for Nonprofit News at
The Miami Foundation / Newsmatch
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KEEPING IT LOCAL

Here’s What I Think About That

LISA BRYAN,
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Let’s hear it for living the good life on the Key Peninsula — where practically anything is possible when we work together for the common good.

At a recent Washington Newspaper Publishers Association convention in Everett, I joined journalists, photographers, editors and publishers working hard to adapt to rapidly changing conditions while producing quality newspapers people want to read.

You tell us our work is essential in person, over the phone, by email, and with sweet handwritten notes, cards, and letters of encouragement and praise. I’ve been embraced in bear hugs and even lifted off my feet once in a grocery aisle. We’re certainly not strangers after that!

Even people who tell us they don’t always appreciate everything they read in KP News say the newspaper matters because it fosters a sense of belonging through good stories about what happens here.

For me, the fun part of attending the convention each year is talking with other newspaper professionals. We learn from discussing the challenges of producing local news.

We proudly shared our successes, including our work with student journalists from local high schools — made possible by a scholarship fund that began with the generosity of one couple who believed in us. One of our students, 18-year-old Camri Clawson, won third place in the state competition against seasoned professionals. (And we took home 19 more; see our Page 1 story in this edition.)

Please don’t buy into the notion that newspapers don’t matter to young people. It’s simply not true. The convention was packed with twentysomething interns and newcomers eager to learn and share. Young adults may be attracted to different subjects, but reading about people they know in their hometown can mean more than another social

media post.

Although KP News is among the minority as a nonprofit publication in the WNPA, our success has helped inspire others to consider transitioning to community-supported nonprofit newspapers. That model can help sustain quality local news and healthy communities. I get a phone calls from other news outlets every year asking how we do it.

It’s because our “owners” aren’t based in some faraway place with little knowledge of or attachment to the communities they serve. Your voluntary contributions make you our owners and enable us to deliver local news to all.

We have heard painful accounts from communities that have lost their local newspapers. We’ve seen longtime publishers ready to retire, only to close shop after failing to find buyers for the businesses they built over many years.

When a community loses its newspaper, neighbors can find it harder

and where to turn for answers.

Effective government needs public scrutiny, from county and city decisions to the state and federal policies that shape the infrastructure people and businesses depend on.

Change can come slowly, despite our best efforts, or suddenly, without warning or time to prepare. Today, artificial intelligence is transforming how information is produced and shared, while familiar civic norms are being challenged. Those changes

make trustworthy local reporting more important, not less.

We still live in a democratic republic, where voting is a constitutional right and a civic responsibility. It is easy to take that right for granted, but it is far too

precious to surrender. Reliable journalism helps us understand the choices before us.

November is election season. It also launches our annual fundraising effort, strengthened by NewsMatch, which will support us in amounts commensurate with yours. Key Peninsula News relies on local donations to keep publishing the newspaper you hold in your hands. Please consider a tax-deductible gift in whatever amount you are comfortable giving to support this ongoing work.

Thank you for the constructive input you give us and for whatever you can do to help sustain KP News.

The paper has long billed itself as “The Voice of the Key Peninsula.” But it is not our voice; it is yours. ■



YOUR VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS
MAKE YOU OUR OWNERS
AND ENABLE US TO DELIVER
LOCAL NEWS TO ALL.



KEY PENINSULA NEWS WASHINGTON NEWSPAPER ASSOC. BETTER NEWSPAPER CONTEST STATE AWARDS	
2018 - 3	2022 - 14
2019 - 8	2023 - 25 Feature Writer of the Year Chris Rurik
2020 - 14 Feature Writer of the Year Sara Thompson	2024 - 24, Gen. Excellence Feature Writers of the Year Ted Olinger, Eddie Macsalka
2021 - 17 General Excellence	2025 - 22 Feature Writers of the Year Chris Rurik, Eddie Macsalka

There's Room for Everyone on This Wall

Courageous Kids Climbing has spent more than a decade offering opportunities for people of all ages with developmental, physical, or intellectual disabilities.

MEREDITH BROWAND, KP NEWS

For most rock climbers, reaching the top of a difficult wall is a chance to overcome fear and tackle a challenge they may have thought impossible.

For others, simply leaving a wheelchair and experiencing the world vertically can be an achievement all its own.

Courageous Kids Climbing has created those opportunities for people with physical, developmental, and intellectual disabilities for more than a decade. The Idaho-based nonprofit provides free, inclusive climbing events across the western United States. The organization and its volunteers specialize in adapting the experience so participants with a wide range of abilities can get on the wall and climb.

The organization returned to Longbranch Sept. 20 for its annual Key Peninsula visit at YMCA Camp Colman, with KP Fire Department personnel on site to assist. Courageous Kids Climbing has been coming to the KP since 2017, according to founder Jeff Riechmann.

Riechmann, a retired Southern California firefighter, started the program in 2014 with climbing gym owner Larry Morton. The idea grew from a conversation about finding a way to give back to their community and provide inclusive experiences for people with disabilities.

"Ten minutes later, we had this whole thing laid out," Riechmann said.

What began with one event has grown far beyond that initial conversation. The Longbranch event was Courageous Kids Climbing's 205th in the western United States, Riechmann said, with more than 2,200 climbers participating since the organization was created. Climbers have ranged in age from preschoolers to adults in their 70s.

Climbing can offer benefits beyond recreation and physical activity. Reichman shared that climbing naturally fosters problem-solving, focus, and independence, and participants are encouraged to make their own climbing decisions while on the wall. Parents are sometimes asked to step away and give their children a chance to decide for themselves where to put a hand or foot.

"We're trying to build self-confidence," he said. "We're trying to help overcome any fears that the kids may have with climbing."

For climbers with physical disabili-



Courageous Kids Climbing welcomes all comers. *Courageous Kids Climbing*

ties, Courageous Kids offers specialized, adaptive equipment that allows all climbers to experience the thrill of reaching the top. Participants who use a wheelchair benefit from climbing equipment that allows them to ascend the wall in a supportive chair. The organization describes the experience as taking someone out of the "horizontal world" and allowing them to experience the "vertical world."

The adaptive equipment also creates a natural connection between Courageous Kids and first responders, including the KP Fire Department.

Much of the rope and hauling equipment utilized at their events is similar to that used by fire departments' technical rescue and search-and-rescue teams. This allows first responders to practice their rope skills while gaining experience interacting with people whose disabilities could affect how they respond during an emergency.

Riechmann said he encourages first responders to observe participants and consider how they might assist someone with similar needs during a fire, vehicle

collision, or other emergency.

The interaction works both ways. Spending time with first responders in a recreational setting can help participants who may be apprehensive around those in uniform become more comfortable. Riechmann said the organization has worked with participants whose fear of uniformed first responders was significant.

"It is such a low-key, accepting environment," said Rose, a mother who has brought her two children to the event for years (she preferred not to use her last name). "There is a confidence boost in meeting their physical climbing goals, and it's an opportunity to engage with adults who understand they might need a little more patience and understanding."

Anne Nesbit, Public Information Officer with KPFD, said the fire department looks forward to participating with Courageous Kids Climbing each year. "The KPFD loves the opportunity every year to work with the campers."

Another mother, Karenina, whose 16-year-old son has Down Syndrome, said, "We were so proud of him, because

he tried three times to climb to the top. He didn't give up until he got it. Jeff (Riechmann) is an incredible man with a big heart and great affection for our children."

The measure of success for Riechmann remains simple.

He would like to see more families take advantage of the annual Longbranch event, but said the number of participants isn't what determines whether a day succeeds.

"If we have one child show up, and they get something out of it, they leave with a smile, the event is considered a success," he said.

One comment, in particular, has stayed with him through more than 200 events: parents telling him they never thought their child could do it.

His response is equally straightforward. "You'd be surprised what these kids can do if you just give them a chance," Riechmann said. "That's what it's all about."

To learn more about Courageous Kids Climbing and future events in Longbranch, go to www.courageouskidscimbing.org. ■

Candidates for County, State, and Federal Office Face the KP

The Key Peninsula Candidate Forum is a longstanding tradition where residents question their local politicians.

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

Nine candidates in the November election appeared before a standing-room-only crowd of 80 or more in the Whitmore Room at the KP Civic Center Oct. 5 to describe their qualifications and answer questions.

In attendance were:

Brenda Lykins (D) and Mike Solan (R) competing for the District 7 seat on the Pierce County Council; David Olson (R) and Rep. Adison Richards (D) for the 26th Legislative District State House Position 1; Katy Cornell (R) and Renee Hernandez Greenfield (D) for the 26th LD State House Position 2; Sen. Deb Krishnadasan (D) and Gary Parker (R) for the 26th LD State Senate; and Teresa Fox (R) for the 6th Congressional District U.S. House. The incumbent U.S. Rep. Emily Randall (D) was absent.

As in past years, each candidate gave a two-minute opening statement and a two-minute closing statement, and had two minutes to answer each question. A two-hour time limit allowed for just four questions previously submitted by residents, each chosen so all candidates could answer.

The event was sponsored by the KP Community Council, KP Business Association, KP Civic Center, The Mustard Seed Project, and KP News. The moderator was KP News Executive Editor Lisa Bryan.

What follows are highlights from some of the candidates' answers in the order they were given. Not all answers are printed here due to space limitations. The forum was videotaped and can be viewed in its entirety on The Mustard Seed Project YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G99kBrbVsnM>

1. What are your budget priorities? What revenue streams will you keep or reform? What expenses will you eliminate?

Cornell: Policies that are failing hurt people, but they also cost us money. ... We need to address the root issues effectively so we can help people and save tax dollars at the same time.

Hernandez Greenfield: I always start with child care and education because child care is workforce infrastructure. ... Transportation is another need. If we're stuck in traffic and I can't pick up



A panel of candidates addressed a capacity crowd at the KP Civic Center Oct. 5. *Ted Olinger, KP News*

my child by 5 because of our bridges, roads, or ferries, those are costs.

Krishnadasan: When COVID hit, Washington state had a ton of federal money come in to help us get through it. We got through COVID, but the programs stayed, and we continue to want to offer them. ... When we talk about expenses to cut, that would be the first place I would look. In terms of revenue, we need to grow our tax base.

Parker: There's a purpose for government: providing programs to help offset things going on in our society. What I don't see in Olympia is people going back and asking, "Does this program actually do what it was intended to do?"

Solan: My platform is public safety, fiscal integrity, and infrastructure. ... Why does the (Pierce County) Sheriff's Office still have the fewest deputies per capita, not just in Washington state but in the nation? ... I would require department heads to cut three to five programs that do not work, keep the ones we are mandated to fund, and go from there.

Lykins: I would love to see us recruit, fully staff our Sheriff's Department, and grow it. The public safety sales tax was

passed by the (Pierce County) council with bipartisan support. It gives the county access to grant funding because the state will not give that funding unless jurisdictions first pass their own public safety sales tax.

Richards: When I got into office, I immediately started talking about refocusing our priorities on our core values of education, health care, and safety. ... I voted against revenue when it was not strategically directed at those priorities. ... Another thing I'm working hard on is how much costs are going up across government: energy, insurance, paid family and medical (leave), and other things driving costs across our system.

Olson: The (state) budget has more than doubled in 13 years. ... We need a thorough review of our spending. Is there redundancy? ... We can't tax our way out of this. We are losing big businesses from the state. B&O taxes and gas taxes are putting a strain on small businesses.

Fox: There is so much waste in the federal budget. We need to get our coastal industries back: timber, maritime, recreational fishing and hunting, and hospitality and tourism associated

with parks and national forests. Public safety and economic issues are priorities.

2. The Key Peninsula and other rural areas have unique needs. How will you make sure rural communities receive their fair share of county resources?

Fox: At the federal level, we need to get more money directly to law enforcement. One thing hampering that is state sanctuary policies. ... We need to get the Shutdown Sanctuary Policies Act (H.R. 7640) passed so we can hold state and local officials, the governor, and municipalities accountable for failures causing long (emergency response) times and our illegal immigrant problem. We have a serious crisis in our region, deeper than anybody knows. There's human trafficking and drug trafficking, particularly in Clallam County. Drugs are pouring across the border, and there's human slavery up there. We have homelessness everywhere.

Solan: For Key Peninsula infrastructure, we have to advocate and partner with the Washington State Department of Transportation, especially on

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Make living on the KP even better.

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AT KEYPENNEWS.ORG



Thelma Brown

GUEST COLUMN



From The Circle Of Friends

I am the president of the Gig Harbor-Key Peninsula Suicide Prevention Coalition. I am also a retired principal, counselor, and teacher.

I founded the club Circle of Friends-Safe Space in 2023 at Gig Harbor and Henderson Bay High Schools because of the urgent need for students experiencing harassment, intimidation, bullying, and discrimination to have a voice.

These students of all backgrounds, ethnic groups, and sexual orientations needed to be able to express how they felt and what changes they would like to see to improve the behavior of their fellow students. In other words: accountability.

Every student deserves to feel safe, respected, accepted, and heard. Circle of Friends allows these students to speak up and be part of the solution.

Our community lost four students to suicide within the last year and a half.

We all have experiences that may lead to thoughts of suicide, but we all don't react or respond to them the same way. Hate speech is spreading throughout our society, from our leaders to our children. Inappropriate language has become commonplace and almost acceptable among our youth.

Stop and think about how this negativity is affecting our social and emotional well-being. We must stay focused and hopeful, making sure that we are taking care of our own mental health as well as our children's.

When it comes to suicide prevention, talking about it is vital because it breaks the stigma. It is OK to ask, "Are you thinking of killing yourself? Do you have a plan?"

Members of the Circle of Friends have been trained to be Youth Mental Health First Aiders by Anne Nesbit and Annie Schuster, teen mental health trainers. Here is what they have to say:

Charlie: Over 7,000 people in the U.S., ages 10-24, die each year by suicide. It has become the second leading cause of death for teens. Those statistics alone show why talking about suicide prevention is important. For many people, this may seem like the only option in hard times. When I was 11 years old, I myself struggled with depression and thoughts

of ending my life. The main cause of my depression was feeling alone.

A big part of suicide prevention is making sure people in need have community support. By coming together in Circle of Friends, we can support each other and make it easier to talk about mental health in a safe place. Sometimes we don't have all the answers, but what we can do is notice when someone is feeling down, listen to them, and help them in any way we can. A simple conversation and a little kindness, as well as being there for someone, can save a life.

Kelsea: Circle of Friends has given me a sense of belonging and something to look forward to during the week. Seeing people from all parts of Gig Harbor come together inspires us all to work toward a better community.

Abby: Circle of Friends has given me a purpose. It has given me a support system that has saved my life. My peers and mentors in this group are always here for me and are genuinely amazing people.

Avril: Circle of Friends has been a huge lifesaver for me. It's one of the few places where I can be myself without worrying about being judged or feeling like I have to be "perfect." I can talk, laugh, share what's on my mind, and just be me. It's given me people I can connect with and a place where I feel accepted for who I am. Even on difficult days, knowing I have Circle of Friends to look forward to gives me something to be excited about. It means more to me than I can put into words, and I'm so grateful to have a place where I can feel comfortable, welcomed, and like I belong.

Thelma: Take time to listen to each other. Acknowledge your neighbor, family member, and friends with kind words, a positive gesture, a smile and hello, a helping hand.

Fight hate. Stay hopeful. Help each other make a difference one life at a time.

Thelma Brown is president of the Gig Harbor-Key Peninsula Suicide Prevention Coalition and a retired principal, counselor, and teacher. She lives in Gig Harbor.

Mark Michel

RIDE ON



If I Knew

I confess I am not the boldest person when it comes to getting into cold water. It's honestly a little embarrassing how

hesitantly I inch into the Sound, even on the warmest summer days. That's why when I chose to get dive certified, I went to the warm waters of a Mexican coastal town.

My instructor, Fernando, was grossly overqualified, possessing a Ph.D. in marine biology. My last supervised dive was to a shipwreck in shallow waters in a large bay. After a successful dive, we returned to the beach, sat in the shade of a palapa, and chatted over a post-dive beer.

He broke a period of quiet contemplation by saying more to himself than to me, "There used to be dolphins." He turned to me and finished his thought: "There used to be dolphins in this bay. Since they started renting jet skis, the dolphins don't come here anymore."

It was mid-week of a shoulder month, so all the jet skis were parked on the beach, waiting for the next wave of tourists. It was a quiet, calm day on the water with only a few locals and random tourists causing any ripples on the water's surface.

Since Fernando's comment several years ago, I've asked myself numerous times: "If I knew riding a jet ski would cause dolphins (and whales) to leave the area, would I still want to ride one?" I've ridden them in the past and thought it was pretty fun. Now I'm not sure I'd want to.

I want to be clear, though: There's no judgment of others here, only some head-scratching on my part. Fernando's comment triggered a whole list of "If I knew, what would I do?" questions.

If I knew whales were dying from ingesting plastic bags, would I carry canvas bags or reused plastic bags when I go into the grocery store?

If I knew there is currently more carbon in our atmosphere than at any time over the last 800,000 years, would I buy an EV?

If I knew replacing existing plants with a grass lawn would take away nutrients for birds, bees, and butterflies, and habitat for rabbits, squirrels, and other ground animals, would I?

If I knew riding my mountain bike would catastrophically damage sensitive soil and drive away animals, would I still ride the trails?

When I was still working, I helped a passenger off the airplane and pushed her wheelchair up the jetway. She wasn't significantly older than I was. Near the top of the jetway, she turned to me and said, "If I'd have known I was going to end up like this, I would have done

anything to prevent it."

I didn't know her and hated to question her, but I did wonder: Would she have? Would she have gone on regular walks? Would she have made healthier choices? If I blew out a knee, would I push hard enough rehabilitating it to get back to fully functioning? What would I do if I knew?

If we knew the challenges of being in a long-term relationship, filled with highs and lows, would we choose marriage?

If we knew parenting would be such a challenge (at times), would we choose it? (I hope all parents can answer "yes" even during the most trying times.)

When our daughter was in high school, I heard a great podcast from NPR's Planet Money: "What's Your Major?" It was a very entertaining look into earnings potential. As I recall, a change in the most recent (at that time) census allowed them to couple college majors and earnings. It listed some of the least and most lucrative majors.

I listened with my daughter in the car. We didn't talk much about it. A few weeks later, someone asked her what she planned to study. She immediately responded, "petroleum engineering." She had heard. That podcast took the "If" out of "If we knew."

I was able to talk with her about potential career pathways. I didn't want her to be driven by maximizing income. She seemed relieved there was no expectation for her to be a petroleum engineer.

Most of those are relatively meaningless individual contemplations. We're at a crossroads where much larger "should we?" questions need to be asked and answered.

The latest talk on AI has my attention. When leaders of the tech world say, "There's a nonzero chance this could end civilization," I worry. The statement of AI risk published in the Center for AI Safety in May of 2023 states, "mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war."

I enjoyed watching "The Terminator" and "The Matrix." I don't want to live through them.

We may be too far down this road to stop, but before it's too late, I sure wish someone would ask: "If I knew, what would I do?"

Mark Michel is a retired commercial airline pilot and a Key Pen Parks commissioner. He lives in Lakebay.

Krisa Bruemmer

IRREVERENT MOM



Butter, Dumplings, Nice Cubes 'n' Cheese

On the eve of the first day of school, my daughter Violet proudly showed me the five keychains she'd selected to adorn her new backpack. Then she unzipped her bag to reveal a footlong ice cream sandwich, a massive cube of butter, and a container filled with dumplings.

"You can't bring all those squishies to school!" I said, breaking her happy spell.

It took some negotiation, but we reached an agreement: one squishy per day for class, one small squishy for the bus.

Many parents and teachers have a love-hate relationship with these stress ball fidget toys piling up all around us. Squishies are distracting, sticky with germs, and coated in dog hair. And the desire for more is insatiable.

It seems our entire world is being replicated in foam, rubber, and silicone, from pickles to neon-colored cat paws, Swiss cheese, gummy bears, bananas, even creepy, stretchable babies.

"Wash your squishies as soon as you get home from school, or we'll all get sick!" I added.

Violet rolled her eyes, then agreed to start fifth grade with a brick of butter and a single gyoza.

All summer, Violet insisted she didn't want to be a fifth grader. Sometimes she added, "I hate school," with a scowl, expressing a level of anxiety that seemed absurd for a typically cheerful kid with

consistently excellent report cards, great relationships with her teachers, and plenty of friends.

"I don't like math, and I don't like winter, and I don't like school!"

So, Dad worked with her on math, while I halfheartedly tried reasoning with her about winter.

"Winter's cold and dark and it sucks, but it's months away," I said, and then added, "I'll buy any coat you want when we go school shopping."

"All I really want is a Lululemon backpack and lots of squishies!"

"How many squishies does one girl need?" I asked, glancing at the growing pile on Violet's dresser.

"There's no such thing as too many squishies." Then she broke into song, inexplicably in a country music twang: *A new feeling! A different squeeze!*

Butter, dumplin', Nice Cube 'n' chee-ese!

How could I not laugh at that? This tween daughter of mine, grumpy only moments before, clutching her slow-rising stick of foam butter like a microphone and giggling.

Violet tossed me a tie-dyed butter, and we belted out a squishy jingle duet, and then bounced ice cubes, rainbow ducks and dumplings against the ceiling while playing catch across the room.

She laid out her full collection, and we rated each squishy on a 10-point scale in four categories: Look, Feel, Condition, and "Fun-ness." Violet tallied each score and did some calculations before making a Top 10 Squishies list. When I pointed out that she was having fun with math, she frowned.

Satisfying as they may be, squishies cause an internal tug of war for me. Some, like NeeDohs, are hard to find. And the plentiful, cheap versions are

potentially toxic.

Recent news stories have reported squishies leaking gels, powders, or water beads, causing skin irritation and chemical burns. Squishies have exploded after being left in direct sunlight, hot cars, or intentionally heated, splattering children with scalding gel.

These toys, among others, are destined to pile up in landfills. Unlike the countless stuffies, Barbies, Hatchimals, and L.O.L. Surprise! dolls I've seen come and go, squishies seem unlikely to survive intact long enough to make their way to Angel Guild and a new life with another excited child.

As a parent, it can be difficult to decide when to worry and when to let things go. In a world flooded with plastic, it's hard to stay mad at cute, whimsical toys that bring my daughter so much joy while perfectly satisfying her tactile nature.

"They're good for arthritis," Violet insists, "and carpal tunnel!" Her grip strength is stellar.

Her life skills are improving too. Violet likes going "NeeDoh Hunting," calling all over town. She looks up phone numbers independently. She says thank you and is always polite. She tells me there's a thrill in the chase.

She knows Purdy Cost Less Pharmacy's phone number by heart, but not mine.

At the end of Violet's first day of fifth grade, she said, I think I'm going to be OK with school."

I could hear her super rare golden glitter dumpling gurgling as she sighed. I stifled the urge to remind her — no squishies in bed.

"I had a really good day. A really, really good day."

We smiled at each other in the dark.

"I actually really like school," Violet added, and then started giggling. "I snuck three gyozas."

"What?"

"You said I could take one gyoza. But I decided to bring two because I didn't want the one to be lonely. Then I realized the third gyoza would feel left out, so I brought all three."

I probably shouldn't have laughed, but I did. Then I went upstairs, opened my laptop to write, and unboxed my own NeeDoh, a translucent blue Nice Cube she talked me into buying. Squeezing it, I felt my stress melt. Ten out of 10 across the board.

Krisa Bruemmer is an award-winning writer. She lives in Vaughn.

Meredith Browand

KEY ISSUES



What to Pay Elected Officials?

Pierce County sent me an invitation last summer to participate as a citizen representative on the Salary Commission for Elected Officials. I had been randomly selected from the county's registered voters.

I didn't know that this commission existed, but the opportunity caught my attention. I am a "behind-the-scenes" enthusiast and have always been curious about the unseen ways work gets done. This invitation offered a way to participate in our county government firsthand.

The work of the commission centers on reviewing current compensation and making salary recommendations to the

José Alaniz WE LIVE HERE: RITUALS OF SUMMER FALL



Pierce County Council for four elected officials: the county executive, sheriff, auditor, and assessor-treasurer.

These are significant positions with substantial responsibilities. The work of these elected officials, and the offices they manage, are at the core of our county government. These aren't ceremonial positions. They require significant expertise, leadership, and accountability, and the decisions these four officials make have consequences throughout our communities.

The county executive manages the day-to-day operations of county government, overseeing thousands of employees, a multibillion-dollar budget, and the delivery of essential public services. The sheriff leads the second-largest sheriff's department in the state and is responsible for law enforcement, public safety, and county jail operations. The auditor safeguards the integrity of our elections while also overseeing voter registration, marriage licenses, vehicle and vessel licensing, and public document recording. The assessor-treasurer determines property values for tax purposes, administers property tax collection, and distributes those revenues to public entities such as schools, fire districts, and other local governments.

Determining appropriate compensation for these positions requires more consideration than simply deciding whether someone deserves a raise. The commission must evaluate the responsibilities of each office, compare salaries with similar jurisdictions, consider

current and projected economic conditions, and weigh the county's ability to attract qualified candidates.

The work of the commission began by analyzing the information necessary to make informed salary recommendations. Pierce County human resources staff provided us with extensive materials to compare compensation across jurisdictions, review historical salary adjustments, and examine economic factors such as inflation and cost-of-living increases.

We also considered how the salaries of the elected officials compare with those of senior employees working within their departments. For example, the highest-ranking non-elected undersheriff has the potential to earn more than our elected sheriff. Commissioners expressed concern that this disparity could discourage qualified candidates from seeking the office in the future.

But perhaps the most valuable part of the process was the opportunity to meet directly with the four elected officials whose salaries we were reviewing. Rather than relying exclusively on job descriptions and spreadsheets, we heard firsthand about the work these officials perform. They answered questions about the demands of their positions and shared with us the challenges facing their departments.

These conversations helped put the numbers into perspective for the commission. A figure on a spreadsheet only tells part of the story. Understanding the responsibilities behind that

number, and hearing directly from the people doing the work, provides context that statistics alone won't capture.

Our work culminated in July, when the commission finalized its recommendations to the Pierce County Council for salary increases beginning in January 2027.

The commission recommended 3% increases for the county executive, auditor, and assessor-treasurer, matching the increase approved for non-represented county employees. For the sheriff, the commission recommended a 4% increase, citing concerns about the position's competitiveness with other public safety leadership roles.

These recommendations weren't about rewarding individual officeholders or evaluating their political positions. They were about determining appropriate compensation for the offices themselves, regardless of who occupies them.

That distinction is important. The commission's procedures specifically call for thoughtful, nonpolitical decisions that represent the interests of all Pierce County residents. Much of what we hear about local government comes through news coverage or contentious public meetings. But a splashy headline or standing room only crowd doesn't reflect the quieter, less visible work that keeps government functioning.

I was grateful to serve with other community members who brought their own experiences and viewpoints to the discussion. We didn't need identical backgrounds or similar opinions to

approach our responsibilities seriously. That's what made the experience especially meaningful to me.

It has also reinforced something I believe strongly: Government works better when ordinary citizens participate. Serving on this commission reminded me that local government is much closer than we sometimes realize.

Pierce County has numerous boards and commissions that rely on community participation. Their work touches everything from land use and environmental protection to public safety and community services. Some commissions require specialized experience or knowledge. Others simply need residents who are willing to learn and volunteer their time.

You don't have to be an expert to get started. You don't have to agree with every decision your government makes. In fact, different perspectives improve the health and reliability of a commission or board.

Your involvement doesn't have to begin with a formal appointment either. Attend a public meeting. Read an agenda. Submit a comment. Ask questions about a proposed policy. Learn who represents you and what decisions they're making.

A year ago, I said yes to an unexpected invitation I knew little about and, in turn, I gained a greater appreciation for the people and processes behind county government. I hope that more of us will take advantage of the opportunities to get involved.

Meredith Browand lives in Purdy.

Obituaries



Michael Louis Hoelscher

It is with heavy hearts and profound gratitude for a life well lived that we announce the passing of Michael Hoelscher, beloved husband, father,

grandfather, brother, and friend, who died Sept. 26. He was 77.

Born in 1949 to parents Louis and Lillian Hoelscher in North Bend, Oregon, Mike touched the lives of many with his warmth, humor, and unyielding love for others.

Mike's academic journey took him from Wilson High School to Tacoma Community College, and ultimately to the University of Puget Sound, where he earned his master's degree in business administration.

A proud veteran, Mike served honorably in the Navy, stationed in Vietnam and Alaska, before his discharge in 1975. His service to his country was a source of great pride and an integral part of his life story.

Professionally, Mike's career began at Carl's Drive-In in Tacoma, where he worked from the age of 17. His journey led him to the Heidelberg Brewery and later to Scott Wetzel

Services as assistant vice president of data. He found his calling in the IT Dept. of Pierce College, where he dedicated over 30 years of his expertise and wisdom until retirement.

An avid sports fan, Mike held a deep passion for the Seattle Sounders and Seahawks, ensuring he never missed a game even during travels. He was excited about F1 racing as it gave him a connection with his grandson. His love of the outdoors brought him immense joy. Whether exploring the Puget Sound on his tide runner or cruising the San Juan Islands on a chartered trawler, Mike found solace in nature's beauty.

Mike is survived by his wife Elaine, with whom he shared a remarkable partnership for 42 years. He leaves behind his stepson, Eric Williams; daughter-in-law Tam Marino (Scott Martin); beloved grandchildren Isabella and Gavin Williams; sister Susan

Dixon (Ray Dixon); and his lifelong friend Rich Mayo. Each of them carries forward the legacy of love and kindness Mike so generously shared.

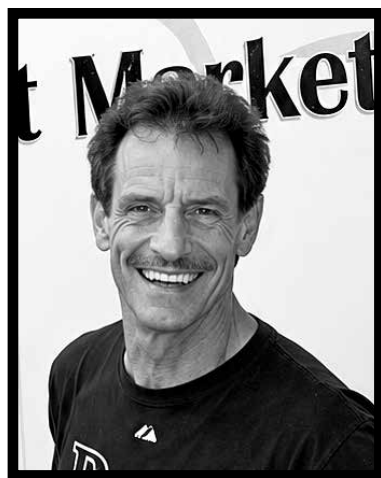
The family extends their heartfelt thanks to the compassionate staff at St. Joseph Medical Center, especially Dr. Marina Jansen, Mike's cardiologist, for exceptional care and support during his final days.

Instead of flowers, the family requests that donations be made in Mike's memory to the Wounded Warrior Project.

Raymond Paul Schumsky

Key Peninsula resident Raymond Paul Schumsky died peacefully at home on the north end of the KP Oct. 9 after a year-long battle with cancer. He was 74.

Born to Raymond and Lucille Schumsky in



Auburn, Paul was the second-born of three boys, all of whom preceded him in death.

Paul was adventurous and athletic, a skilled meat cutter, a baby whisperer, and a talented musician who always had a song in his heart. He had a huge heart for people and all animals.

He attended Auburn High School, where he competed in football, wrestling, and track. His passion for music led him to sing in the church choir and play guitar

in a garage band in high school. A steady influence throughout his life, he played music at home as an outlet that helped him chill out.

Many people knew Paul as “Ray” after he opened Ray’s Meat Market in Purdy in 2010, named in honor of his father, who practiced the same trade. He became a beloved community member who built Ray’s Meat Market from nothing. The business was his pride and joy.

He was a loving partner, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, uncle, son, and friend. He touched many lives and will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him.

Paul is survived by Debbie Schumsky; sons Travis Prescott, Jesse Schumsky, and Derrick Schumsky; daughter Samantha Schumsky; stepdaughter Kelsie Campbell (Jerrell); grandchildren Maia, Lincoln, Ila, Serina, Logaen, Daryn, Lydia, Brooklyn; and two great-grandchildren, Willow and Siah.

There will be a celebration of Paul’s life Nov. 6 at 1 p.m. at Messiah Lutheran Church, 410 H Street NE in Auburn.

Letter to the Editor

UNFOUNDED RUMORS ON LAKEBAY MARINA REDEVELOPMENT

The Department of Natural Resources is continuing down the path towards permitting to remove the pier and pursuing a feasibility study/alternatives analysis to inform future planning and discussions (“State Officials Update KP Group on Lakebay Marina Restoration,” August 2026).

DNR has not applied for permits to move the Egg Co-Op building or replace the pilings under it. There has been no change in strategy or new communication.

Last year we had a structural assessment completed by engineers which evaluated the building’s current structural integrity and assessed whether the building could withstand moving for future replacement. The assessment indicates that the building would survive moving it temporarily. However, we do not have the funding needed to replace the pilings or move the

building. The structural assessment also assured us that the building is quite sound. The KP Citizens Advisory Committee requested and received a copy of the structural report in August.

We have heard concerns from the committee that DNR will let the building and pilings deteriorate to the point that the building collapses into the water. My hope is that the structural report has assured them that DNR is proactively monitoring the condition of the building. We have also been contacted by other organizations who seem to have heard the same rumor.

We hope this response will help quell the rumor that the building is about to collapse or that DNR is pursuing action to remove the building.

Stephanie Leiendecker
Project Manager/Technical Writer/Policy Analyst
Aquatics Division
Department of Natural Resources

FORUM FROM PAGE 4

Highway 302. ... A few weeks ago, I rode the free shuttle (from KP to Gig Harbor). Did you know there are only six people on average during the 12 hours the shuttle operates? Is that a good allocation of your \$600,000 for a two-year pilot project? I’m not sure.

Lykins: We need to look at all our resources. Are there federal grants? State grants? Can we use our money? (When I served) on the Gig Harbor City Council, we had people who needed help and vulnerable populations. We had incredible nonprofits, churches, and people ready to lift them. ... We raised zero taxes to make that happen.

3. How do you work with your opposition to reach a common goal? Are there political red lines you won’t cross?

Hernandez Greenfield: To work across ideologies and concerns, you stay curious. ... When you stay curious, you can see different sides and come back to something you agree on. That’s my experience and the perspective I lead with.

Cornell: We need to learn to respect one another again. That’s something I want to bring to this position. ... You find common ground, listen, talk, and work together on what you agree on. ... Like my opponent said, you walk in someone’s shoes and learn to do that.

Parker: People are people once you drop the titles they carry. You have to get to a decision. That’s one reason I run: for greater balance. The more we get the opposing voice in there, the more we can deliver.

Krishnadasan: I’ll continue doing what I’ve done for the last two years. I’ve become known as someone who works across the aisle, listens to the other side, and looks at good policy and what works rather than Democratic or Republican. My seven bills are all bipartisan.

Lykins: With a lifetime in health care, I bring therapeutic listening skills. When I see a patient, I have to listen and know where they’re coming from. They may not agree with the treatment I recommend to keep them healthy. I have to listen without judgment and ask, “How can we make this work for you?”

Solan: The common goal is nonpartisan. ... If one party has been making decisions for a long time, government is unbalanced, and the electorate feels disenfranchised. My red line is never to lie to you. I’ll be the most authentic person I can be.

Fox: I want to work for the middle 50 of us, finding common ground and building consensus on items we agree on. When I go to D.C., I’m going to knock on every one of the 415 congresspersons’ doors, find the people there, and make the case for our district on whatever the topic is.

4. What is your position on the millionaires’ tax?

Krishnadasan: I voted no. Tax reform is not just more revenue; it is relief for those struggling most. This bill did not have enough of that for me.

Parker: It’s a money grab. ... It goes against the will of the people. When the Legislature tried to put in provisions saying it would never drop below \$1 million to protect you and me, that was rejected. Why? Because it’s a state income tax, not a tax on millionaires.

Cornell: On this bill, I’m a no — not because we don’t need tax reform, but because we have to look at it as a whole. ... It also taxes business revenue rather than profits, which is dangerous for small businesses operating on very small margins. It included pensions as taxable income.

Hernandez Greenfield: For me, I’m a yes. I’ll explain why. Working and low-income families need relief, and this is a beginning. ... I also don’t want that (threshold) to come down. As a working middle-class person running for this seat, that’s what I would fight against.

Richards: I voted no. ... I voted for amendments that would have cut sales taxes nearly a point, ensured half the revenue went to tax relief and the other half to tangible priorities like education and health care, and kept the limit at \$1 million. That failed. We need tax reform and a less regressive system.

Olson: I think we should start with a moratorium on taxes. ... I believe in reform, but we need to know where the

spending goes. ... The (Peninsula) school district passed bonds to build schools, but citizens voted for them. If we’re going to have a tax, citizens of the state should vote for it.

Fox: It’s an illegal tax. Our governor should not have signed the bill. He violated his oath of office. ... Democratic state legislators have become used to feeding at the trough of public revenue. We need to stop that, cut waste from the budget, and start acting like responsible adults. We also need to hold our governor and elected officials acting like tyrants accountable.

Solan: This is an income tax going after everybody in this room. ... I’m a union guy. My first vote was for Bill Clinton. My parents are Democrats. As I’ve grown into adulthood and my profession, I’ve seen policies, particularly taxes, affect the most vulnerable. I see it firsthand working the streets (as a police officer). The establishment that’s been in power a long time is failing us.

Lykins: I believe our system is regressive. We need responsible spending on essential projects like public safety and roads, especially projects already underway, and to find federal and state dollars that don’t add costs for people here.

View the forum in its entirety on The Mustard Seed Project YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G99kBrbVsnM> ■

COMICS

OFRENDAS

This year our family experienced the heaviest losses in a long time. José's mother and Kristin's father passed away, while we lost many animals to age and debility. Some that we brought with us from Seattle or acquired shortly after moving to Longbranch in 2019 started dying in greater numbers. In Mexican-American culture, the Day of the Dead ofrenda (aka altar) provides a colorful stage upon which to mourn, celebrate and remember them and what they will always mean to us. Here are some of our loved ones that made it onto the ofrenda this year. Q.E.P.D.

2026



Elections

Candidate Teresa Fox on Her Congressional Race and Plans

The Republican challenger for the CD-6 seat emphasized professional experience, public safety, and a greater role for federal representatives.

MEREDITH BROWAND, KP NEWS

Teresa Fox has spent her life in Bremerton, where her family's roots in the automotive industry stretch back nearly 90 years. Now, the longtime Kitsap County resident is drawing on three decades of professional experience in workplace safety, emergency management, and government regulation to make her first bid for elected office.



Teresa Fox

Fox, a Republican, is challenging Democratic incumbent U.S. Rep. Emily Randall in the Nov. 3 general election for Washington's 6th Congressional District, which includes the Key Peninsula.

"I'm a citizen, not a politician, born and raised in Bremerton, Washington, lived here my whole life," Fox said.

Throughout her professional career, Fox has served as environmental health and safety director for the Naval Inactive Ships Maintenance Office in Bremerton and worked in environmental health, safety, and emergency management for Icicle Seafoods. Her experience also includes 12 years with Kitsap County in community development and five years in the fire marshal's office.

Fox said those positions required managing multimillion-dollar budgets while interpreting regulations and working with government agencies. She believes her familiarity with government operations and the industries supporting the regional economy would translate into effective congressional leadership.

"One of the things that I have to do in my career is build consensus with a variety of different stakeholder groups and citizens," she said.

Fox identified two main reasons for

entering the congressional race: concerns about economic opportunity and what she describes as a growing public safety crisis.

She said she is concerned about the decline of traditional industries, including timber harvesting and maritime operations. She attributes some of those changes to environmental policies and restrictions that she believes have reduced employment opportunities and hurt related businesses. She views these declines as directly connected to the economic pressure many are now facing.

"One of the two major things that I hear from folks ... is economic prosperity and economic vitality, affordability issues," she said.

Fox's other major concern is public safety. She supports increasing law enforcement staffing and strengthening efforts to combat drug trafficking. Improving cooperation among federal, state, and local agencies is also a priority.

Fox points to Washington's low per-capita law enforcement staffing levels as evidence of the need for additional resources, particularly in rural communities. For the Key Peninsula, she identified emergency response times and the availability of Pierce County Sheriff's deputies as pressing concerns. She believes federal funding could help local agencies recruit and retain law enforcement officers, particularly in communities where geographic isolation can complicate emergency response.

"We've got to get unique areas, rural areas like yours, adequately funded," she said.

If elected, Fox said her first-term priorities would include increasing public safety funding, pursuing congressional term limits, and strengthening oversight of Washington state government.

Fox is particularly critical of Washington's immigration policies, including the Keep Washington Working Act, which limits certain state and local government involvement in federal immigration enforcement. She supports federal legislation restricting sanctuary policies and wants Congress to investigate state officials — like Gov. Bob Ferguson and Attorney General Nick Brown — she said have violated federal law or constitutional protections.

Another priority is establishing term limits for members of the U.S. House and Senate. Fox said she signed the U.S. Term Limits Pledge while attending the September Republican political convention in Dallas, and would work to build support for legislation limiting how long lawmakers can serve.

"We need term limits. We can't have these folks in office for years on end," she said.

Her campaign also advocates reducing federal spending, lowering taxes, and limiting government regulation.

Asked which specific federal programs or regulations she would change or eliminate, Fox declined to identify any, saying other district concerns were more immediate.

"We need to get back to the basic premise of a limited government with very limited spending," she said.

Rural health care is one example. Fox's campaign website identifies rural healthcare access as one of her top priorities. When asked how she would improve health care access and affordability on the Key Peninsula, Fox said many of these decisions are made at the state level. She suggested that a congressional representative could help bring local and state officials together to identify gaps in services and explore opportunities for federal assistance.

"What is working for you? What's not

working for you? What can we assist you with from the federal level?" she said.

Although running as a Republican, Fox said her campaign is directed toward the political middle, rather than exclusively toward conservative voters.

"A cornerstone of my campaign is people over politics, and I truly mean that," she said. "I'm running as a Republican because I lean more conservatively, frankly. But I want to represent everybody."

Fox has criticized Randall's priorities and approach to representing the district, arguing that the incumbent has focused on national issues rather than local concerns.

Asked whether she would be willing to disagree with President Trump or Republican leadership, Fox said her decisions would be guided first by the Constitution and then by the preferences of district residents.

"I am not going to vote on any single issue because somebody in a political party says we have to do that," she said. "If that means going against the party or the president, we're going to do what the citizens want."

Fox said she wants voters to view her candidacy as an opportunity for more direct communication between residents and their representative in Washington, D.C.

"It's not about the representative and what that person's own personal or special interests are," she said. "My job is to represent my constituents." ■

EMILY RANDALL

Despite repeated attempts, Key Peninsula News could not arrange an interview with Rep. Emily Randall (D-CD 6), Teresa Fox's opponent, in time for this issue.

PSD Settles Lawsuit Over Teacher Molestation Convictions

STAFF REPORT

The Peninsula School District settled two state and federal lawsuits stemming from the January conviction of former Evergreen Elementary School teacher Jordan R. Henderson for child molestation charges.

Henderson, 37, was sentenced May 8 in Pierce County Superior Court to 66 years to life in prison after being found guilty

in January of 12 counts of first-degree child molestation, specifically inappropriate touching, of four of his fifth-grade girl students over two years (See "Former Evergreen Teacher Gets 66 Years to Life for Molesting Students," May 2026). A fifth student was involved in a subsequent federal lawsuit. Henderson taught at Evergreen for 11 years.

The two lawsuits were brought by fami-

lies of the victims and alleged that PSD and school administrators failed to protect students or investigate claims of Henderson's behavior. They were both settled in August for a total of \$23.2 million, and approved Oct. 20, according to the U.S. District Court for Western Washington and Pierce County Superior Court records. The settlement resolves all claims against the district and individual administrators.

In a statement to KP News, PSD Chief of Schools Michael Farmer wrote, "We can confirm that the district reached an agreement to resolve the litigation around the conduct of a former employee, Jordan Henderson, through a settlement funded entirely by our insurers. ... It is our sincere hope that the survivors and their families feel a sense of closure as they continue on their path toward healing." ■

The Legend of 'Book Ninja' — Stalking and Stocking

Book nerds unite: There's a home for your books and your books that need a home in your local little free library.

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

A mild-mannered figure subtly scrutinizes a little free library minding its own business somewhere on the Key Peninsula.

The shelves are mostly bare. Nothing but vampire fiction and self-help books.

The figure moves in.

When they leave, the lower shelf is packed with children's books. The upper holds novels and nonfiction, including a history of vampire lore.

The Book Ninja has struck.

"It's my hobby," they told Key Peninsula News, on condition of anonymity. "It's not for recognition. I'm a book nerd."

The self-styled Book Ninja grew up in a house where books were everywhere. It's much the same in the ninja's KP home now: books on shelves, in the kitchen and in baskets around the house.

"I grew up in the '90s, so it was different back then," they said. "My parents took me to the library all the time. That's where we got books and videos. I was crazy for it. I didn't know about video stores until I was in high school."

Then, two years ago, came the event that would eventually require a secret identity.

Book Ninja spotted an online auction for books being discarded by a closing school. On a whim, they bid \$3.

They won four pallets of books.

One pallet consisted entirely of dictionaries, which the future ninja managed to donate to a charitable program for teachers.

"But then I had the rest."

A little free library provided the first clue.

Little Free Libraries are neighborhood book-sharing boxes where anyone can take a book or leave one. Book Ninja had noticed

one near home and filled it with an armload.

One armload barely made a dent in the collection.

The search began.

"My top three on a weekly basis are Gateway and Volunteer Park, because they get hit pretty hard, and the Burley Post Office," Book Ninja said. "Then there are random ones."

Those random targets stretch from Bremerton to Gig Harbor to Tacoma. Some appear on the Little Free Library Finder app; many do not. The app shows only 10 on the Key Peninsula, four of them on Herron Island.

Book Ninja knows more.

And over time, the ninja has learned that stocking little libraries isn't simply a matter of putting books into boxes. They had to learn to read the readers.

"At Gateway, the children's books get wiped out right away, but that's not true everywhere," they said. "At the Mustard Seed (the Crandall Center, an activity hub for elders), it's more fiction."

"I have to go to a little library more than once to kind of learn what's being taken."

Then there was a crisis.

"I hit a point where I ran out of books."

Book Ninja had already been considering creating a character to preserve their anonymity while searching Facebook for unwanted books. Running out forced the issue.

Book Ninja was born.

"Just shoot me a message on Facebook Messenger," they said. "I'm pretty well stocked on adult books, mostly nonfiction. But I'll take anything. There's no limit to children's book donations. They go so fast."

The ninja would also like to see more little libraries built on the Key Peninsula.

"Repurpose something in your own neigh-



Local civic leaders Arianna and Alexandra Sprague, 10, with the late Nan Feagin of Home, took it upon themselves to design, construct, and install what are believed to be the first little free libraries on the KP in September 2016 for a homeschool project. The libraries have seen continuous duty in Key Center in front of Sunnycrest Nursery and in Home at 7th and C streets ever since. *Voski Sprague*

borhood because there aren't a lot of little libraries out here on the KP," they said. "If they start one and don't want to register, just let me know. I'll help support you."

Meanwhile, the legend is spreading.

"Keep the name anonymous, but a high

school student told me they want to be the next Book Ninja," the original said. "It makes me happy."

Somewhere on the Key Peninsula, another mild-mannered figure is waiting to strike. ■

AWARDS FROM PAGE 1

He also won second place in Personality Profiles for "Local Animal Rescuer Back to Ukraine for Eighth Mission" (November 2025), and second and third place for his reporting on local tragedies ("Double Murder on Herron Island," January 2026, and "Vaughn Murder-Suicide Stuns Community," February 2026). He took third place as well in Education Stories for "Emissaries, Ninjas and Zookeepers: Fourth Grade at Vaughn" (March 2026).

Executive Editor Lisa Bryan won second and third place in Editorial Writing for "No

Kings Day in Key Center" (July 2025) and "News from the Hellfire Club" (December 2025).

About her work, the judges wrote: "Very nice to see people come together to protect the voices of everyone, regardless of personal opinions. Great history followed up by proudly defending your local journalists."

Six KP News columnists swept two categories.

In General Interest, Camri Clawson took third place for her column Class Notes; Jonathan Bill earned second for Magical History Tour; and Janice Bryant won first place for Local Color.

About Bryant, the judges wrote: "This woman can write. I'd read her grocery lists.

Makes me want to subscribe." For Bill, they wrote: "Love the historical perspective delivered in a readable, digestible, and entertaining prose." And on Clawson: "This young lady has a bright future as a writer ahead of her. Her writing is mature beyond her years."

In the Topical category, Chris Rurik earned third place for Wild Peninsula; Kamryn Everett took second for her KP Gardens series (both won last year as well in opposite placements); and the estimable Katrina Herringbottom received first place for her acerbic recipes in KP Cooks.

Rurik also won first place in Short News Stories for "Students Learn About Life: Release Salmon Fry Into Vaughn Creek" (May 2025) and third place in Environmental

Stories for "By Hand and By Robot, An Eelgrass Meadow Recovers" (September 2025). Anna Brones earned second place in the same category for "All In: A Year of Daily Swims for Endangered Orcas" (February 2026).

In her final contributions last year, former KP News correspondent Sara Thompson won first place for her Business Feature "Adam's Mushrooms Has a Farm" (December 2025) and second place for "Local Healthcare Providers Plan for Uncertain, Expensive Future" (August 2025).

KP News received 22 awards for its 2024 work, 25 in 2023, 14 in 2022, 17 in 2021, 14 in 2020, eight in 2019, and three in its first entry to the contest in 2018. ■



In her role as drum major, senior Lee Gjertson conducts the PHS Seahawks Marching Band performance of "Rach & Roll." *Shannon Bundrick*

GJERTSON FROM PAGE 1

Nearly eight years later, the Peninsula High School senior is a league co-MVP, district champion, school-record holder, and team captain. In October, Gjertson added another accomplishment to the list: a commitment to swim at NCAA Division I University of New Mexico next fall.

Quite a resume for someone who spends nearly as much time on the marching field as she does in the pool.

Gjertson is also Peninsula's drum major, a musician who plays several instruments, a theater performer and a volunteer — all while maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Making waves

By her freshman year at Peninsula, the former Minter Creek Elementary and Key Peninsula Middle School student had established herself as one of the Seahawks' most promising young sprinters.

Last season, Gjertson won West Central District championships in the 50- and 100-yard freestyle and helped Peninsula capture the district title in the 200 freestyle relay. She finished ninth in the 100 freestyle and 10th in the 50 freestyle at the Class 3A state championships, helping the Seahawks finish ninth overall.

She also helped break a roughly 20-year-old school record in the 200 freestyle relay alongside teammates Boe Ballard, Sophia Evers, and Reese Miller.

Gjertson, who earned Puget Sound League co-MVP honors last season, hopes to add another school record before graduating. Her personal best of 24.84 seconds in the 50 freestyle is less than half a second from Peninsula's longstanding record of 24.36.

"Winning is exciting, for sure, and it feels really good to win, but the most important thing to me is improving myself and getting

faster," she said.

Peninsula swim coach Hunter Hobbs said Gjertson works out so much outside the pool that coaches have to remind her to take a break. Her improved conditioning has allowed her to compete in longer events, including the 200 freestyle.

As a senior captain, Gjertson helps younger swimmers with technique, organizes teammates, provides rides and occasionally directs practice activities herself.

"She is an extension of us, really," Hobbs said. "She helps us every day and really built the team up with us."

Gjertson also helped Peninsula defeat rival Gig Harbor 116-69 Sept. 29, the Seahawks' first dual-meet victory over the Tides since 2006. She won the 200 freestyle by 9 seconds and contributed to a relay victory.

Keeping the beat

When swim practice ends at 4:30 p.m., Gjertson has 30 to 45 minutes to change, eat, and get to the field. By 5:30, she's leading the Peninsula High School marching band as drum major, and she won't head home until 8:30.

The overlap is constant. A Friday night band performance at a football game often leads to a Saturday swim meet, or the reverse.

"I've grown to love it," she said. "It just makes for some really long days."

Gjertson played clarinet during her first two years of marching before becoming a drum major as a junior. She also plays oboe, saxophone, and English horn.

Last fall, she added theater to her schedule, playing Laertes in Peninsula's production of "Hamlet."

As drum major, she conducts the band and helps lead rehearsals, working closely with her schoolmates.

Peninsula Director of Bands Megan Hilborn watched Gjertson grow from a



The Seahawks team captain, PHS Senior Lee Gjertson, recently committed to swim at the University of New Mexico next fall. *Veronica Foley*

freshman musician into a leader her peers trust.

"Her genuine kindness and warmth inspire her peers to follow her with enthusiasm and trust," Hilborn said. "She leads not just with her hands, but with her heart."

Gjertson found that leading a marching band and captaining a swim team require different approaches.

"In band, I have a more forward leadership because I do lead the band through all of our marching rehearsals," she said, explaining that her swimming role is more about supporting teammates.

Her schedule occasionally forces her to miss swim practices for band competitions and vice versa. She credited her coaches and instructors with helping her manage both.

Beyond the competition

Gjertson takes college-level courses, completing much of her schoolwork in the morning before heading to campus for swimming and band.

She also volunteers with environmental organizations, participating in habitat restoration and litter cleanups. Closer to home, she has worked with students from Vaughn

and Minter Creek elementary schools as a high school cabin leader at fifth-grade camp.

Both of her parents work in environmental education, and Gjertson grew up surrounded by the woods and water of the Key Peninsula.

"I've been around nature for my whole life, and I have a passion for protecting our climate," she said.

At New Mexico, she plans to major in environmental science and eventually pursue graduate studies. She's considered careers ranging from environmental education to working as a park ranger.

Although she doesn't expect to continue marching in college, she hopes to keep playing music with community groups.

For now, Gjertson hopes to reach the podium at the Nov. 13-14 state championships in Federal Way, improve her personal bests and perhaps break another school record.

Hobbs believes her legacy at Peninsula will extend beyond the record books.

"I think this school will remember her less for her speed and more for who she is as a person," he said. ■

About the Wauna Earthquake — And That Other One 1,100 Years Ago

CHRIS RURIK, KP NEWS

Perhaps the most surprising part of last month's magnitude 4.2 earthquake — speaking for my mind now, not my poor heart, which rocked me harder than the quake — was finding out where it had occurred. It originated right here on the Key Peninsula, just north of Lake Holiday and Doyle Pond northwest of the SR 302 and KP Highway intersection.

How did we end up with an earthquake to call our own? The answer involves a fault zone only discovered in the last quarter-century, and it ties the Key Peninsula to deep, potentially catastrophic movement across Cascadia.

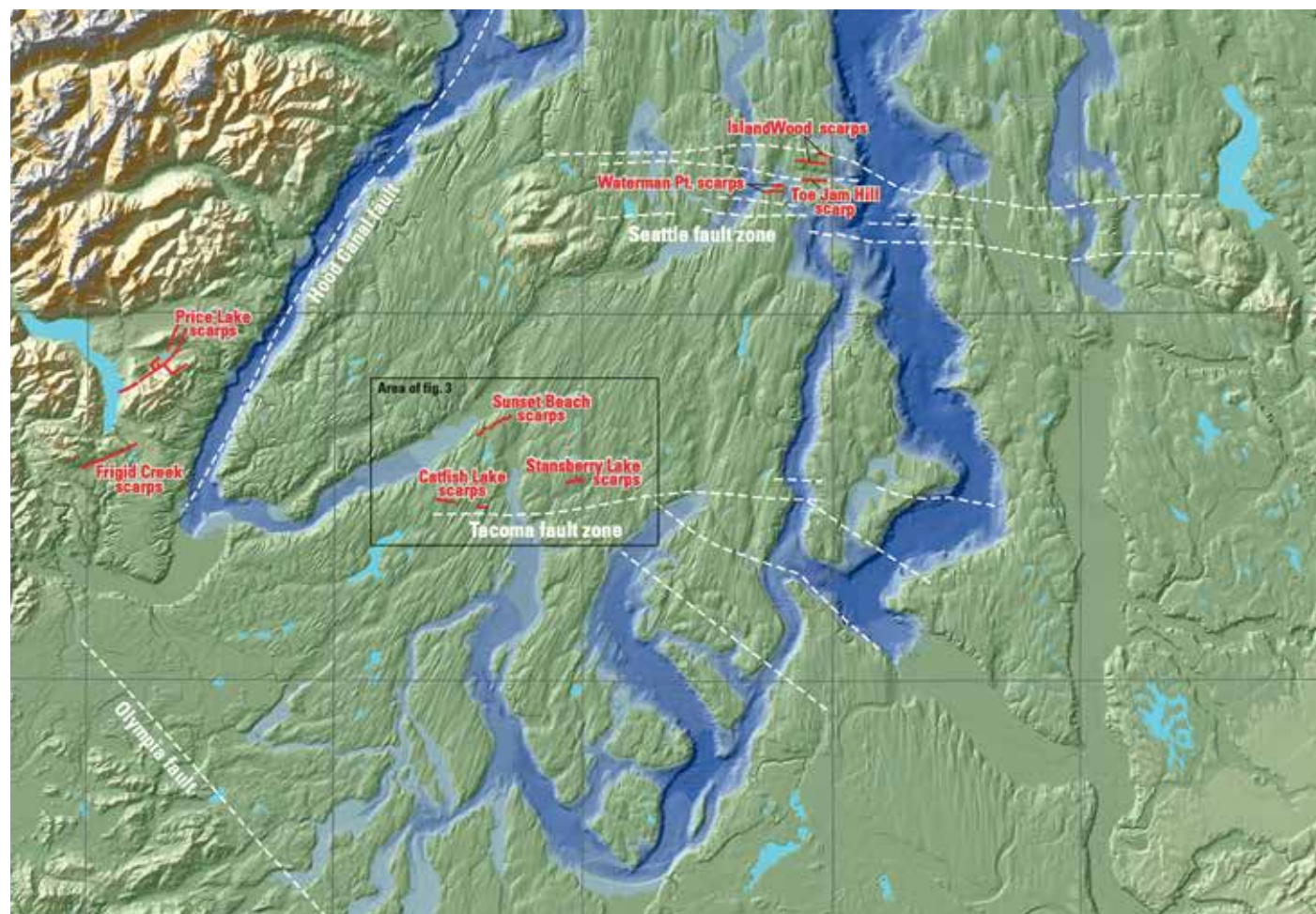
First, some basics. An earthquake is a release of tension in the Earth's crust. Along a zone of rupture, which may stretch for many miles in large earthquakes, huge blocks of the crust suddenly slip past each other. From this epicenter, shock waves travel outward in concentric rings, fading as they get farther away.

Our earthquake's hypocenter was 17 miles underground (the epicenter is the point on the surface), a figure calculated by triangulating the shock waves' arrival times at dozens of seismographic stations in a regional network maintained by the University of Washington and the United States Geological Survey.

Around here, some folks had things rattling in their workshops for 15 seconds. Others felt two quick jolts and nothing more. I could swear I heard it before it hit, a low whooshing rumble like a truck in the driveway, followed by shaking that lasted a few seconds at most. One friend said she got excited; she loves the deep power of things like thunder and fighter jets. Another was reading in his recliner and felt nothing.

The scale for earthquake magnitude is logarithmic, meaning that each successive number represents a tenfold increase in earthquake magnitude. The 2001 Nisqually earthquake, a magnitude 6.8 that I rode out in an early computer lab full of folding tables and metal chairs, was about 400 times larger in magnitude than this 4.2 quake. The magnitude 7.1 earthquake I experienced in Anchorage in 2018, when I ran outside and had to wait long seconds for the shaking to stop, and was shocked when most Alaskans shrugged and went about their day, was about twice as large as the Nisqually quake. And the magnitude 8.8 earthquake I experienced in Chile in 2010 — well, that was a whole different beast, 50 times bigger than the Alaska quake.

That's a story for another time, but maybe



Major fault zones and late-Holocene fault scarps in the neighborhood. A scarp is a small, step-like offset or cliff where one side of a fault has moved vertically relative to the other. USGS

now you can give my heart some grace for pounding when this little shake hit. My daughter just grinned. When I asked her how her first earthquake felt, she said, "Like the house was moving over bumps — very fast."

The USGS has a form on its website where you can report your experience, including your emotional response. It's more than an exercise in the humanities. Local terrain and geology have a big impact on how an earthquake's shaking is expressed. Solid bedrock, for example, shakes far less than mud or infill. Shake intensity maps, created using seismograph data as well as the firsthand reports of those who felt the earthquake, show that the amount of shaking and patterns of damage are hardly as simple as concentric rings.

This one may have been small — it says a lot that the theme was excitement rather than fear, even close to the epicenter — but the fault responsible, known as the Tacoma Fault Zone, is capable of much larger quakes.

The relatively small offshore Juan de Fuca Plate, which stretches the length of the Cascade Range, is being shoved under the North American Plate. Its disintegration in Earth's mantle fuels the Cascade volcanoes.

Such a tectonic plate margin may seem simple in outline, but at a regional scale, islands, basins, mountain ranges, and bits of ancient

island arcs are all caught up in continental movement, resulting in complex regional networks of fractures, uplifts, strike-slips, and subsidence.

Several east-west fault zones cross Puget Sound, with blocks between them rising or folding back to accommodate an inexorable north-south squeeze.

The Tacoma Fault Zone was found as part of a Puget Sound-wide effort in the early 2000s to use advanced subsurface mapping to better understand where large earthquakes might occur. The Tacoma Fault Zone runs from Allyn across the northern part of the Key Peninsula, roughly under the Purdy spit, across the Gig Harbor Peninsula and southern Vashon Island and possibly as far as Federal Way.

After the mapping data revealed it as the southern boundary of the Seattle Uplift, a "pop-up structure" just to our north, researchers set out to find on-the-ground evidence of past quakes. They discovered deformed sediment in shoreline bluffs. More tellingly, they found places in Allyn and Burley, north of the fault, where coastal marshes had been lifted above the high tide line, suddenly altering their plant communities. South of the fault, in the intertidal zone of Wollochet Bay, they found a still-rooted Douglas-fir

stump, evidence that the elevation there had suddenly fallen.

The evidence was consistent among sites. The fault had ruptured right to the surface — land on the north side pushed up; land on the south side pushed down — with an offset up to 12 feet. By dating freshwater peat layers, buried plants, and the stump's outermost rings, they deduced that the earthquake occurred about 1,100 years ago.

Subsequent work has uncovered more evidence for that quake, now estimated to have been a magnitude 7.1 that was a full rupture of the fault plane, 35 miles in length and extending from the surface to 9 miles in depth.

That was around 900 CE. Now hundreds of thousands of people and buildings are within striking distance of the Tacoma Fault Zone. Geologists say similar earthquakes are almost certain to recur, though the timeline is unknown. Both the USGS and U.S. military have modeled the modern effects of such a quake. Possible impacts include a tsunami in the Port of Tacoma, liquefaction throughout the Puyallup floodplain, landslides, thousands of injuries, and thousands of damaged buildings, with many collapsing.

Heck, if it happens again and again, our peninsula might just end up underwater. ■

The Epsteins Share One Last Season on the Seahawks Sidelines

After 27 seasons coaching Peninsula football, Joel Epstein is watching his youngest son become one of the Seahawks' top defenders.

EDDIE MACSALKA, KP NEWS

For most of his football career, Asher Epstein wore No. 43, the same number his father wore during his playing days. Entering his senior season for the Peninsula Seahawks, he switched to No. 4.

Head Coach Clay Mauro noticed. He asked Joel Epstein, his defensive coordinator, how it felt to see his son abandon the shared number.

"His senior year, his choice," Joel said. "I think No. 4 looks good on him."

For Mauro, the moment captured what he had watched unfold over two years: Asher growing increasingly independent while his father learned to appreciate it.

"It's been really cool to see Asher grow into his own and to see Joel have that moment of accepting Asher growing up," Mauro said.

The Epsteins are running out of Friday nights on the field together. Joel has coached Seahawk defense since 2000, long before Asher was born. Now he is calling plays for a son who has become one of the team's most disruptive defenders. Asher, a 6-foot-4, 230-pound senior and all-Puget Sound League defensive end, had 57 combined tackles through seven games, including eight for loss, 3.5 sacks, nine quarterback hurries and three blocked kicks.

He learned the game from the man on the sideline, though not the way most kids do. There wasn't much tossing the football around the backyard. Catching passes took a back seat to hitting blocking bags, practicing hand techniques, and learning how to tackle.

"I wasn't as concerned with him being able to throw the ball," Joel said.

When Asher decided in fifth grade that he wanted to play because his friends were joining, Joel was happy to support him.

"I never told him to play defense. I never told him to play football," he said.

Asher took to defense early, but Joel said it wasn't until the past two seasons that he developed the relentless mentality he wanted to see.

"I was just waiting for him to flip the switch," he said. Before games, he would remind Asher to "be a game wrecker."

For Asher, that means pursuing the ball wherever it goes, even when the play develops away from him.

"You've got to have a mindset where no one can stop you," Asher said. "You're just gonna rip stuff up and totally tear through everyone and do what you want."



PHS Senior defensive end Asher Epstein and his father, defensive coordinator Joel Epstein celebrate their first Fish Bowl win together as player and coach. *Courtesy Epstein family*

That approach has Peninsula 5-2 overall and 4-0 in the Puget Sound League Nisqually Division. The Seahawks hosted the Lakes High School Lancers in the regular-season finale to determine the division title Oct. 23 (results were not available by press time).

"This has been my favorite year to this point," said Joel, who also teaches math at Peninsula. "Obviously, being with my son, but also with a group of guys that has stuck together throughout the years."

The biggest win so far came Sept. 19, when Peninsula beat rival Gig Harbor 37-8 in the annual Fish Bowl. The defense held the Tides to 116 yards of total offense, reclaimed the trophy and evened the all-time series at 24 wins apiece. It was

the first Fish Bowl victory for Joel and Asher together.

It meant something extra to Joel, a Peninsula graduate who played linebacker at the University of Puget Sound. He began coaching for the Tides in 1995 before then-Seahawks head coach Ross Filkins recruited him to Peninsula in 2000. Filkins, who led the program through 2024 and is now the school's athletic director, watched Joel set high standards for his defenders over the next 27 seasons. He also watched Asher grow up around the program.

"We're so proud of Asher because he's just grown beyond his playing ability," Filkins said. "He's become a leader for us and our entire team."

Mauro said coaches who work with their

own children sometimes struggle to find a balance, either showing favoritism or being overly demanding to avoid the appearance of special treatment. Neither seems to be an issue with the Epsteins.

"Joel is an amazing dad," Mauro said about Joel, whose daughter Julia graduated from Peninsula in 2025. "He also doesn't sugarcoat many things, which is what we love about him."

While teammates hear the defensive coordinator barking instructions, Mauro said Asher provides "a steady reminder of the more fun side of Joel."

Asher has his own way of describing the different sides of his father.

"I feel like he has three personalities," he said. "He's got the teacher personality, the coach personality, and the dad-at-home personality."

Asher said his father generally leaves coaching at the stadium, but the line isn't always clear. On the field, Asher calls him Coach, something Joel admits still feels a little strange. After Asher blocked an extra-point attempt in Peninsula's Oct. 9 win against North Thurston, Joel admitted he congratulated Asher more like a dad than a coach, and sometimes that excitement is hard to contain.

"Coaching my son has been amazing," Joel said. "I'm so proud of the fantastic things that he has been doing on the field right before my eyes."

Asher is already mapping out what comes next. He is weighing college football offers from schools like George Fox University and Lewis & Clark College and plans to study education. He wants to be a teacher, like his dad, but history instead of math.

Like most high school seniors, Asher's family time competes with school, friends, and a girlfriend, and the older Epstein is starting to reflect on their time together on and off the field.

"As he's gotten older, we haven't hung out as much as we probably should have," Joel said.

For now, they still have some fall football together, and both are hoping to hang out together deep into the 3A state playoff, with Asher wearing No. 4 and his father calling the defense from the sidelines. And while Joel may be Coach during those games, Asher can still hear his dad come through.

"There are times during the game when a little bit of Dad comes out," Asher said. "I can tell he's proud of me, and I can feel that." ■

How to Save Your Bland Thanksgiving With Salty Honey Pie

MADELEINE SPENCER

I have strong opinions about food, and they are all correct. So I won't hold your hand when I tell you that your Thanksgiving meal is bad.

It's not your fault. You're making the food you think you're supposed to, using the recipes your great-grandmother tore off the back of a can of green beans, and everyone says they always look forward to the food. They are also wrong.

The food is bad. It's almost all brown. It has zero texture, unless mushy counts as texture. Stuffing is just wet bread — the least appetizing of foods. Any vegetable on the table has been cooked to within an inch of its nutritional usefulness and then cooked some more. It's a meal celebrated at the end of harvest time that somehow ends up using everything from mushrooms to cranberries out of a can.

Why have we accepted this sorry state of affairs for so long? If we're going to be fighting about politics and making awkward chitchat with great-uncles and dotty aunts we see once a year, can't we at least be doing it over food that's actually good?

I will admit to my biases before we go any further. I grew up vegetarian in the 1990s before anyone thought that was a normal thing to do. My family was not invited to the various Thanksgiving dinners held by relatives because "What do you feed a vegetarian?" We did our own thing, of course, but the meal was mostly kind of a weird large lunch that lasted for about 15 minutes, after which we were allowed to start decorating for Christmas.

I am no longer a vegetarian, but I did grow up to be a vegetable farmer who is friends with lots of other farmers. And let me say on behalf of all of them, maybe consider spending some of the (so much!) money you're spending on this one meal with local farmers.

I have friends who raise turkeys and friends that grow sweet potatoes and friends that have hazelnut orchards, and friends that grow mushrooms, and I guarantee all of it is going to be fresher and higher quality and will taste better than anything you are standing in the checkout line for three hours to buy at Costco. (No shade to Costco, but we can do better on this.)

I said at the beginning that I have strong opinions about food and that they are all correct. But the truth is, every-



Simple to make and easy to love. *Liz Morrow*



KPCooks

one's opinions about food are correct because eating food is an inherently subjective experience. Some people don't like spicy food (incorrect, in my opinion); some people don't salt their meat enough (also incorrect); some people serve mashed potatoes that aren't a 50/50 ratio of potato to sour cream and butter (criminal). So, if you still love your Thanksgiving meal and all the shades of beige it encompasses, great, you are correct in your opinion (just not mine).

gether and have salmon from Slow Boat Fish Co. (Poulsbo) or pork from Wildwood Hollow (Lakebay) because let's give the turkeys a year to just live, you know?

But I feel like the only thing that will make you feel better is pie. And no, not pumpkin. And not pecan. And no, apple pie won't cut it either.

This pie is so good that the Brooklyn-based Four and Twenty Blackbirds bakery that created it has trademarked the name, and the recipe is asked of me so often I have a special folder in my phone with a photo.

Here it is, my annual contribution to the Thanksgiving meal — Salty Honey Pie. (And if you're saying to yourself, hey, that pie looks kind of beige, how dare you? It is golden.)

Salty Honey Pie Ingredients

- 1 stick unsalted butter, melted
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon white cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla paste
- 3/4 cup honey
- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 2 teaspoons white vinegar
- 1 to 2 teaspoons flake sea salt, for finishing
- Have ready and frozen one pastry-lined 9-inch pie pan, crimped.
- Whatever you want to use here is fine.

Procedure

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 375.
2. Stir together the melted butter, sugar, cornmeal, salt, and vanilla paste. Stir in the honey and the eggs one at a time, followed by the heavy cream and vinegar.

Place the frozen pie shell on a rimmed baking sheet and strain the filling through a fine-mesh sieve directly into the shell.

3. Bake on the middle rack of the oven for 45 to 50 minutes, rotating 180 degrees when the edges start to set, 30 to 35 minutes into baking. The pie is finished when the edges are set and puffed up high, and the center is no longer liquid but looks set like gelatin and is golden brown on top.

4. Allow to cool completely on a wire rack, 2 to 3 hours. Sprinkle with flake sea salt. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature. ■

This is the part of the column where I'm supposed to give you a recipe to counter the myriad gastronomical sins committed by this meal every year. I could describe a salad with radicchio (color!) and hazelnuts (crunch!) and goat cheese (salt!) and apples (sweet!) and tell you all the ingredients can likely be found at the Proctor Farmers Market the weekend before the holiday. I could let you know that while it's probably too late for this year, a little preplanning will get you the best turkey you've ever eaten from the folks at Tail Feather Farm (Walla Walla) or Hungry Hollow Farm (Shelton) or Bright Ide Acres (Orting). I could tell you to ditch the turkey alto-

The Sabbath Poems of Wendell Berry

CHRIS RURIK, KP NEWS

A man walks from field into forest. It is Sunday, the Sabbath, and he has left his tasks to “lie in their places where (he) left them, asleep like cattle.”

He comes to the woods, where light becomes leaves. He reads the scars of eroded fields now overgrown. Through no doing of man, birdsong fills the air. He comes to find rest, yes, but in his workingman’s rest he seeks something larger, something that might offer an encompassing redemption.

The man is Wendell Berry: poet, mad farmer, and critic of America’s insatiable appetites and so-called progress. His Sabbath poems, gathered in “This Day” (1979-2013) and “Another Day” (2013-2023), represent a poet-farmer’s most intimate encounter with self and place.

These are the poems I turned to Aug. 31 when I heard Berry had died at the age of 92. They seek rest and hope — and don’t always find it, as they are nothing if not honest — while they trace a man walking into old age and a society continuing to race toward points of no return. Death and light suffuse them. His moods shift with the seasons. Is nothing pure? Is redemption forthcoming?

As a young man, in 1965, Berry left a cosmopolitan writer’s life to return to his ancestors’ farmland in Henry County, Kentucky. There he raised sheep and farmed with horses. His surroundings suffuse his earthy novels and poetry. His experience as a farmer gives authority to his biting cultural criticism.

Berry remains a talisman for grass-roots America for the way his work paints a portrait of a rooted lifestyle that feels present, possible, imminent. A worry I have is that his writing will be reduced, like Ralph Waldo Emerson’s, into one-liners. He argued his points with such pith that he is quotable as hell.

But these Sabbath poems are unlike his other poems, he warns us. They were never intended to be performed. They are not arguments. They derive from a tradition of silencing the human voice and surrendering

to something larger. His back-ground is Christian. His life-long allergy to institutions pushes him into the woods more often than the pews on Sabbath.

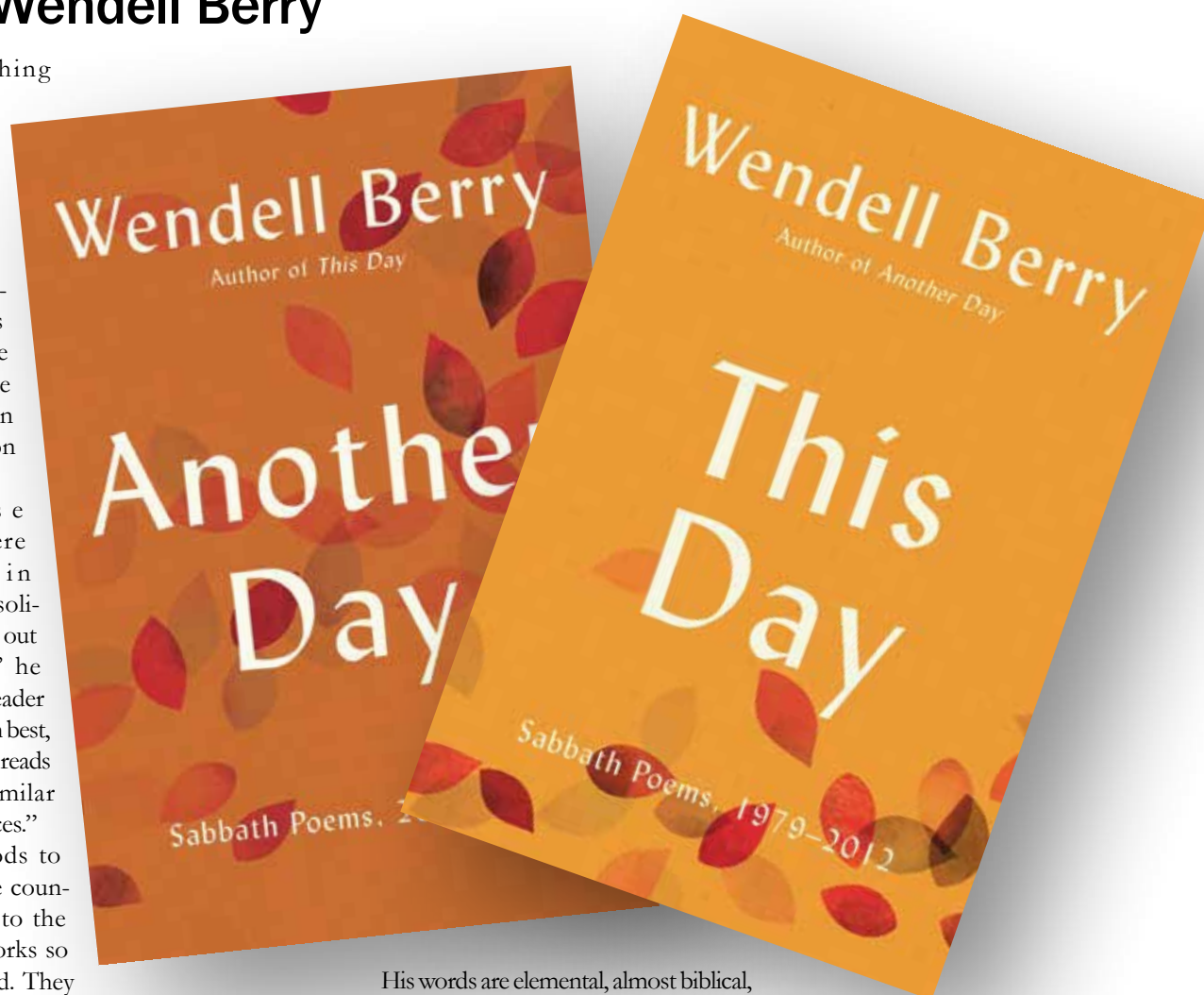
“These poems were written in silence, in solitude, mainly out of doors,” he writes. “A reader will like them best, I think, who reads them in similar circumstances.”

The woods to him are the counterbalance to the fields he works so hard to tend. They are patient. They are full of song. They will one day swallow the paths he makes through them. The context they give his life and effort cannot be created by man:

The mind that comes to rest is tended
In ways that it cannot intend:
Is borne, preserved, and comprehended
By what it cannot comprehend.

Such an attitude sidesteps the top-down responsibility we are taught to feel toward nature. It reveals the bounds of our powers. Speaking of trees, he writes, “A man / is small before those who have stood so long.” Speaking of leaves and flowers, he writes, “The light made flesh and blood.”

He returns again and again to that alchemy upon which we depend: leaves from light. It is his best analogue for the unearned grace by which we live.



His words are elemental, almost biblical, a terrain of strength even when his heart is weak. The early poems remind me of the Psalms of the shepherd David. There is great struggle in them. His whole life and work hang in the balance.

And here is where he perhaps overidealizes the woods and nature’s powers. He yearns for an order that transcends. The thicket that grows on a badly eroded field — land lost to human use by greed or sloth — with its bloodroot flowers and dappled light, holds an innate tonic power to outlast and counterbalance the technological society’s slow slide into oblivion.

Or that is what he projects upon it in the early poems. They have structure and rhyme, evidence of a yearning for order. They are built on dualistic concepts: work and rest, worry and joy, cultivation and nature, dark and light. Yet half the time the rhymes are slant: noise with rejoice, home with bloom, place with peace.

And his concepts sometimes slant too. Hope pairs with Wrong: “The field is made by hand and eye, / By daily work, by hope outreaching wrong.”

Love pairs with grief: “Where love has equaled grief, who grieves?”

His treatment of darkness may be most compelling. To Berry, darkness is a relief, a canvas for thought, a place beyond the reach of machines. It is a strong indicator that you



belong in a place if you feel comfortable there when it goes dark. Darkness is also where miracles occur: “The seed is in the ground. / Now we may rest in hope / While darkness does its work.”

These unexpected twists only grow as you watch his years accumulate. He retreats from projecting his faith through poetic structure, opting instead to capture moments of grief and insight, impure as they may be. These poems are quite different from the bulk of nature poetry, in which wilderness must be exactly as unpeopled and pure as industrial society is not. Berry’s home terrain is everywhere touched by man, marked with bones of labor and generations of family. His words are tangled up in human joy and pain.

Continue with him, slowly, as friends die and a tornado tears through a beloved stretch of woods. Watch his focus drift toward the bottomland and the creek. Solace shifts like the shade on a Sunday afternoon.

He writes, “The force that brought us here remains to carry us away.” If you choose to read these Sabbath poems — especially if you do it outdoors, in your own home terrain — you will be carried into a lifetime of attempted approaches to that force. ■

“This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New, 1979-2013,” Counterpoint Press, 404 pages. “Another Day: Sabbath Poems, 2013-2023,” Counterpoint Press, 2024, 256 pages.

Wendell Berry (1934-2026) was an essayist, novelist, and poet. He received many awards for his writing, including the National Humanities Medal presented to him by President Barack Obama in 2010. He met his future wife, Tanya Amyx, at the University of Kentucky, and they married in 1957. She is an artist, photographer, and collaborator with Wendell, including on his book, “For the Hog Killing” (1979). They lived together on their farm in Henry County, Kentucky, where she still resides at age 90.



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We focus on maintaining and improving the quality of life on the KP by being a central hub and resource center to connect all residents, services, and businesses to our greater community.



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Join us every 2nd Thursday, 6:30pm
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September Grants:

\$350 to KP Community Council
for Scarecrow Contest

\$6,060 to KP Community
Services for Food Pantry

\$3,454.92 to KP Community
Services for Outreach Program



Open 10 to 4 Thursday-Saturday
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Key Center Corral 253 884-9333

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- Ages 21+
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TERMS

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TREE LIGHTING

Sunday, December 6, 2026
3:30–6:30 PM
KEY CENTER CORRAL

Photos with Santa
5:30–6:30 PM
(Time subject to change)

Photo Ops • Food & Drink • S'more Fire Pit
Local Music • Giveaways • Crafts & More!

PRINT AND ONLINE CALENDARS ARE UNDERWRITTEN BY A GRANT FROM THE ANGEL GUILD

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

To add a listing for your event or find the latest details, visit www.keypennews.org/calendar

Nov 2 Brunch and Bingo 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m., Crandall Center. Brunch is \$5, prizes are awarded at bingo.

Nov 4 Lego Club - STEAM Kids Discovery Lab 4-5 p.m., Key Center Library. Hands-on activities, experiments, and creative challenges. Designed for kids and tweens.

Nov 5 Celebrating 20 Years of Community Gathering 2-4 p.m., Crandall Center. The Mustard Seed Project is turning 20! Join in an afternoon celebration of this milestone.

Nov 5 Teen STEAM Program 4-5:30 p.m., Key Center Library. Explore, build, or experiment with hands-on projects; no experience needed. Designed for ages 13-18.

Nov 6 Friends of the Key Center Library Meeting 10 a.m., Key Center Library. Learn how you can support the library through fundraising and advocacy. New members welcome, ages 18 and up.

Nov 6 Fall Family Night 6 p.m., Harbor History Museum. A fun night of storytelling, fall-themed crafts, and delightful fun. Featuring storyteller Karen Haas.

Nov 6-7 PHS Theater presents "Radium Girls" 7 p.m., Peninsula High School. Tickets available online at www.gofan.co/WA23302.

Nov 7 Bird Walks 8:30 a.m., rain or shine. Meet nature guide Chris Rurik at the Gateway Park pavilion.

Nov 7 Free Flu Vaccine Clinic 1-5 p.m., Key Center Fire Station. Key Free Clinic; must fit established parameters for flu vaccine.

Nov 7 Pier Into the Night 6 p.m., Maritime Pier. Join the Harbor WildWatch divers and biologists from the pier as they live-stream and explain what they encounter below the surface.

Nov 8 Harbor Winds Fall Concert 3 p.m., Gig Harbor High School. Celebrate the USA's 250th anniversary at the first concert of the 2026-2027 season—free admission with a suggested \$10 donation per patron.

Nov 9 Life After Loss - Grief Support Group noon, Crandall Center. A safe and compassionate space for individuals grieving the loss of a loved one.

Nov 9 MultiCare WIC Program 1-4:30 p.m., Key Center Library. The WIC Clinic helps pregnant people, new and breastfeeding moms, and children under 5.

Nov 9 Key Center Library Teen Council 4-5:30 p.m., Red Barn Youth Center. Teen Council is your chance to help plan events, give feedback, and speak up about what teens want from the library.

Nov 10 Tacomaprobono Legal Aid 10 a.m.-noon, Key Peninsula Community Services, and 1-3 p.m. at the Crandall Center. Free civil legal help.

Nov 11 Pier Into the Night 6 p.m., 7 Seas Brewery. Join the Harbor WildWatch divers and biologists from the pier as they live-stream and explain what they encounter below the surface.

Nov 12 Mammogram Clinic 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Crandall Center. Call Mardi Landry of Community Health Care at 253-592-8863 or 253-722-1765 to set up an appointment. Have insurance information ready.

Nov 12 KP South Book Club 12:30 p.m., Key Peninsula Community Services. Call 253-884-4440 for November book selection.

Nov 12-14 PHS Theater presents "Radium Girls" 7 p.m., Peninsula High School. Matinee also available on Nov 13-14 at 2 p.m. Tickets available online at www.gofan.co/WA23302.

Nov 14 Winter Warm Up 10 a.m.-3 p.m., KP Civic Center. A holiday marketplace with handcrafted treasures and artisan goods. Enjoy food vendors and live musical performances throughout the day.

Nov 14 Fish and Forests Walk 10 a.m., Gateway Park. Join a Harbor WildWatch biologist to explore the trails at Gateway Park and learn about native species. Meet at the pavilion.

Nov 14 Open Hours at Vaughn Library Hall 1-4 p.m., 17816 Hall Road NW. Come visit during open hours at the restored historic hall; kphsmuseum@gmail.com.

Nov 17 Hootenanny 2-4 p.m., Crandall Center. Folksong sing-along and play along.

Nov 18 Veterans and Friends Coffee 1 p.m., KP Community Services. Join the gathering of veterans and friends each month at KPCCS.

Nov 18 Ready Reader Program 4 p.m., Key Center Library. A book party celebrating the Geronimo Stilton books. Join in games, crafts, and activities.

Nov 19 Key Pen Book Club 11:15 a.m., Crandall Center. November selection: "Four Against the Arctic: Shipwrecked for Six Years at the Top of the World" by David Roberts.

Nov 19 Teen Creative Space Program 4-5:30 p.m., Key Center Library. Get creative, try something new, or just be yourself. Make, write, perform, or explore your style. Designed for ages 13-18.

Nov 19 Psychedelic Science 6 p.m., Home Fire Station. November intensive workshop with the Key Peninsula Psychedelic Society. RSVP at www.kppsychedelic.org.

Nov 20 TGIF 5:30-8:30 p.m., Longbranch Improvement Club. Open to members and guests, BYOB.

Nov 21 GH Women's Co-op Makers Market 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Sehmle Homestead Park. Open to the public, support local women and purchase handmade treasures.

Nov 21 Creative Open House 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Key Peninsula Community Services. All ages and all crafts welcome.

Nov 28-29 Winterfest 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Peninsula High School. The annual PHS fundraiser for ASB. Handcrafted and artisan goods vendors, live music performances, food trucks, and a silent auction. Sunday hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m.

WEEKLY EVENTS

Monday Al-Anon Keys to Serenity 5 p.m., Key Center fire station. Group for friends and family of alcoholics.

M-W Shuttle service to Crandall Center in the afternoons for seniors 60+ and adults with disabilities on the KP. Call 253-884-2216 for information.

M-W Yoga at the Civic Center 8:30 a.m., Key Peninsula Civic Center. Schedule classes online at the KPCC website.

M-W SAIL 3 p.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440. Flexibility and balance for those over 60.

M-W-F SAIL 10 a.m., Crandall Center. 253-884-9814. Stay Active and Independent for Life, \$7 per class.

Tuesday Beginning Tai Chi 10 a.m., Crandall Center, 253-884-9814. Drop-ins welcome, \$7 per class.

Tuesday Friends of the Key Center Library Book Donations 1-3 p.m., Key Center Library.

T-TH Tai Chi 9:45 a.m., KP Community Services, call 253-884-4440 for information.

T-TH Keys to Sobriety - A.A. Open Meeting 5:30 p.m., Key Peninsula Lutheran Church, McColley Hall, 4213 Lackey Road NW, Lakebay.

T-TH Community Nights 5:30-7 p.m., KP Community Services. Games, music, and snacks. Open to all ages.

T-TH-SA SAIL 8:30 a.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440. Flexibility and balance for those over 60.

T-SA KP Historical Society & Museum 1-4 p.m., "Logging the Great Forests of the Key Peninsula." Open through Nov. 24, keypeninsulamuseum.org.

Wednesday Cards and Games 9:30 a.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Wednesday Pickleball 9:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m., KP Civic Center. Open to the public.

Wednesday Story Time for Babies 10:15 a.m., Key Center Library. Songs, rhymes, and stories just right for babies and their caregivers. First and third Wednesdays in November.

Wednesday Chair Yoga 1 p.m., Crandall Center, 253-884-9814. Drop-ins welcome, \$7 per class.

Wednesday Play Time 1 p.m., Key Center Library. Join us for play times designed to spark learning. First and third Wednesdays in November.

Wednesday Write & Share Group 1:30 p.m., Crandall Center with Carolyn Wiley, \$5 per session.

Wednesday Cribbage Club 2-4 p.m., first and third Wednesdays, Crandall Center. Everyone welcome, no experience required, 253-884-9814.

W-F-SU Alcoholics Anonymous Home Group Meeting 7-8 p.m., Key Peninsula Services Center. All are welcome, 253-414-2380.

Thursday KP Toastmasters 8 a.m., WayPoint Church, 253-514-2836.

Thursday Gentle Yoga 10 a.m., Crandall Center, 253-884-9814. Drop-ins welcome, \$7 per class.

Thursday Story Time for Mixed Ages 11:15 a.m., Key Center Library. Songs, rhymes, and stories just right for young children and their caregivers. No story time Nov. 26.

Thursday Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Key Center Corral. Call 253-432-4948 for schedule: Air Quality, Triple P, COVID-19, General HD, Water/Wells, and Healthy Housing advice.

Thursday Senior Bingo 1 p.m., first and third Thursdays, KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Thursday ADHD/PTSD Support Group 2:30 p.m., KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Friday Popcorn and Movies 12:45 p.m., first and third Fridays, KP Community Services, 253-884-4440.

Friday Yoga with Shabdrang 3:15-6:45 p.m., Home Fire Station. 3:15 - Vinyasa, 4:30 - Kundalini, 5:45 - Hatha. Bring your own mat. Message 907-988-7474 for information.

Friday Skate Night 6-9 p.m., KP Civic Center. K-3rd: 6-7 p.m., K-8th: 7-9 p.m. Entry \$6, includes skate rental and games. No skate night Nov. 13 and 27.

Sunday WayPoint Community Dinners 6 p.m. Free community dinners at WayPoint South church.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Friends of the Key Center Library Board Meeting first Fridays, 10:30 a.m., Brones Room at the Key Center Library.

Key Free Clinic first and third Thursdays, 4:30-7 p.m. (check-in 4:30-5 p.m.). KPC Office in the Key Center Corral.

Key Pen Parks Board of Commissioners Meeting second Mondays, 7 p.m. Home fire station, 253-884-9240, www.keypenparks.com.

Key Peninsula Beekeepers first Thursdays, 6:30 p.m., Key Center fire station, keypeninsulabeekeepers.com.

Key Peninsula Council Coffee Hour fourth Thursdays, 11 a.m., Key Center Corral.

Key Peninsula Land Use Advisory Commission fourth Thursdays, 5:30 p.m., Key Center Fire Station.

Key Peninsula Psychedelic Society first Wednesdays, 6 p.m., Home Fire Station.

KP Business Association Business Meeting November 3, 6:30 p.m., networking 6 p.m. November meeting location: KP Community Services.

KP Business Association Luncheon third Fridays, noon at El Sombrero, kpbusinessassociation@gmail.com.

KP Civic Center Association Board Meeting second Thursdays, 6:30 p.m., Whitmore Room, KP Civic Center, 253-884-3456.

KP Community Council second Thursdays, 6:30 p.m., Key Center fire station, keypencouncil@gmail.com. Nov. 12 meeting will feature a speaker from Peninsula Light Company.

KP Fire Citizens Advisory Panel third Wednesdays, 7 p.m., Home fire station. Public welcome.

KP Fire Regular Board Meeting second and fourth Tuesdays, 5 p.m., keypeninsulafire.org or 253-884-2222.

KP Historical Society Board Meeting first Tuesdays, 11 a.m. at the museum, kphsmuseum@gmail.com.

KP Lions Club first and third Wednesdays, 6 p.m. Potluck at Key Center fire station, 253-525-0802 or keypeninsulalions@outlook.com.

KP Veterans first and third Mondays, 7-8 p.m., KP Lutheran Church, 541-514-9371.

Lakebay Fuchsia Society first Thursdays, 6:45 p.m., KP Civic Center, Whitmore Room, 253-549-3015.

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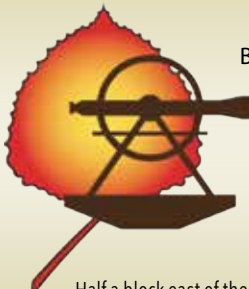
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TOP LEFT: A scene from Moon Mountain Farm.

Lisa Bryan, KP News

TOP CENTER: A Key Center witch keeps a watchful eye.

Lisa Bryan, KP News

TOP RIGHT: Readers Brett and Cheril Allen in front of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Courtesy of the Allens

CENTER LEFT: Apples in waiting for the annual apple squeeze event at the Key Peninsula Farm Tour Sept. 26-27.

Lisa Bryan, KP News

CENTER: A demonstrator at the No Kings-Get Out the Vote rally in Key Center Oct. 18.

Lisa Bryan, KP News

CENTER RIGHT: Madeleine Spencer of Honeywood Farm and artist Anna Brones at Moon Mountain Farm.

Lisa Bryan, KP News

BOTTOM: Christie Tackett of Moon Mountain Farm during a presentation to farm tour attendees.

Tina McKail

