

Breakfast and Books just part of busy days in Morton schools

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'Matilda the Musical, Jr.' closes out its two-week run at the Roxy this weekend

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Morton/White Pass freshman Liam Pelletier takes a lead from first base at Morton on Wednesday afternoon

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Buddy Rose | East County Journey

Running for the health of it

Starter Mike Anderson, left, fires off the starting gun for the nearly 60 runners in the Packwood Mountain Festival 5k and 10k Fun Run on Saturday, May 2. The festival featured food and craft vendors, live music, demonstrations and more, hosted by White Pass Country Museum. For more images from the festival, see page 8 of today's East County Journal.

Added space and services are needed at Arbor Health

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Lewis County Hospital District No. 1 commissioners reviewed ongoing strategic planning during their regular board meeting on April 29. Additional information regarding anticipated needs for the hospital district was provided by WIFPLI, a consulting firm assisting with the current strategic planning initiative for Arbor Health.

Sydney Diekmann, a manager for WIFPLI's healthcare facility planning practice, provided a presentation that continued from her discussion about local healthcare demand at last month's board meeting. The focus for this month was facility planning and financial affordability for expansion to meet the anticipated future needs for healthcare within and near the hospital district.

Diekmann stated the highest priorities for expansion of hospital services that need to be addressed in the near future are expected to be emergency department, surgery and rehabilitation services. The current hospital campus in Morton, however, is limited in the amount of

increased space that could be developed there, not only to provide those services, but also for patient parking.

For the clinics, all will need to be expanded to take advantage of opportunities for growth within the district. Mossyrock, especially, would need to add two or three times the current space available to take advantage of growth opportunities in that area. Another option there would be to add another clinic west of Mossyrock.

Regarding financing for any expansion, Diekmann said Arbor Health's financial position is improving and is currently in a strong position to take on a moderate-sized capital project of about \$30 million. Anything beyond that, however, would require considerable cost-savings strategies or increases in revenue.

Any additions to increased revenue from taxes (potentially up to \$20 million) would require approval by district landowners for a special levy, which could be challenging considering the current and likely economic conditions in the future within the district.

The current strategic planning effort will continue with another workshop at a special board meeting scheduled to take place 9 a.m., Wednesday, May 13, at the Tiller Arts Center located at 239 Main Ave., in Morton. The public is welcome to attend.

In other business at the meeting, district CEO Max Neal reported the Arbor Health Foundation's Family Resource Fair on March 21 was attended by 130-140 people representing 36 families. There were 33 vendors present at the event, which was hosted at the Morton Elementary school gymnasium. The next Foundation event will be the Senior Resource Fair, which will take place June 20 at the Morton Senior Center.

Chris Schumaker reported finances for March continued the positive trend for the year with operations yielding a net income of \$1,218 for the month, which is essentially breaking even. Highlights for the month included outpatient revenues ahead of budget projections by seven percent at \$331,454. Year-to-date outpatient revenue is ahead of budget

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Seminar discusses short-term rentals

BY AMBER BROWN
East County Journal

The world of short-term rentals (STR) and regulations in Lewis County is changing. To help owners, community members and anyone who had a passing interest to understand some of the changes, Jenn Kaatz, STR owner and real estate agent, hosted the STR conference on Saturday, April 11 with her real estate co-worker, Paulette Eaton.

The speakers at the conference were Lewis County Director of Community Development Mindy Brooks and Community Development Planner Tara Snelson. They worked together through a slideshow presenting information from the community development perspective of Lewis County.

The housing definition of an STR is "a single-family home, accessory dwelling unit (ADU), duplex, detached bedroom, RV/trailer, yurt or other similar structure," Snelson said.

To be considered an STR, the housing unit cannot be rented out for more than 30 days consecutively. "Washington state law for rural areas states that there can only be two residences per par-



Jenn Kaatz

cel," Brooks said. She made it clear that the size of the parcel is not taken into account. For example, someone with a .17-acre parcel and some-

one with a 50-acre parcel will still only be allowed two residences.

As to instituting regulations, Brooks said, "The county regulates all land usage. STRs are new so new regulations must be implemented." STR's in its various forms has been around for a long time, however discussions surrounding how STRs are affecting housing availability, business and commercial ventures and housing affordability have only started since roughly the 2020-21 rise of the real estate market. Even Washington State Legislature has been having conversations regarding STRs.

The main regulations that Lewis County are requiring are for an STR to be registered with the county by Jan. 1, 2027, and

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White Pass School's interim Superintendent jumps right into action

BY AMBER BROWN
East County Journal

At the regular meeting of the White Pass School Board on Monday, April 20, the five board members swore in the new interim superintendent, Mark Westley. He started his duties immediately and will continue to be the interim superintendent through the end of the 2026-27 school year.

Angela Bowen, business manager and acting superintendent, gave the district report to the school board. The Future Farmers of America (FFA) grant that had been applied for had been approved for the full amount. "The \$20,000 grant will go toward hydroponic stations, mulching bins and everything need for a chicken coop and run," Bowen said. The check is set to arrive before the next school board meeting.

"The FFA participated in the Gifting of Blue and the all the students who applied



Mark Westley

have received a jacket," Bowen said. The Gift of Blue program,

also called the Blue Jacket Program, is where every student who receives a jacket is left feeling like they are a part of something bigger.

To honor reading week, both the elementary and junior/senior high school created book covers digitally inserting the pictures of teachers. The posters are displayed on the classroom doors. The covers include "Curious George," "Charlotte's Web," "James and the Giant Peach" and more covers.

There is a White Pass Junior/Senior High School committee that is in the process of developing a new

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Chris Johnson | East County Journal

Award winners

Morton High School winners of the 2026 Powerful Examples of Excellence awards were recognized at a ceremony hosted on Tuesday, May 28, at the high school. The winners include, from left, front: Noemi Lopez for Citizenship, Siara May for Citizenship and Mazzie Martin for The Arts. Back: Gus Greiter for Leadership, Kohen Ingalsbe for Athletics, Briar Pousson for Career Technical Education and Daniel Waleski for Most Improved. Not pictured is Jadya Holmes for Academics. White Pass School District will honor their award winners during the Senior Tea on May 27 and Mossyrock School District will honor the awardees at a year-end assembly on June 5.