Whittier Mayor, Vice-Mayor Look Forward
By Marc Donadieu
Glacier City Gazette

The City of Whittier’s general election in early October featured three city council seats for a three-year term. Dave Dickason and Thomas Wagner defeated incumbent Mayor Daniel Blair, who had served in the position for six years.

Whittier operates as a second class city with seven city council members elected by voters. The council chooses the Vice-Mayor and Mayor from among its members. The positions carry no more power than other council seats, and a City Manager, also chosen by council, administers.

The Gazette interviewed Dickason and Vice-Mayor Peter Denmark to learn about their goals and the issues facing Whittier.

The council unanimously chose Dickason as Mayor after he had finished his first three-year term.

“I was surprised it happened,” Dickason said. “It wasn’t something I expected. It’s an exciting challenge.” He also understands the downsides of the job, saying, “It’s a thankless job. You’ve got a target on your back. There’s no pay.”

As mayor, Dickason is responsible for knowing the city’s issues, running meetings and following up to make sure the administration and council live up to their commitments. Dickason says economic development is one topic he is focused on. He sees different opportunities for businesses and industry while maintaining what Whittier unique.

GVT Drivers
By John Pfeifer
Staff Writer

Glacier Valley Transit (GVT) provides free public transportation year-round in Girdwood, but its workers are more than just bus drivers. Sometimes, they’re a one-person welcoming committee for new arrivals. In the summer, they serve as tour guides, and year-round, they’re a friend to the many regular riders going to and from work or just hopping on the bus for a few minutes to chat and go for a ride.

Jeff Locke is one of GVT’s three full-time drivers. “One of the best parts of my job is getting to know people. My regulars. They’re people I would never have met if I weren’t a driver,” he said on a recent drive.

Locke has been working for GVT almost five years. He came to Girdwood in April 2000 to just hang out for the summer, but he never left. “I’ve made friends from all over the world,” Locke said, and he’s kept in touch with many of them. “China, Jamaica, Serbia, I’ve met a half-dozen countries. ‘We get a lot of Australians. Out of all the countries, I meet more Australians than anyone else,’” he said.

“If people want, I give them a little tour. Mostly I point out what businesses are in town. They always want recommendations about where to eat,” he said. “They also like to hear the story about the ghost trees down by the inlet.” During the 1964 earthquake the bedrock dropped nine feet, and the trees were soaked with saltwater, creating today’s Girdwood Ghost Forest.

Locke explained how sometime the tourists have misconceptions about what Girdwood offers visitors. “When I say I’m taking them downtown, they’re expecting a Walmart and a movie theater. I tell them, well, your downtown is nothing like our downtown.”

Locke said, “One of my favorite questions is, ‘How many people live here?’ I say around 2,000, and they say, ‘So, you must know everyone then.’ And I say, ‘What, you have 2,000 friends?’”

Dawn Skadan is another full-time driver and has been working for GVT two-and-a-half years. She’s equally enthusiastic about her job. Last year, she decorated the buses for Christmas and people liked it so much, she’s doing it again this year. In fact, she’s expanded to other holidays. During Thanksgiving week, the buses will be adorned with turkey drawings made by students at the Girdwood K-8 School. “They went all out and made some great decorations,” she said.

Skadan is also known as the Disco Lady (at least she’s called that by one of her riders). On Friday and Saturday nights, she puts up a disco light and plays dance music on the bus speakers. “I tape it up to the visitors. I tape it up to the visitors.”

Dave Dickason is one of many volunteers attending work parties to improve Whittier’s trails.

GVF&R’s 60th Anniversary
Part 3 - Chief Michelle Weston
By Marc Donadieu
Glacier City Gazette

This article is the third of a five-part series featuring interviews about Girdwood Volunteer Fire & Rescue (GVF&R) during parts of its 60-year history.

From an early age, GVF&R Chief Michelle Weston dreamed of becoming a firefighter, and a move to Girdwood inadvertently allowed her to realize her dream.

As a child, I used to call she went on was after watching a movie I really loved it. I wanted to becoming a firefighter, and a move to Girdwood inadvertently allowed her to realize her ambition.

“You know, I used to watch TV shows like Emergency! on tv, and I loved it. I wanted to be a firefighter or a paramedic when I grew up.”

However, Weston’s parents insisted she go to university. She graduated with a Masters degree in forestry from Univ. of Alaska Fairbanks, she moved to Girdwood in August 1996. She met then Chief Michael Tu- mey, who made her an offer to join the fire department.

“He was a super fabulous guy who was welcoming and kind,” Weston said, “Come on in, let’s do something.”

Weston joined GVF&R with no training and was gradually taught to be a firefighting through firsthand experience. Fire service is much more regulated today than it was over 20 years ago. After a couple of years with the department, Weston was shown how to drive and operate the FWFD Tender, an old style of water Tender, an old style of water truck that she had no prior experience with. After driving it around the school a couple of times, her training was complete.

Weston took EMT 1 training when the opportunity arose. The second call she went on was after young students from Girdwood K-8 School recently visited the fire hall for a tour.

Look Forward
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Glacier City Gazette

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See Back Page
Moments in Time

By Morgan Smith
Staff Writer

As we finish overindulging ourselves with candy from Halloween, we settle into the idea of Thanksgiving. A day of gathering with those we care about and sharing a meal reflecting on what we’re thankful for.

In 2005, Jim Doepken “thought Girdwood was a community in which a community meal would work,” he explains. The event wasn’t to be a fundraiser. It didn’t have a purpose other than just bringing people together for Thanksgiving. The event also helped all of the newer residence recently moved to Girdwood for winter work get a chance to meet other community members. Since Jim was not only the Pastor at Girdwood Chapel, but the Chaplain for the Girdwood Fire Department, it only seemed natural bringing the two organizations together to help conduct this Community Thanksgiving dinner.

So for several years they held the dinner in the equipment bay at the fire station with the vehicles pulled out. Chief Bill Chadwick would make his famous deep-fried turkey and others were encouraged to bring something, but there was always food leftover. Jim would distribute the leftovers to those who could use it. He also took food to the ski patrol the following day to make sure the food didn’t go to waste and was used for a good cause.

Around 60 people attended the community dinner in the first few years with the event reaching over 100 attendees at times. So once the community center was built and open, the dinner was moved there. The year the Girdwood Fire Department got its addition, the event was held in the Girdwood Chapel off Timberline. Even though throughout the years the location hasn’t always been consistent, the premise is the same. Sharing a meal with those we cherish and a community we care so much about.

“My thought was that there are enough folks in Girdwood who are a long way away from family that it might be a nice community gesture to come together in the spirit of Thanksgiving and giving and community. The people of Girdwood Chapel provided more turkeys than we could eat, the drinks, and all of the paper goods. It was fun. And it could not have been done without a lot of leg work from the Girdwood Fire Department and the Girdwood Chapel,” Doepken notes.

Terry Sherwood, longtime volunteer and participant, filled me in on some current Community Thanksgiving dinner details. Currently back to being held at the Girdwood Fire Department in their spacious kitchen, they were able to support over 400 attendees last year.

As participation grew, the concern for their ability to provide fresh food for the whole event. Three years ago, they asked the community to assist in providing side dishes.

“It’s really become a real community event,” Sherwood says. “Girdwood Chapel and the Girdwood Fire Department do all the organizing and other non-profits in town pitch in by supplying side dishes and serving. Last year we had several local musicians provide music during the event.”

This year the Community Thanksgiving Dinner is being held on Wednesday, November 27 from 1-8 p.m. at Girdwood Fire Hall. All are invited to attend and participate. And a big thank you goes out to all of those who donate and volunteer. This holiday season we are thankful for you and all that you do for the community.
Community Calendar

Nov. 27
Community Thanksgiving Feast, Fire Hall, 3-8 p.m.

Nov. 28
Community Fun Run/Walk for all ages,
Registration 9:30 a.m. at Daylodge,
Start 10 a.m., route TBD by conditions -
approximately 2-3 mellow miles, Free Entry!

Dec. 2
Girdwood Trails Committee,
Girdwood Community Room, 7 p.m.

Dec. 3
Public Safety Advisory Committee,
Girdwood Community Room, 6 p.m.

Dec. 5, 12
Health Insurance Open Enrollment,
Girdwood Community Center, 12-6 p.m.,
Open Enrollment ends Dec. 15 for insurance
through the marketplace.

Dec. 8
Food Pantry, Girdwood Chapel, 2-4 p.m.

Dec. 9
Land Use Committee,
Girdwood Community Room, 7 p.m.

Dec. 12
Turnagain Arm Community Council meeting,
Valley Bible Chalet, 7 p.m.

Dec. 16
Girdwood Board of Supervisors Meeting,
Girdwood Community Room, 7 p.m.

Dec. 17
Whittier City Council, Public Safety Building,
Council Chambers, 3rd Floor, 7 p.m.

Dec. 22
Food Pantry, Girdwood Chapel, 2-4 p.m.

Event listings for Turnagain Arm communities in the
next Glacier City Gazette Community Calendar should
be emailed by Jan. 4 to marc@glaciercitygazette.net.

Live Music

BROWN BEAR SALOON
Indian
Free pool and $5 burgers (in house only)
every Wednesday, 12-11p.m.

Winter hours:
Fri.-Sun. 12 p.m.-12 a.m.,
Mon./Tue./Thur. 3-11 p.m.

CHAIR 5
Girdwood
(shows 10:30 p.m.)
Dec. 5 – HWY 9

SILVERTIP GRILL
Girdwood
Dec. 2 – Open Mic with Andy Mullen

2019 Winter 49er

Publication Date: Dec. 11
Advertising Deadline: Dec. 5

See website advertising page for details or
e-mail marc@glaciercitygazette.net

LEFT – Some of the current members of Girdwood Volunteer Fire & Rescue.

RIGHT – Girdwood Brewing Company Beer Ambassador Josh Hegna and GVF&R Chief Michelle Weston hold up the sign for Engine 41, an American pale ale brewed to celebrate the department’s 60th anniversary. A dollar from every Engine 41 sold will be donated to GVF&R.
FROZEN IN TIME: A look back at the week that was...

By Emily Maxwell
Associate Editor

November 24 – Two days after JFK’s assassination, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby shoots presumed assassin Lee Harvey Oswald with a .38 revolver in the basement of the Dallas police headquarters. Oswald had been brought to the basement, where police and press were gathered, before he was to be transported to a more secure county jail, when Ruby stepped out of the crowd and fatally shot him. Ruby features prominently in Kennedy-assassination theories. - 1963

November 25 – Swedish chemist and engineer Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Prizes, patents dynamite. He finds that when nitroglycerin is incorporated into diatomaceous earth, it becomes safer and easier to handle. The name, “Nobel’s Safety Powder” is considered before he settles upon dynamite, from the Greek word for “power.” - 1867

November 26 – The first bill is introduced into Congress to organize the Territory of Alaska. It dies in committee. - 1867

November 27 – Formed Board of Supervisors Dan White storms into San Francisco’s City Hall and fatally shoots Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk, one of the nation’s first openly gay politicians and admired activist, after Moscone decides not to reappoint White to the city board. White blamed his actions, in part, on a steady diet of junk food, which becomes known as the “Twinkie Defense.” The following year, White is charged with voluntary manslaughter instead of murder. - 1978

November 28 – The Grand Ole Opry begins broadcasting live from Nashville. One of the longest-lived and most popular showcases for western music, the Opry features some of the country’s most well-known musical acts, including Willie Nelson, Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn and Johnny Cash. - 1925

November 29 – Coffee joins the list of rationed items in the United States. In spite of record coffee production in Latin America, the growing demand from military forces and the demands placed on shipping require the limiting of its availability. - 1942

November 30 – Mrs. Elizabeth Hodges of Sylacauga, Alabama, is struck by a meteorite after it crashes through the roof of her house, bounces off a radio and into her hip. The space rock weighs 8.5 pounds and is seven inches long. While Hodges is not seriously injured, she reports suffering a nasty bruise. - 1954

The LOCALNEWS

GIRDWOOD • BIRD CREEK • INDIAN • PORTAGE

By Morgan Smith
Staff Writer

This article is the sequel to last issues piece that I found and shared. And the one thing I can think to say as I read this piece is, just be yourself. You never know what kind of enjoyment others will get out of what you create. This article comes from The Local News created by Four Valleys Community School, May 1981, Volume 1, Issue 5, written by G. Gordon Scott.

Martians In Portage

You were probably wondering why the men from other planets have been to Portage, Alaska, of all places. I write this sequel with hesitancy, for the few people who know may be uncomfortable with the knowledge. If you are faint of heart or cringe at the thought of hiking to the outhouse on a dark and moonless night, it’s time to start reading “Alice in Wonderland.” Do not continue this report as you may never find a spot less likely than Portage? Who would suspect them here?

Johnny Cash performs at the Grand Ole Opry in 1965.
Headline Reads

3 Compelling Stories from Home & Away

By Emily Maxwell / Associate Editor

INTERNATIONAL – from cnn.com

China tells gaming arcades to ban children outside school holidays

China is taking steps to curb online gaming addiction by ordering arcades and computer cafes to deny access to minors outside public holidays. From January 2020, entertainment businesses should not allow minors to log on, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism said in a statement posted on its website Wednesday.

“(This will) promote the healthy development of the industry and meet the growing needs of the people for a better life,” the statement said.

Enterprises that create gaming equipment are encouraged to tap into China’s “traditional culture” and “actively promote the core socialist values,” the statement added.

Sun Lei, a senior consultant at Beijing’s TA law firm, said a ban was already in place but it had rarely been enforced. He saw the announcement as a warning by Beijing that it is serious about addressing the problem.

“It is certainly a part of re-emphasis of the government on gaming addiction,” he said. “But whether it will be effective is still unclear.”

In recent years, the Chinese government has sought to reverse what it sees as a growing trend of gaming addiction in people under 18. Earlier in November, it announced a curfew, banning gamers whose registered age is under 18 from playing online between 10 p.m. and 8 a.m.

On weekdays, minors are only allowed to play up to 90 minutes, and up to three hours during weekends and holidays.

Sun said it was not clear whether the law could be enforced, given the number of machines that would have to be monitored.

National – from npr.org

Barr Announces Plan To Address Crisis Of Missing And Murdered Native Americans

U.S. Attorney General William Barr announced a national plan on Friday to increase the federal government’s role in reducing the number of Native Americans who are murdered or reported missing every year.

Barr announced the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Initiative after a meeting with tribal leaders and law enforcement officials at the Flathead Reservation in Montana, home of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

“American Indian and Alaska Native people suffer from unacceptable and disproportionately high levels of violence, which can have lasting impacts on families and communities,” Barr said in a statement. “Native American women face particularly high rates of violence, with at least half suffering sexual or intimate-partner violence in their lifetime. Too many of these families have experienced the loss of loved ones who went missing or were murdered.”

As NPR’s Camila Domonoske reported last year, “Native women living on tribal lands are murdered at an extremely high rate – in some communities, more than 10 times the national average, according to research funded by the Department of Justice. And in part because of jurisdictional challenges, the disappearances can be hard to track and prosecute.”

And the crisis is not confined to reservations since more than 70 percent of Native Americans in the U.S. live in urban areas. A study by the Urban Indian Health Institute found that in 2016 there were 5,712 reports of missing American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls, but the Justice Department’s database of missing persons database only logged 116 cases.

Alaska – from ktoo.org

Study finds marine mammal viruses are traveling between oceans as sea ice recedes

As sea ice in the Arctic decreases due to climate change, it’s opening the way for more than cruise ship travel. Scientists have found evidence that links the virus spread to the emergence of a virus in Arctic marine mammals that has killed thousands of seals in European waters.

While the virus isn’t proving harmful to Arctic species and those who subsist on them, its presence highlights a new disease risk for the region.

In two outbreaks – one in 1988 and another in 2002 – the Phocine distemper virus, PDV, killed thousands of European harbor seals in the North Atlantic Ocean. University of California Davis researcher Tracey Goldstein said the virus spread to multiple species but hit seals the hardest.

“The virus in seals causes them to have respiratory disease. They get pneumonia,” Goldstein said. “It also affects their neurologic systems, so you’ll see animals coming up on the beaches coughing, some of them having seizures, being unaware of their surroundings.”

The disease is native to the Atlantic Ocean, but in 2004, PDV was found in Arctic sea otters for the first time.

Since the early 2000s, the Arctic has seen declining sea ice, opening new open water pathways between the Arctic and Pacific Oceans. A 15-year study published this month by Goldstein and other UC Davis researchers found that the new pathways are allowing contact between Arctic and sub-Arctic populations. Goldstein says that means diseases can also be carried across oceans.

“As ice changes, and animals move further, they will come in contact with new species and bring whatever it is that they normally have that may not be killing them into the Arctic,” Goldstein said. “And so we just have to be aware of that and continue to monitor for that.”

Get your pet featured in Pet Parade:

Email Marc Donadieu at marc@glaciercitygazette.net
Keeping It Local for the Holidays

By Emily Maxwell
Associate Editor

The season of giving is upon us, and with holiday parties and Secret Santa gift exchanges just around the corner, the gift-buying season is ramping up. This Friday is the notorious Black Friday, with its Big Advertising, hordes of shoppers and, of course, plenty of media on hand to document the ensuing chaos. From 2006 to 2018, 12 people died and 117 were injured as a result of Black Friday shopping, whether from stampedes, fights or falling asleep while driving home due to lack of sleep.

Luckily, between pop-up shops and brick-and-mortar businesses, Girdwood locals have tons of opportunities right here in town to check loved ones off their gift list. Gift shop Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard, the new(ish) kid-on-the-block affectionately known as MoHuCo, will unveil new holiday gifts when they reopen this Friday, November 29th. MoHuCo, located in the log cabin adjacent to Jack Sprat Restaurant, was opened in summer of 2018 by Jen Weits. The cozy, little shop features “objects of wonder and whimsy for the human and canine soul,” including candles, luxurious blankets, cookbooks and cooking utensils, dog toys, handcrafted jewelry and a variety of skin and body care items for both men and women. This holiday season, they’re inviting customers to come in and create their own wish lists of shop items. The lists will be kept on file for friends or family wanting to pick up a gift for their loved one.

On Wednesday, December 4th, MoHuCo will host the local Boy Scout troop, which will be selling their Christmas wreaths among cozy fires in the beer garden, while Jack Sprat features a Boy Scout-themed Burger Night. On Saturday, December 21st, a holiday unto itself in Alaska, Girdwood Brewing Company (GBC) will host the Girdwood Maker’s Showcase from 2-8 p.m., featuring an entirely local and female roster of artists including Namaste in AK, Elizabeth Ellis, Shred Maiden, Dharmic Spruce, Copper Wolf Co., Rambler Knits and Raeanne Krugger. At 3 p.m., GBC will tap a special edition pin cask of their Hippy Speedball coffee stout, combined with Alaska Saltworks’ Prince William Sound sea salt, coconut, maple and vanilla.

Josh Hegna, co-founder of GBC and Beer Ambassador, says locals supporting locals is what inspires brewery events. Each weekend from now through winter solstice, the brewery will host local artists, including Meg Smith, Charlie Renfro, Shred Maiden and the artists of the Showcase. “We book artists that are close to us geographically, personally and philosophically,” said Hegna. “We like to give up-and-coming artists a platform to sell their goods.” In keeping with the community spirit, the brewery takes no commission from artwork sales. The brewery also has new swag, including hoodies and hats, just in time for holiday gifting.

Paige Hvamstad, owner of Copper Wolf Co., one of the featured Showcase artists, began crafting dreamcatchers while in college as a creative way to spend her free time. Later, a friend in Girdwood suggested she make dreamcatcher earrings and a local trend was born. “I love adventuring, whether it be mountain biking, hiking or snowboarding, and being able to wear my art in any of those environments,” said Hvamstad, who is also a brewery employee. She points out that Girdwood has supported the brewery, and the brewery is happy to repay the favor in kind.

Other local favorites for gift-giving include Thriftwood, for one-of-a-kind gemstones, jewelry, singing bowls, vinyl records and more. For the adventure hound in your life, stop by Powder Hound Ski Shop for all the gear and accessories they’ll need to shred the mountain this season. For locally made jewelry, leggings, trucker hats, ceramics, artwork and more, check out Slack Tide Gallery.

Gifting in Girdwood

Photos by Emily Maxwell / Glacier City Gazette

TOP LEFT – Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard
TOP RIGHT – Pairs of Copper Wolf Co. dream catcher earrings
BOTTOM RIGHT – Vinyl at Thriftwood

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BOTTOM RIGHT – Vinyl at Thriftwood
Late fall is fickle around Turnagain Arm, with short days and overcast skies mixed with mostly rain and some snow.

Scenic Bird Point offers a mix of contrasts and textures to a careful observer when conditions are not great.

Though the views are grand, paying attention to smaller scenes is just as rewarding and sometimes surprising.
Snow Vibes and High Fives: Skier and Rider Education Movies for Local Youth
By Carolyn Seramour
FVCS

This December Four Valleys Community School and High Fives Foundation are partnering to bring a series of skier and rider safety education movies to be shown to Girdwood youth and their families. Each movie night is sponsored by a Girdwood-based ski industry business, helping to reinforce the outreach effort and safety message.

The High Fives Foundation is a non-profit based in Truckee, California whose mission is to prevent life-changing injuries and provide resources and hope if they happen. Their video series and B.A.S.I.C.S (Being Aware Safe In Critical Situations) program was created to reach young athletes in order to promote smart decision making in the mountains and prevent injuries of any kind.

Each movie features famous skiers and snowboarders telling their own stories while promoting injury awareness. The videos also interview athletes who have suffered an injury from a skiing or snowboarding accident and are on the path to recovery.

“What interested me about the videos is that they are filmed and presented just like a Warren Miller type of ski movie, but they are designed with safety messages in mind,” said Catherine McDermott, organizer and director of FVCS. “We are hoping to inspire and educate our local kids to make great decisions while out skiing and riding this winter”.

Chugach Powder Guides, Alyeska Resort and Powder Hound Ski Shop are sponsoring the video series. “I think it is important to have local businesses that are part of the ski industry involved to reinforce the idea that promoting safety is paramount in all aspects of the sport whether in the backcountry, or pushing the benefit of wearing a helmet, talking about what to do in a collision, or how to stay safe in the terrain park,” said McDermott.

In addition to helping present the movies, Sponsors are providing door prizes and a grand prize for a drawing on the final night. Girdwood Middle School teacher and Alyeska Ski Patrol member Scott Hickox will be the MC of the events.

“Our target audience is skiers and riders in 4th grade and up. But really, the idea that being safe and smart on the ski hill is good one for everyone to hear, no matter your age,” said McDermott. “Bring your family, bring your friends, and let’s hope it snows soon.”

Movie showings will take place on Tuesday evenings December 3, 10 and 17 from 7-8:15 p.m. in the commons of the Girdwood K-8 School. There is no charge for the events.
Pet Parade

Hades
By Leah Kay Simons

Hades is a 4-year old Red Doberman from Quebec. He’s a libra and is a very picky eater. While he’s a natural guard dog, he is the biggest baby you would ever meet. He whimpers whenever other animals are sad, mean or upset. He has to sleep under the covers and loves wearing clothes.

Scout
By Diane Olthuis

This is Scout, a Hope kitten. She was born in mid July. Every person is a new plaything. Everyone, especially children, love her.

Ringo
By Cynthia Wilson

This is Ringo my grandchildren’s dog. As you can see he’s minus one leg. It doesn’t stop him from fetching balls going for hikes and searching the Internet. I guess it’s a handicap only if you think of it as a handicap.

Outstanding Philanthropist Award: Connie and Harold Casey

Glacier City Gazette was given a copy of the speech on Nov. 15 posthumously presenting the Outstanding Philanthropist Award to Connie and Harold Casey, who were longtime Girdwood residents.

The Outstanding Philanthropist Award is presented to the individual or family who has demonstrated exceptional civic responsibility by providing ongoing and major financial support as well as strong leadership to community-wide major fundraising projects.

Today the Outstanding Philanthropist Award is presented posthumously to Connie and Harold Casey.

We decided there is no better way to describe the late Connie and Harold Casey than in the words of their good friend, Larry Daniel in his letter of support for this nomination:

“I arrived in Girdwood in June 1974. The second person I met was Connie Casey and within the hour, I had met Harold Casey. (I suspect that only Casey’s Mother and Father called him Harold, everyone else just called him Casey).

Connie was the Front Operations Manager for the Nugget Inn at Alyeska and Casey was the Bar Manager. Connie almost always had a smile and Casey occasionally smirked. Connie and Casey never had any children, so they made up for that by taking every young “little”, ski bum, cocktail waitress, bar tender, carpenter or welder they met under their wing if by conversation or a little help when they needed it.

Within a year or so, Casey opened “Casey’s Spirit Shop” on the board walk next to the Bake Shop. From that vantage, Casey kept track of just about everyone in Alyeska and Girdwood. Along with the “spirits”, Casey also sold popcorn, candy and soda, so his customers covered the gamut from 7 to 70.

A good Irishman, Casey was also a member of his local Catholic Church. For years our small parish rented the Methodist Chapel for Sunday evening services. By the late 90’s, we felt we needed to raise the money for our own church. Connie and Casey stepped forward to make the largest donation from a Girdwood resident. And they helped us out several more times with substantial donations, most unsolicited.

Connie and Casey were not flashy. They drove a Dodge sedan for a very long time and later, a couple of Subarus. Their true wealth was in the endless relationships that they developed over the years. Their living room was always full with friends stopping by for a visit. Their stories were endless. And their friends bridged several generations. Even though they had no children of their own, Connie and Casey were parents, grandparents, good friends and good Samaritans to a huge number of people.

During their lifetime, Connie and Casey gave generously of their time and energy, they helped friends with medical bills, and buying a house, and just stretching from one paycheck to the next. They are an example to all of us that one does not need to be independently wealthy to be a philanthropist and to leave a legacy.

In their estate, Connie and Harold established an endowment at Providence Hospital “recognizing their 54 years of marriage and to support their Alaskan friends and neighbors experiencing cancer.” Because of the Casey’s the Providence mission of steadfast care to the poor and vulnerable will continue into perpetuity at the Cancer Center for generations to come.

The impact of the gift is unique as another gift from their estate benefits students receiving nursing education and training through the College of Health at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The dual gifts to both organizations address health care needs from two sides – the patient and the caregiver.

Their legacy gift is the largest made to Providence by individuals since Providence Alaska Foundation began in 1983. Every now and again we hear in the news of large corporate gifts to nonprofit but planning charitable gifts through an estate takes forethought and preparation. Connie and Harold truly knew what it took to be philanthropists and for that, we remember and honor them - this year’s Outstanding Philanthropist.

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Whittier Mayor, Vice-Mayor Look Forward

Continued from front page

“We want to find ways to grow our economy, but we don’t want to ruin the culture and the character of the place. It’s a balancing act.”

– DAVE DICKASON, WHITTIER MAYOR

“Being in a small community,” Dickason said, “we don’t have a large tax base. The result is we won’t have a lot of revenue to work with. That will always be a challenge for us, which is why we need to explore ways to grow the economy. We want to find ways to grow our economy, but we don’t want to ruin the culture and the character of the place. It’s a balancing act.”

Dickason cited future construction extending Shotgun Cove Road as an important project that will benefit the city economically and increase opportunities for recreational activities. The project’s next stage starts in 2021. It will give access to city property open for development, but utilities are not part of the project.

With Dickason’s council experience, his perspective takes a long view when making important decisions, particularly those that will have an effect in the future. He says he enjoys the challenge.

“For me, it’s solving these puzzles,” Dickason said. “I get enjoyment figuring out as each problem, as each task comes up, finding ways to solve those problems so as many people benefit as possible. I try to imagine what the future could be like. I’ve got a daughter, and I always try to imagine what it will be like for her when she gets older to try to create a place that would be safe and secure.”

Dickason indicated Whittier’s relationship with Girdwood is more than a police contract, though it is an important part. Whittier’s residents dine, recreate, shop and work in Girdwood, and some of the latter’s residents work in Whittier. He appreciates the cooperation and says it’s important to find ways to keep working together and helping each other.

“I really appreciate the relationship we have with Girdwood,” Dickason said. “It’s important. The police contract has helped us out a lot. We’re an experienced police force we didn’t have before. They learn a lot being exposed to Girdwood, and they enjoy their jobs more. We’re really proud it has worked out as well as it has and the way Girdwood has helped us out a lot. We’re an experienced police force we didn’t have before. They learn a lot being exposed to Girdwood, and they enjoy their jobs more. We’re really proud it has worked out as well as it has and the way Girdwood has helped us out a lot.”

Vice-Mayor Denmark is entering his second year in the position and has served as a council member on and off for about 14 years as a Counselor at Large. As vice-mayor, Denmark has a reporting spot early on the meeting agenda and leads meetings if the mayor is unable. However, he said he has always vigorously avoided the mayor’s chair.

“The commitment it takes to do the job well is significant,” Denmark said. “It requires a passion in a volunteer position and a time commitment that I am somewhere between unable and unwilling to make.”

Denmark’s tenure on council has given him insight into the problems Whittier has experienced for decades and what needs to change. He is candid about his priorities to improve the city.

“My personal areas of focus have been the same for a couple of years in perceiving systemic issues in a city manager form of government,” Denmark said. “I have been pressing for the city to develop administrative policies to overlap all the departments of the city. The City of Whittier is operating without any written policies, and our only rule book is Whittier Municipal Code, which is antiquated and conflicting in many ways. I’ve always felt that the development of policy would allow for some consistency in administration and operations that we have not experienced over the decades.”

Whittier is in the process of completing a comprehensive plan for 2020 with a public review period of the draft ending December 15. A comprehensive plan is a mandatory five-year document used to secure grants and other funding by identifying the city’s priorities. Denmark asserts the plan contains inherent contradictions needing resolution, such as heavy industry working side by side to a community dedicated toward tourism.

“Whittier is a land of paradox and anomaly,” Denmark said. “If you look at our comprehensive plan, 58 percent of our land uses are devoted to industry, specifically the railroad and associated submarine industries. Only 10 percent of available land in Whittier is residential, and our comprehensive plan is firmly targeted on tourism and recreation, so there is a paradox right there to resolve.”

Denmark proposes creating a master development plan for the city to guide future growth beyond what the comprehensive plan allows. He said numerous user groups are suffering from seasonal overcrowding in Whittier, and it’s an issue that needs to be addressed for future needs and uses for limited real estate plots. He sees the city as a blank canvas and hopes the council can incorporate some planned development to determine what the city will look like in five, 10 and maybe 50 years.

“Our short-term challenge is trying to quickly develop short-term infrastructure to manage what amounts to overcrowding in the summertime,” Denmark said. “There was a Saturday this year when somebody was talking about closing the tunnel because there was nowhere to park a car in Whittier. They were blocking the roads. At this point in time, on a seasonal basis, the infrastructure supply is exceeded by demand. It amounts to parking.”

“The Master Lease is a long-term challenge,” Denmark continued. “The City of Whittier is essentially a tenant of the Alaska Railroad on most of the acreage of the Whittier Moraine, so we’re a subtenant, so the business owners are a subtenant of the railroad via the city. The city doesn’t own most of the land around here. They have a long-term lease with the railroad, and we have to pay them 40 percent of lease and rent revenues as a function of the Master Lease.”

The Master Lease is for 99 years and was developed around the late 1980s as a way to resolve issues between the city and the Alaska Railroad. Denmark asserts the deal has a number of flaws that have been revealed over time.

“It was developed as an 11-hour settlement by Bill Sheffield, the governor at the time, and our City Manager Terry Williams at the legislature have given the railroad a big push to decide what the hell to do in Whittier. The Master Lease was the idea that came forward. It is my stance, that the 20 or whatever years the Master Lease has been in effect, it is a failed experiment in the state’s management of the Whittier City Charter. The city, I feel, should work to separate itself from the Master Lease.”

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Town League Is Around the Corner

By Sue Todd
Staff Writer

Alyeska will once again gather Alpine skiers, telemarkers and snowboarders to compete in ever popular eight-week Town League race series this coming ski season. According to Brian Burnett (aka Burntski), General Manager for Alyeska, the event has been held every year since the mid 1980s, and it will continue again this year. This season, registration will be held on January 9, 2020, and the race season will run from January 16 through February 27, with a final party on March 5.

Every season, actually every night, of Town League is unique. Some seasons enjoy perfect conditions. Other seasons there is a dearth of snow. Sometimes, snow is perfect at the top of the mountain and pure slush at the bottom. It can be a surprise each week, not to mention when there is fog.

What does not change is the camaraderie among the participants and the sheer joy of competing. Burntski credits Matt Parisen for driving the events on the hill, working behind the scenes on the details. Each year, Parisen sends a team of solicitors out to collect sponsorship. Merchants from across the Turnagain Arm and Anchorage generously donate door prizes that are dispersed over the eight-week series. Winners of the prizes are randomly drawn after each race so everyone has a chance, not just those who finish first.

Before and during the races, the usual ski movies run on the TVs at the Sitzmark. However, once the races are done, and more quickly than anyone would imagine, replays of the skiers’ performances are run on repeat. Whether a stunning finish or an embarrassing fail, everyone gets to see. This moment is when the real party begins, with ribbing, drinking and celebrations that bring the noise level to a crescendo. It is all in good fun, and it continues to compete as long as I am physically able. It’s my moral obligation.

“Once there were some ladies who just came from a bachelorette party. When they got on the bus, the Backstreet Boys were playing and they went bananas. When some of them started to sing on the handrails, I had to tell them to stop,” she said. “They were nice ladies but they were having a little too much fun.”

You can meet a GVT driver by just hopping on a bus any day of the week. This time of year, GVT operates the town route, which travels from Alyeska Hotel and Resort to the Tesoro station with several stops along the way. In the summer, they add a second route up Crow Creek Road. More information is available on their website glaciervalleytransit.com.

The series was originally held on weekends, but some years back, it was changed to Thursday nights. Reportedly, John Byrne was looking for an excuse for additional night skiing. (Well played, John.)

There are several divisions for the races: A) experienced racers; B) expert skiers with gate experience; C) intermediate skiers with no gate experience; and last year a newly formed open division for mono-skiers. Teams consist of five to seven people, and both men and women must be represented.

It is best to have a variety of talent on a team, as only the top five in each division can accumulate team points, so the possibility of earning top points in several categories can benefit the team score. However, whether skiing as part of a team or alone, individual points are still accrued, and everyone who participates accumulates points.

The cost to be a part of the series is $100. Though it does not include the lift pass, it does provide pre-race practice time from 3:30-5 p.m., eligibility for weekly prize drawings, overall series awards and the Town League Final Party. Races are held each week from 6-8 p.m. The after party with video replay starts at 8:30 p.m.

Town League, according to rumor, started when there were few competitions for adult recreational racers. It provided an opportunity for adult racers of all ages to continue competing. It was, at one time, a far more serious competition than it is now. Town League today has a more recreational vibe, but the participants still bring it each week, and there is plenty of friendly individual rivalry. Kevin Desmond, who has participated in Town League for many years, says, “Hats off to the resort for organizing Town League, collecting swag and keeping it fun. I will continue to compete as long as I am physically able. It’s my moral obligation.”

Here’s to another great season of racing. See you on the mountain! (I’ll be in the Sitzmark.)
Weston explained what she enjoyed about her first run with GVF&R saying, “I like helping people. I like the teamwork. I’ve always liked team sports. There’s a team sports aspect to the fire service. It’s nice to give back to somebody when they’re having a bad day. We don’t do a lot of fires anymore. Twenty years ago, we had a lot more fires in Girdwood. Those are very exciting if you’re an adrenaline rush kind of person.”

In 2001, Weston accepted a position with the Municipality’s Wildfire Mitigation program and then went to Anchorage Fire Department to become chief of the administrative side. Weston was hired as GVF&R’s chief in May 2018. She did not apply for the position after former Chief Bill Chadwick retired because it did not have health insurance at the time.

The next time the position opened there was health insurance, so she applied. When she began, the fire hall was in the process of finishing remodeling and the equipment was not moved back in yet. The department was waiting for a certificate of occupancy, and it took about six months to create storage space and move gear and files back into the fire hall.

According to Weston, staffing GVF&R is always a challenge. She said there is a real need for Girdwood firefighters. The department has 53 people now, but firefighters who live in Anchorage cannot respond unless they are already at the fire hall. GVF&R needs people from the community because they can respond quickly when a fire happens.

When Weston first started over 20 years ago, there were not as many requirements to join the department. Today, some potential candidates are discouraged by too much structure with regulations and trainings. Weston said retention becomes a challenge when members are focused on a career path with AFD or in the medical profession. Another issue is people who would normally volunteer cannot afford to live here due to the high cost of housing.

A number of GVF&R members are joining AFD in January, and Weston would like to see them replaced by Girdwood residents. Recruitment begins in February, and there is an open house about recruitment on December 11 that will explain what candidates need to join the department.

GVF&R recently gained five EMT 1s after they passed their class, and there are five members in EMT 2 class. When the classes are offered, they are joined by members of other departments such as Hope, Homer and Cooper Landing, which is a recent development.