

Mossy students operate heavy equipment simulators

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SW WA Night Skies: Good time to see most of the planets – if the clouds cooperate

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Senior Living: Morton resident Melody Butterton provides a weekly gift of live music to Timber River Connections in Morton

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## McCurry retiring from Arbor Health Hospital District

BY BUDDY ROSE  
East County Journal

Dr. Kevin McCurry provided a medical department update for Lewis County Hospital District No. 1 commissioners during their regular meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 25. McCurry is currently Chief Medical Officer and is retiring after 33 years of exemplary service with Arbor Health. He will be stepping down effective April 1 when Dr. Mark Hanson will become Chief Medical Officer.

McCurry reported recruitment is underway to replace Physician Assistant – Certified Jocelyn Judd, who recently left Mossyrock Clinic to pursue a career advancement in dermatology. Regarding current medical staffing, McCurry said, “We have really good doctors here with a very good knowledge base.”

Regarding expansion, McCurry said primary care should be the focus for additional staffing, but space issues are currently a limiting factor for adding any staff. He noted he will be taking

part in the upcoming Strategic Planning sessions for the hospital district. How and where to provide additional space is likely to be a major topic of discussion during that planning.

In other business, Hospital District Foundation Manager Jessica Scogin reported the 2026 Family Resource Fair will be taking place 10 a.m. to noon, on Saturday, March 21 the Morton Elementary School gymnasium.

“It’s a Small World” is the theme for the event, which is being sponsored by the Roots

& Wings Foundation. About 32 community family resources will have booths and representatives available and there will be games, raffle drawings and free items for expectant families and those with young babies.

Scogin announced the Foundation received a \$45,000 donation from the Hoksbergen Charitable Trust to be used for education. The donation comes from the family of a patient who was treated here. Uses for the funds include a Nursing Education Program for interested em-

ployees and a Certified Nursing Assistant program in partnership with White Pass High School that currently has three participating students. Scogin added that the Foundation also has applied for a \$50,000 Murdock Grant with a decision expected in March or April.

Commissioner Chris Schumaker attended the Feb. 10 Finance Committee meeting and reported outpatient revenue for January was \$832,813 or 17

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Joe Bruner courtesy photo | East County Journal

Joe Bruner cuts away the wax covering to get to the light colored spring honey as he processes the honey from his hives to sell in a photo from 2025.

## Two Veterans Honey biz is abuzz

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

A buzz whispers on the breeze as a bumblebee alights atop a blooming flower. Gathering honey is a daily summer duty for bees. All the bees take the honey back to the hive where they are cared for by the owners of Two Veterans Honey Farm in Morton. David Elliott and Joe Bruner created the business a year and a half ago.

Elliott was the knowledge base behind the decision. He obtained a degree from the University of Montana to become a Master Beekeeper. He has used the knowledge to promote keeping bees in East Lewis County. “I wanted to teach and train people how to keep their bees alive through the winter. I started a bee club so that I could teach a

larger amount of people at one time,” Elliott said.

Bruner has a keen eye for detail that has helped promote the business and started making a name for themselves. Bruner’s introduction into beekeeping is a lot newer than Elliott’s. Bruner started beekeeping because he had heard that it would help him with his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). His bees did not survive his first winter season. Rather than be discouraged and give up, he sought out Elliott for his advice.

Although a number of factors played a part in what happened, Bruner’s takeaway was that he needed to leave the bees alone. “I was so excited to check on them that I

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## Town & Country Flowers proves to be fertile business for new owners

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

One generation of Morton Town & Country Flowers has come to an end while the next generation is stepping in to take the flower market into the future.

Shirley Starr owned the flower market for 42 years. Her daughter, Rebecca Starr-Justice, has been employed by the flower market for 30 years. Together, they have brought beautiful arrangements to East Lewis County for everything from Valentine’s bouquets to Mother’s Day arrangements. They catered happy events, like birthdays, and sad events, such as funerals. Through it all, they have been a foundation of the community for all things floral.

However, 42 years is a long time to work. At the end of October, maybe early November, new owner and cousin to Starr-Justice, Amy Ray said, “If Shirley ever wants to retire, let me

know.” The response from Starr-Justice was, “It might happen sooner than you think.”

After that, conversations began in earnest and all sides started preparing for the transition. On Monday, March 2, the official transfer papers were signed and Amy Ray and her sister, Angie McKenzie, became the new owners of Morton Town & Country Flowers.

McKenzie has been working at the flower market for the better part of two months to learn more of the hands-on, day-to-day operations. Ray had to finish her time at another job before being able to step into running the market. Starr-Justice has agreed to assist them through the transition before taking on a new career and as family, Starr is still available to answer the occasional question.

“It was divine that everything came together the

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Becky Starr-Justice courtesy photo | East County Journal

From left, Angie McKenzie, Amy Ray and Shirley Starr celebrate Starr’s retirement at an open house party at Morton Town & Country Flowers on Friday, Feb. 28. McKenzie and Ray are the new owners of the shop.

## White Pass Scholarship Fund auction, dinner dash Saturday

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

The annual White Pass Scholarship Fund is hosting its 12th annual scholarship auction on Saturday, March 14. “This is the one opportunity we have every year to meet the community in person,” Susan Fortin, chair of the scholarship committee, said.

The auction proceeds for 2025 totaled \$19,908 which went toward the total donations of \$117,173. The White Pass Scholarship Fund was able to pay \$63,676 in scholarships. The Fund is hoping to meet that amount at the 2026 auction.

The evening’s festivities include a silent auction, raffle, live auction, live dessert auction and dinner dash. The dinner dash auction is a new event. “Consider partnering with friends to reserve a full table for eight, then pool your money for our first ever dinner dash auction,” the yearly newsletter stated.

Some of the items that will be auctioned with be certificates from local eateries, a reclaimed barnwood sofa table from Shaker Craftsman, a hand carved wood salmon from Steve Schinnell, a Big Foot basket that six businesses contributed to, a DeWalt workstation, an airplane ride, blueberries from Raintree Nursery, high ropes experience from Cispus Learning Center and a mystery wallet filled with cash and gift cards. There are 126 items listed on the preview website, [new.biddingowl.com/whitepass2026](http://new.biddingowl.com/whitepass2026).

To participate in the auction night, tickets can be purchased by calling Fortin at 360-791-2768. The tickets are \$10 per person. “This covers our direct expenses and gives you a bidding paddle and a seat at a table for eight,” the newsletter stated.

The doors open at 4:30 p.m. Raffles and silent auction close at 6:30 p.m. Live events start at 6:30 p.m. The event will be hosted in the White Pass High School Gym, 516 Silverbrook Road, Randle.

## Budgetary shortfall has library board to seek staff reductions

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

“TRL Board approves staff reductions.” That was the title of the press release sent out to all Timberland Regional Library (TRL) patrons on Friday, Feb. 27.

“I make the motion to approve the implementation of a reduction in force as discussed for the purposes of ensuring financial stability for the remainder of the 2026 fiscal year and authorize the Executive Director to take all necessary action to implement the reduction in force in accordance with applicable policies, procedures and legal requirements,” board representative of

Grays Harbor County and vice president Dustin Loup said during the Feb. 25 board meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Since the press release sent out on Jan. 29 announcing that there was a budget shortfall for TRL’s 2026 budget, there have been two public meetings and numerous meetings between the TRL board members, staff and employee union.

“In the months ahead, our communities will begin to see the impacts of actions we must take to reduce expenditures, including an estimated \$1.8 million reduction to the collections budget resulting in fewer new materi-

als purchased, a drawing down of paid performers and presenters resulting in fewer library programs and a reduction to the amount of free printing offered to \$20 per month effective March 1.

“Less-visible operational changes will include significant cutbacks to supplies and non-essential purchases, as well as limited employee travel for conferences and training. Finally, we have implemented a hiring freeze, effective immediately, and have begun planning for staffing reductions to be effective as of May 1,” Cheryl Heywood, executive director, stated in

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