

Tribune

PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
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Mach Publishing

Volume 120, Number 1

Thursday, January 1, 2009

Mach Publishing P.O. Box 499 Snohomish WA 98291-0499



Doug Ramsay photo

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Teacher remembered for Hawaiian shirts, big heart

By LINDSAY TOLER

It was more like a stand-up comedy show than a memorial service, but Columbia Elementary School students, teachers and parents say that's just what Kirk Kaas would have wanted.

Kaas, who died of an apparent heart attack Dec. 6, joined the Columbia staff in 2006, leaving behind a high-paying business career to work with

children.

You could tell right away he was no ordinary elementary school teacher, said those who spoke at his memorial. Maybe it was the bright tie dye, Hawaiian print or argyle shirts he would wear to class.

"I looked at him and thought, 'That guy's cool. There's just something about him that is different and cool,'" said Jason Huguenin, whose daughter had Kaas as her teacher.

In his honor, students wore the same bright, bold styles to his memorial.

"Kirk didn't like to be part of the mainstream," said Wendy Eidbo, principal of Columbia. "He was not a trend setter. He was a trend breaker."

For Columbia students, parents and teachers, Kaas was more than a teacher. He was a lunch buddy to his

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Mayor's salary more than doubles

Serving as mayor is full-time, not part-time position, council decides

By LINDSAY TOLER

The longstanding question over whether the position of mayor should be part time or full time was answered last week when the City Council voted to approve a 136 percent increase to the position's annual salary.

The mayor's salary is now \$70,800 a year, up from \$30,000, bringing it closer to the median full-time salaries for Mukilteo residents and for mayors in other cities.

"The mayor has set the standard," Councilwoman Emily Vanderwielen. "He has driven a part-time position into a full-time position."

Vanderwielen presented a list of activities current Mayor Joe Marine performs that are above "the call of duty" — and above a part-time paycheck — including serving with groups such as the Sound Transit Board and the Snohomish County Association of Cities and Towns.

If council decided to keep the mayoral salary at \$30,000, Vanderwielen argued that the city shouldn't expect Marine to perform as many duties.

"What are you going to take off his plate? I would not want to be the one to make that decision," Vanderwielen said.

A \$46,090 increase was included in the recently-passed 2010 budget.

The council reduced that increase by \$5,290, which will be transferred to other parts of the \$31 million budget.

Council members said the decision to more-than-double the mayor's salary was a challenging one when the struggling economy means other city employees won't see raises this year. The City Council even cut the \$2,700 pay increase for their own salaries out of the 2010 budget.

"I do believe the mayor does deserve a salary increase, but then taking that part out of it and looking at the budget we just went through, the current economy ... I can't support pay increases for electeds when its so tough for everybody else right now," Councilman Kevin Stoltz said.

The current mayor's level of work — and the level of work that will be expected for future mayors — necessitated a larger salary, council members decided.

"It's certainly more than a part-time job," Councilwoman Jennifer Gregerson said. "I don't think you could be a good mayor if you couldn't devote a majority of your work time to this."

Gregerson added Mukilteo residents should be able to run for the office and still afford to live in the city they serve.

Marine thanked the council for the increase. "Now I can work 80 hours a week," he said, jokingly.

New group gets residents involved in waterfront issues

By LINDSAY TOLER

Many of Mukilteo's major challenges start at the waterfront: parking and traffic congestion, tourism and business development and the confusion that stems from local, regional and national bureaucracies having a stake in the area.

That's why Mukilteo residents are banding together to form the Friends

of the Mukilteo Waterfront, a non-profit organization advocating for restoration and wise redevelopment of the city's shoreline.

"For most citizens, the waterfront is an area where people can come to enjoy our area's natural beauty — whether that includes launching a boat to enjoy a day on Puget Sound, a picnic at the beach, a visit to our lighthouse or a dinner at Ivars," said

Sandy Kaduce, acting director of the group. "What we would like to see is for more people to be able to enjoy our waterfront and for our community to really be able to take advantage of all these attributes."

Tank Farm

The group, which is in the beginning stages, is the first of its kind in Mukilteo and would give residents a

voice in the discussion among local and national groups.

"There is a lot of red tape to deal with," Kaduce said. "A citizen's group could provide ... focus and be a driving force for change on the waterfront."

One "red tape" issue facing the group is the transfer of the Tank Farm, a 22-acre property the U.S. Air Force used to supply fighter jets

with fuel. The Air Force moved their fuel storage to Kitsap County, and the area has sat unused since 1990. The Tank Farm takes up 3,200 feet of prime waterfront, compared to 450 feet taken up by the ferry terminal, Ivar's Mukilteo Landing restaurant and the former McConnell's Boat House, according to media reports.

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A merry Christmas can cost you

Local charities help low-income families afford gifts for the family

By LINDSAY TOLER

Christmas can be an expensive holiday. To prepare for this week, many Snohomish County residents have been scrambling for months to find their Christmas hams, trees, lights, and, of course, presents.

So as the struggling economy means more residents are losing jobs, taking furlough days or just trying to make ends meet, groups across the county are helping others meet the financial cost of Christmas.

Christmas House, a volunteer-run

nonprofit, gives low-income residents the chance to shop for presents free of charge.

For Mike Menzia, a father of three from Sultan, the chance to go to Christmas House means he and his wife will be able to give their daughters presents this year.

"It's a little bit extra for the kids," Menzia said. "It lets them get something from us," and not just from other family members.

A day at Christmas House

A trip to the Christmas House starts at about 6 p.m. the day before shop-

ping. That's when director Silvia Bauman sees people lining up for tickets for the next day, which are passed out at 6:30 a.m. the next morning.

But it's worth the wait, Christmas House clients say. When it is their turn to shop, they get two presents, a stocking stuffer and a clothing item for each child.

"It's just really fun to watch them shop, to pick things out for their kids," said Kathleen Hickman, a volunteer with the group. She walked the floor with Menzia, guiding him

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Doug Ramsay photo

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