

Morton School Board looks to partner with ASU to offer credits for struggling students

PAGE 4

Hungry? Check out 2026 Fork & Corks

INSIDE

Mossyrock junior Annika Ball celebrates her first career home run on Saturday against Morton/White Pass

PAGE 10



The East County JOURNAL

Dedicated to serving East Lewis County since 1945
April 29, 2026 \$1

Vol. 82 No. 17 • USPS 363-940

White Pass welcomes new interim Superintendent

BY AMBER BROWN
East County Journal

Centralia native Mark Westley is the new interim superintendent at White Pass School District. His term will be from April 20 when he was sworn in by the school board until the end of the 2026-27 school year.

Westley has always been big into sports. He was in the pep band during high school. "It was euphoria all year long. We had so much school spirit," he said. During his freshman year at Centralia High School, the team went to state for basketball, junior year they went to state for

both football and basketball and his senior year the baseball team went to state.

"It was an incredible experience that created school spirit, pride and community. All of the fun aspects that come along with education," he said.

When he graduated from high school, he attended Whitworth University in Spokane to get his bachelor of arts degree in sports radio. "I worked at the on-campus radio station and the school newspaper," Westley said. He almost got the job as the sports radio announcer for the Spokane Indians. "The job



Mark Westley

went to Rich Walz who went on to work for the Mariners," he said.

Westley took a job in communications for a year with the Washington State Patrol in Yakima. He found that the jobs that he had "just weren't overly satisfying." He went back to school and attended St. Martin's University for a teaching certification. He went to work at Centralia and taught middle school math and the sixth grade.

His passion really developed with coaching. He had started by approaching his old coach, Ron Brown, who had coached at Centralia High School for 58

years, and Brown was able to get him his first coaching job. Westley then coached middle school boys and girls basketball, football and track, high school boys and girls basketball, Centralia college women's basketball and he was head coach of the Centralia High School girls basketball team. While he was at Centralia College, he recruited White Pass alum Deanna Riffe to play for their team.

He furthered his education by getting his master's degree in educational administration from Western Governor's University (WGU), which he obtained in one

See **White Pass** Page 3

MeySi farm in Mossyrock begins strawberry harvest

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Harvest of hydroponic strawberries from the MeySi farm in Mossyrock is beginning. Located at the former DeGoede farm on Mossyrock Road West, this will be the second year of strawberry harvests there. Last year, about 160,000 pounds of strawberries were shipped from the farm, according to the Telat Sipahioglu, owner of the MeySi farm.

Charlie's Produce is continuing to market all of the strawberries from the MeySi farm. Most are shipped to the Seattle-Tacoma area for sale at Metropolitan Market or Haggen stores but they are also available locally at Jeremy's Farm to Table mar-

ket in Chehalis as Hidden Gem berries. The hydroponic, greenhouse-grown berries are large and beautiful and are comparable in flavor and sweetness to local farm-grown strawberries and noticeably superior to those imported from California or Mexico that are commonly found in stores.

Telat said the strawberry harvest will be substantially expanded this year. In addition to the three-acre heated and ventilated greenhouse where berries are now being grown and were harvested last year, construction of another five-acre greenhouse is underway on the property.

Starting in about July, 35,000 Albion variety

See **Strawberries** Page 3



Buddy Rose | East County Journal

Opening Day catches

Onalaska youngsters Killian Williams, 7, and his sister Eowyn, 3, display the fish they caught at Carlisle Lake on Saturday during the Opening Day of lowland lake fishing in the state. For more images from Opening Day at both Carlisle Lake and Mineral Lake, see page 5 of today's East County Journal.

Keeping history priority to Packwood Museum board, staff

BY AMBER BROWN
East County Journal

There is a revitalization happening at the White Pass Country Museum. It has recently experienced an expansion in the name, becoming the Packwood Schoolhouse Event Center and White Pass Country Museum.

"The Packwood Schoolhouse is the most important thing to the

community, according to the results of the survey that we took," said Tracy Croshaw, president of the board. "We will be playing up the historical school part."

The expansion on the name shows insight into the changes that are coming. The new board is looking at having more events at the schoolhouse and making the space available to the public. One event option that they

are looking to promote is using the open space behind the building to host weddings. "The view of Mount Rainier from there is amazing," Croshaw said.

They are also looking into making communications with the public more accessible. They want to get a reader board where they can post announcements. They have hired a new manager, Michele Livernash, to help over-

see the resetting of the museum and growth into the future.

The board hired a social media manager, Sarah Genson, who is working with another individual who is developing the website. It will be located at Packwood.org when it is finalized. Genson has also been making more social media content for both the Museum and the Packwood Visitors Center, which is overseen by the

museum.

The outside of the museum has been a topic of discussion for the board. Livernash found a basketball backboard and net at a thrift store and had it repainted and installed. "There is a group of boys that come and play basketball almost every day. They were so concerned when we took

See **Packwood** Page 2



Charlie Plante | East County Journal

A woman rides her horse around the barrels at Rocky Top Arena on April 22. A number of riders travel two-plus hours to the facility in Salkum so they can barrel race.

Rocky Top Arena caters to barrel racers

BY CHARLIE PLANTE
East County Journal

A timer starts as a horse and rider whizzes past a clock. It gracefully bobs and weaves around barrels quickly. It slows down right after it passes the clock again, with the rider and mount turning around to see the time.

This is barrel racing, a horse-riding sport where they circle three barrels in specific patterns, careful

to avoid hitting them, otherwise the person's time is disregarded. The Rocky Top Arena in Salkum sells barrel racing horses and hosts barrel racing events.

"We want people to come up here and enjoy themselves and have a good time, no matter what level they're at," Viki Friedrich, the owner of Rocky Top Arena said.

At Rocky Top Arena, because it's a solo event,

See **Arena** Page 4

Mossy Schools facing major gym, HVAC repairs

BY BUDDY ROSE
East County Journal

Multiple school repair items were discussed at the regular Mossyrock School Board meeting on Monday, April 20. In addition to the extensive gymnasium repairs planned in the junior high, ongoing problems with the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems in several school buildings will result in major repairs taking place this summer.

Superintendent Mark Chandler said the contractor for the junior high gymnasium truss replacement has made a site visit and they are waiting for a final proposal that will also include complete removal and replacement of the roof there. Outside funding sources for those repairs have yet to be secured and are still being explored.

HVAC repairs are set to roll out this summer, and a \$1 million grant will provide funding for most of them. That grant does not cover HVAC repairs at the elementary building, however, and \$242,000 in capital project funds allocated from the school budget will be necessary to pay for that.

Chandler reported April school enrollment is 577 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students with

a total enrollment of 585. That is down three from the previous month.

Also at the board meeting, Elementary Principal Angela Bacon noted there were 37 days of school remaining and things are going well. Lots of testing will continue to take place in May, she explained, including iReady and SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium). There have been and will continue to be make-up days for those absent on testing days, she added.

Related to testing, Bacon said the Educational Service District (ESD) 113 math coaches working with fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade teachers on Professional Development days have been very effective and welcomed by the teachers.

The summer school program is beginning to take shape, Bacon reported. It will be taking place on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays over a four-week period, she noted, and will be by invitation only, with the focus on students that are in need. There have been 124 students invited with 20 parents responding, so far.

The program will include social/emotional development as

See **Mossyrock** Page 2