

Morton end-of-year events include banquet honoring FFA members

PAGE 6



Planning Commission pass retail cannabis recommendations to County Commissioners

PAGE 3

Graduation season is here – see the seniors at Morton, Mossyrock and White Pass ready for graduation ceremonies this weekend

PAGES 9, 11 and 12



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## Contentious Morton Council meeting airs grievances

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

“Since I have been coming to council meetings since I moved to Morton, I haven’t been to a meeting where Councilman (Jason) Sawyer has not been treated with animosity and this cannot continue,” Morton resident Tara Chestnut said at the regular Morton City Council meeting on Tuesday, May 26.

Sawyer brought his concerns to the other City Council members that decisions were being made by city representatives when the decision should have been made by the council. His original intent was to keep the

discussion discreet, however Mayor Rick Mead insisted that his email to the council members be entered into the public forum. Sawyer felt like reading the email out loud would be “airing the laundry” but finally consented by stating, “read the whole thing, not just the highlighted part.”

The entire email was a typed page in length and essentially stated that City Clerk LuAnn Ward, former council member Richard Vanderlip, Chief of Police Cole Courmyer and Mead had made a decision to hire a caretaker for Jubilee Park. “This was the information provided to me,” Sawyer said when Courmyer contested his involvement. Courmyer stated,

“I am not involved whatsoever.”

Ward stated that the decision to have a caretaker had actually been made by the sitting City Council from 2014 and that the city representatives were just continuing that decision. After finding that out, Sawyer acknowledged that it was a “communication breakdown” because Ward did not understand what he had been asking for.

During the discussion, several members of council tried to talk at the same time. Mead banged the gavel and stated, “I’m the chair in this room and you won’t tell me what to do.” Sawyer paused for a moment before saying, “I’m going to finish my conversation,” and proceeded to con-

tinue asking Ward a question.

The clash of personalities continued when Mead said, “This room is becoming like the ‘Jerry Springer show.’ You like to deceive us,” He said while pointing to Sawyer.

Councilman Peter Hansen said, “There are people who are causing the city to spin our wheels over silly things and it’s costing the city money.”

“What I just heard from Councilman Sawyer is that he was asking for information about accountability and process and it was not provided,” Chestnut said. “What I heard from LuAnn in her response and from

See **Morton** Page 2

## WP School Board sees new personnel

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

During the third meeting with a full board at the regular meeting of the White Pass School Board on Monday, May 18, the changes were noticeable. Board members Elise Jennings and Janet Collier were sworn in during the March 16 meeting, interim Superintendent Mark Westley was sworn in during the April 20 meeting and at the May 18 meeting, the new elementary principal, Aimee McCrite, was introduced and will take on her duties as elementary principal on July 1.

The board spent more than an hour in executive session discussing the two open positions of elementary and high school principals. They were able to decide on the elementary principal candidate but not

the high school principal. “There is no selection at this time. We will continue the interview process as more applicants are coming in,” Westley said.

A potential problem was brought to the board by parent Tim Colson, who has a 6-year-old daughter with Type 1 diabetes. In the past, he had brought his concerns to the board about making sure that she was taken care of during the day because at her age she doesn’t fully understand what it means to have diabetes.

During the 2025-26 year, there has been one teacher who fully understood the situation. Others had a vague awareness but there have been several close calls, especially while on the playground. “I can see her numbers dropping

See **WPS** Page 3



Chris Johnson | East County Journal

### Consoling finish

Mossyrock senior Leah Contreras, right, hugs Avery Tienhaara after their 400-relay at the state track meet in Yakima, Washington on Friday, May 29. For more images from the state track meet, see pages 5 and 16 in today’s East County Journal.

## Student shares thank you with committee for scholarships

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

At the regular monthly meeting of the Packwood Improvement Club (PIC) on Monday, May 11, treasurer Jeanette Blankenship shared the correspondence mail from last year’s recipient, Race McKenzie, of the funds donated to the White Pass Scholarship Fund from the PIC.

“Your scholarship helped make it possible for me to attend Northwest Lineman College and pursue a career in the line trade. The program was both physically and mentally challenging at

times, but it was an opportunity I was proud to work for. Knowing that people were willing to invest in my future was a strong motivator for me to keep pushing forward and give the program everything I had,” McKenzie stated in his letter.

Blankenship said, “This is the first time that an award winner has ever reached out to us.” Later in the meeting, the PIC voted to donate \$1,000 to the scholarship fund this year, which was doubled from 2025. The club also agreed to let the scholarship committee decide how to distribute the funds.

The treasurer’s report was delayed until the June meeting. Blankenship was having difficulty making the Quickbooks accounting system balance after the Crab Feed. The Square card reader updated its integration systems and something went wonky.

Blankenship referred to the technology manager, Kimberly Gilbraith, who also couldn’t figure it out. They asked Elise Woodsmith for assistance because she has an in-depth knowledge of the Quickbooks system. She was able to do a general account reconciliation and discovered the issue.

“The problem is with the cash income from the sales of beer at the Crab Feed. The integration systems were updated and caused it to be problematic,” Woodsmith said. She was able to identify the problem and how to solve it, however, there were 180 transactions for her to sort through and she wasn’t able to complete the report in time for the meeting, which is why it will be available at the June meeting.

The Mossyrock Assembly of God is looking to expand its presence into Packwood. They approached the PIC about hosting future meetings at the Packwood

Community Hall. The club was not opposed to their presence, but they didn’t want a new church’s presence to interfere with the Baptist Church that hosts its meetings in the basement of the building on Sunday.

Ron Blankenship, president, sent a proposal over to the Assembly of God and they will review. They don’t anticipate using the building until the fall.

Gilbraith spoke about being approached for a potential rental in 2027. The Trappers Association potentially wants to rent the

See **PIC** Page 3

## WP students protest harrasment

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

On Friday, May 29, the female students at White Pass High School staged a protest. They wore white shirts that they painted with red handprints in order to draw attention to the actions of some members of the male high school students.

The allegations are that a ninth-grade male and his friends created a “rate list” in which they would rate the body parts of females within the school. The other allegation is that a 17-year old male had a list naming 13-year old girls that they would like to have sexual relations with.

Spokesperson of the protest Jessica Coleman said, “The girls felt objectified and scared.” They are using the red handprints to represent blood. While commonly used by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women group, the symbol



Jessica Coleman courtesy photo | East County Journal

**White Pass High School female students protested on Friday, May 29, against sexual harrasment from some male students.**

is also used to represent sexual assault.

“Previous administration has swept issues like

this under the rug,” Coleman said. “The goal is for

See **Protest** Page 2



Chris Johnson | East County Journal

Mossyrock Powerful Examples of Excellence award winners for 2026 are, from left: Kyle Brockway, Freddy Solis, Miley Barnes, Adyson Barrows, Charly Berteaux, Leah Contreras, Taylor Schwartz and Lucia Hernandez-Sanchez.

## Mossyrock honors students named Powerful Examples of Excellence

BY AMBER BROWN  
East County Journal

The Mossyrock School District’s Powerful Examples of Excellence awards ceremony will be during an assembly on Friday, June 5 at the high school.

Powerful Examples of Excellence is a program brought to East Lewis County by DeVaul Publishing, parent company to the East County Journal, and Tacoma Power. This program began in 2003 and has been running for 24 consecutive years.

The three school districts involved are Morton, Mossyrock and White Pass. Each school nominated students for different categories. The suggested categories are

### Student profiles

To see profiles of the eight Mossyrock Powerful Examples of Excellence students, see pages 13-14 of today’s East County Journal

academics, the arts, community service and athletics. The schools can also suggest different categories and a few examples are leadership, citizenship and Career and Technical Education.

Each student is presented with trophies, congressional letters and gift bags at each individual school’s recognition ceremony.

See **Mossyrock** Page 2