

The Tenino Independent

May 20, 2026

Serving Tenino and South Thurston County Since 1922

(USPS 616-400) Vol. 104, No. 20 TENINO, WASHINGTON • \$1

School Board honors top THS senior scholars

Ross Kershaw recognized as Valedictorian

By Dan Fisher
 News Editor

Tenino High School's top ten senior scholars were introduced to the Tenino School District Board of Directors just prior to the May 18 School Board meeting, held in the THS library.

Topping the list is Valedictorian Ross Kershaw, who will attend Centralia College next fall before going on to Eastern Washington University to study mechanical engineering.

Salutatorian for the Class of 2026 is Milo Harrington, who will begin a tattooing apprenticeship with an eye to a career as an artist.

At No. 3 on the list is Chloe Seuss, bound for Centralia College to study fine arts, while



Photo by Dan Fisher

Tenino's School Board recognized the top 10 scholars of the Class of 2026. They are Ross Kershaw, Milo Harrington, Chloe Seuss, Miguel Espinoza, Eva Wegeleben, Samantha Smith, Haley Huber, Chase Staley, Hailey Creekpaum and (absent) Lilyana Sanders.

No. 4 Miguel Espinoza is headed to Pacific Lutheran University, where he will play football and study business.

Fifth place belongs to Eva Wegeleben, attending Saint Martin's University next fall to major in biology, while the No. 6 scholar is Samantha Smith.

She will attend Clark College to study education. At No. 7 is Haley Hubert, who will attend The Evergreen State College to concentrate on environment science.

Eighth place on the list is Chase Staley, who intends to major in music at Central Wash-

ington University and eventually to be a music teacher, and No. 9 is Hailey Creekpaum, who plans to attend the Northwest College of Design in Tacoma. Rounding out the list is Lilyana Sanders, also bound for Northwest College and eyeing a career in fine arts.

Sanders was the only Top Ten senior not able to attend the May 18 recognition event.

When the meeting got under way, recognition was given to the Tenino Garden Club and the THS Future Farmers of America for cooperating in the planting, raising and hanging of flower baskets as part of the Tenino Area Chamber of Commerce's city beautification plan. Starting May 20, baskets will be hung on light pole brackets along Sussex Street through downtown.

Chamber President Cheryl Pearce noted that the Garden Club, after some hesitation, had agreed last year to helping with the flower baskets, and FFA advisor Geraldine Maxfield added her chapter members to the effort this year.

Reluctance on the part of both groups was due to the fact that, with flowers, nothing can be guaranteed. But they brought one

See THS, page 2

Candidate John Braun speaks at Town Hall in Tenino

Skookumchuck Grange hosts Braun's first one

By Dan Fisher
 News Editor

State Senator John Braun (R-Adna) has declared himself a candidate for the 3rd U.S. Congressional District in Washington, where he will attempt to unseat Democrat incumbent Maria Glusenkamp Perez in the November general election.

An audience of 50 to 60 local residents attended the meeting Wednesday evening, May 13 at the Skookumchuck Grange Hall, and Braun began the meeting by introducing himself.

"I came to Washington in 1986 from Ohio," Braun said. "I served in the U.S. Navy and got a Navy scholarship to the University of Washington, where I studied engineering. By 2012 I got frustrated with the business climate and ran for the State Senate. For about five years we had a Republican majority there, along with some conservative Demo-

crats who sided with us on many issues.

"We balanced the budget and built a long-term budget plan," Braun said. "When the other party took over in about 2016 they dismantled all of that, and we're in real trouble now, especially with more taxes."

Braun cited his experience of running a successful business and serving for 14 years in the state legislature as qualifications for a Congressional seat.

"I think I have good skills to bring to Congress," he said. "I have four grown children who all live in other states now. I'd like to make this state somewhere they'd like to come back to. We're in better shape with a Republican majority in Congress, but it's pretty slim and this seat is one of those that have the best chance to be flipped."

Braun then opened the meeting for questions and got several, starting with how he plans to deal with the affordability issue.

"Affordability is the top issue by a mile," he said. "The two most important things we can do to address that are federal taxes and energy prices."

The next question was on the homeless and illegal immigrants.

"It's getting worse, not better," Braun said. "We have a real problem – the biggest problem has been our policy of housing first – it's failed absolutely. We need to address behavioral health and mental health. Federal funding is almost all distributed by non-profits, and some of those aren't very good at their jobs."

On illegal immigrants, Braun said the problem isn't complicated.

"It turns out all you have to do is try," he said. "All you have to do is enforce the laws we already have. We have to get after it in a humane and effective way, with local and federal officials coordinating. Washington Democrat policies prevent that."

Asked about outlawing Socialism, Braun said retaining and increasing the Republican majority in Congress will require extra effort by all his supporters.

"The Constitution doesn't prevent Socialism being voted in," Braun said. "You've got to get out and make a stand. Capitalism isn't perfect, but it's the best system yet devised."



Photo by Dan Fisher

John Braun, running for the Dist. 3-WA congressional seat, had a Town Hall May 15 at the Skookumchuck Grange Hall.

It was also suggested that the religion of Islam be outlawed, but Braun rejected that.

"Freedom of Religion is at the fundamental core of our formation," Braun said. "But we don't have assimilation now. We have to get involved – we have to get out and make it work. Put in the effort."

On Washington state's mail-

in ballot system, Braun did not actively oppose it.

"My personal preference is, going to a polling place is a civic duty," Braun said. "But we're a nation of laws and the law allows mail-in voting. We should watch it closely and make sure the rules are being followed. If we want to change that law, we've got to do the work."

Council okays dissolution of the Tenino Police Force

6-mo. contract with TCSO for police services is approved

By Dan Fisher
 News Editor

After months of public meetings and discussions on the matter, the Tenino City Council at its regular meeting on May 12 voted approval of Ordinance 943, officially dissolving the Tenino Police Department.

Council Member Jeff Eisel made one comment after the vote.

"I'd like to recognize the contributions of our police officers over the last 120 years," Eisel said after it was noted that Tenino has had a police force since its incorporation in 1906.

Earlier in the same meeting, during New Business, the Council voted approval of a Temporary Contract with the Thurston County Sheriff's Office to provide police services for Tenino for a



Photo by Dan Fisher

TCSO Lt. Malcolm Melver will be the contract officer for the deputies covering the Tenino area.

six-month period, extendable to the end of 2026. During the work session prior to the start of Tuesday's meeting, the council took comments from Thurston County Sheriff Derek Sanders and from TCSO Lieutenant Malcolm Melver, who will be in charge of directing the deputies assigned to cover the Tenino area.

Melver asked that Tenino residents continue to report crimes or suspicious activity by calling the sheriff's office or the 9-1-1 emergency line.

Also during the work session, the Council was addressed

by Aslan Meade of the Thurston Economic Development Council, who said the EDC, a lease of the Tenino Ag Park property, is requesting an extension of the lease so it will be in effect through 2036.

"Much of the funding for the project has come from the federal government through us," Meade said. "They require certain proofs of ownership to provide those funds, which our lease supplies."

Meade said EDC's completion of the project has been determined by the Council as "getting the site graded."

"We'll be breaking ground for that in August, and it should be completed within two months, even as little as one month," he said.

Mayor Dave Watterson read a report from Public Works, noting that work is continuing on the ballparks at the City Park, and has begun on the basketball/pickleball court being constructed in the park as well.

Maria Rodriguez, police and city hall clerk, reported on Tenino's code enforcement.

"We already have 20 permits this year," Rodriguez said. "That includes two pretty major projects, new roofs at Tenino Market Fresh and at the high school stadium."

In the clerk/treasurer's report, Nancy Reddick said, "We are looking at some new vendors (for city computer services and software). Revenues this year are about even with projections, and we're still working on unclaimed properties."

In the Mayor's report, Watterson told the council the Tenino Regional Planning Council (TRPC) had a meeting on the Small Cities Grant awards and addressed the Old Highway 99 paving project.

"The project starts May 19," Watterson said. "There's going to be a grind and overlay, with re-stripping to follow. That's going to be weather-dependent."

Most of the project work will take place at night, between 9 p.m. and 7 a.m., he said.

"All these things have gone to our attorney, and he's reviewing them," Watterson concluded.

During the first public comment period, T.J. Johnson, chairman of the Thurston Conservation District, told the Council that his group's plan for 2040 and beyond is "the most ambitious in our 75-year history. We're introducing the plan to all county jurisdictions and it includes provisions to increase farmland and food production. We want to partner with you on this."

Watterson also introduced a proclamation that the City of Tenino and the City Council will engage in commemorative activities during the U.S. Semiquincentennial (250-year celebration) of the nation's founding during 2026, during the Family Fun Day set for June 27 and the annual Oregon Trail Days celebration July 23-25. The proclamation was approved by the council, as were both the Temporary Sheriff's Contract and the Ag Park lease extension.

A resolution (2026-08) was approved, declaring city properties as surplus, enabling them to be sold to the Tenino Community Service Center, which is now using the properties as its offices and food bank.

Prep Sports Calendar

Thursday, May 21
 Track

Tenino, Rochester at 1B/2B/1A
 District meet, Vancouver, 3:45 pm