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Tenino chamber hears from two main speakers

School, fire district plans are outlined

By Dan Fisher
News Editor

Featured speakers at the May 20 monthly lunch forum for the Tenino Area Chamber of Commerce were Tenino Superintendent of Schools Clint Endicott and South Thurston Fire & EMS Interim Chief Kris Gray, who each described the upcoming needs of their respective districts.

Endicott said the Tenino School District had two special levies on the ballot approved in April, one for subjects not considered “general education” by the state, things such as art, music and drama. The other was a capital levy for funds to be used repairing and improving facilities for the TSD’s aging infrastructure.

“We’re replacing the HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) system at Parkside,” Endicott said. “We’re improving fencing and security on school campuses.”

Endicott said he would not go into detail on the latter subject because “we don’t want everyone to know all of our security measures.”

The superintendent described the newly-refurbished art room at Tenino High School, with its new kiln, and told his audience of improved seating at Beaver Stadium.

“Our tennis courts needed to be replaced,” he said. “When we first looked into that, the cost was quoted at \$700,000. But we were able to make a different deal that will resurface three courts for about \$220,000. The high school



Photo by Dan Fisher

South Thurston Fire & EMS Chief Kris Gray delivers a report at the May 20 Tenino Area Chamber lunch forum.

gym floor has reached the point where it can no longer be sanded and must be replaced.”

Endicott said the switch a few years ago to a seven-period day at THS has enabled the dis-

trict to offer more sections of required classes and a broader array of elective courses. But he said the district is now dealing with a problem that has been more evident since schools were

shut down during the COVID pandemic, with school policies restricting student use of smartphones during the school day.

“We are part of a mass-action lawsuit against social media companies,” Endicott said. “We’re looking at, are we massively over-reliant on technology? We have got to a point where we know how much damage screen time does to kids.”

Gray began his presentation by confirming that the Fire Commissioners for Fire District 12 have voted to remove Gray’s “interim” title and make his permanent chief.

“Our borders are not just inside this town,” Gray said. (“City,” corrected former Tenino City Council member John O’Callahan). “Our area of responsibility covers 96 square miles.”

Gray praised the Chamber members and the Tenino public in general.

“You guys have always been supportive and helpful,” he said.

Gray said South Thurston Fire & EMV has a WSRV insurance rating of five in Tenino and four for areas outside the city. WSRV is an insurance rating service, issuing ratings from 1 to 10 with the best areas represented by lower numbers.

“We have some water issues,” Gray said. “There are village hydrants near schools which only have two 2 ½ inch outlets. These cannot furnish the water flow we need and have to be replaced.

Gray said fire inspections of businesses have to be performed by a certified inspector and paying for that is a city responsibility.

Gray added that the current Tenino fire station costs TSF&EMS \$175,000 per year to operate while a site for a planned

new station is being sought.

“We’re in a holding pattern on that, we need to find a way to do this,” he said. “There has been a Fish and Wildlife report on Fire District 12 property and 12 other lots. At the cheaper end, it’s \$11 million to build a new station. We’ve got about \$5 million, plus about \$3 million in government funds. If I have to, we’ll build the new station in two phases.”

Gray said call volume is increasing, and that another manned station will be required for the Tenino area before long.

“Ten years from now, we’ll have to have another staffed station somewhere, depending on where the calls are coming from,” he said.

Gray was asked about the impact of Tenino dissolving its police force and said that action will have little effect on his operations, but said the current fire season looks ominous.

“This wildfire season is going to be awful, unless we get two or three weeks of significant rain,” he said.

The May20 meeting also included an Oregon Trail Days report, and Tenino realtor Dave Champaign spoke on plans for the July 23-25 event.

“We want to do something to bring people from the park into downtown,” Champagne said. “We’re putting up a castle bounce house on the Tenino Young at Heart Theater lot next to Castle Realty. I think pioneer and medieval themes kind of clash, so we have that separation.”

In other action, the Tenino Area Chamber of Commerce made a \$600 donation to the Tenino Stone Carvers Guild, and a drawing was held for two concert tickets. Alice Swdecki’s entry was drawn as the winner.

Couple acquitted of first-degree murder in 2024 Tenino death

Curtis and Tabitha Gibson were found not guilty by a Thurston County jury of first-degree murder while armed with a firearm, concluding a month-long trial that ended May 20.

The couple had been in custody since their arrest following the incident that took place April 16, 2024, at the Old Highway 99 Bar and Grill. Prosecutors alleged that the fatal shooting of Gaylord “Travis” Sayers was premeditated by the Gibsons.

The defense attorney for the Gibsons maintained that Curtis acted in self-defense.

The incident took place shortly before 6 p.m. that evening and began with a confrontation between Sayers and the Gibsons a few hours earlier at the Old Highway 99 Company Bar and Grill, after which the Gibsons left. They returned at approximately 5:44 p.m. Several members of the motorcycle club UMF and Sayers, a UMF initiate, were present at the bar and approached the driver’s side of the vehicle on its return.

During the ensuing alterca-

tion, Curtis Gibson was reportedly punched in the face and his phone was smashed, while Tabitha exited the vehicle and was grabbed by her ex-husband, another UMF member.

During this altercation, Curtis Gibson fired his revolver out the window of the vehicle three times, striking Sayers in the side and in the middle of the chest. Curtis Gibson was disarmed and held on the ground by UMF members until Tenino police officers and Thurston County Sheriff’s deputies arrived.

Sayers died at the scene and, after investigation of the scene, both Gibsons were taken into custody, Curtis with blood covering his face and Tabitha reportedly showing signs of intoxication. Tabitha was released after her initial arrest and Curtis was charged with first-degree murder. Tabitha was arrested again May 6 and also charged as a codefendant on May 8.

The Gibsons have been released from custody following their acquittal on all charges.

Memorial Day ceremony in Tenino



Photo by Dan Fisher

Tenino Veterans of Foreign Wars Commander Michael Scacchi (at podium) resides over a rainy Memorial Day ceremony at Forest Grove Cemetery, with (L-R) VFW Chaplain Christina Fredrickson, Jr. Vice Commander Karen Black and Ron Grantham. Olympia VFW Auxiliary member Margo Wall (with paper) placed flowers.

Washington’s GET Plan expands enrollment period

OLYMPIA — Washington Education Savings Plans (WA529) announced that the annual enrollment period for its GET Prepaid Tuition Plan is expanding. Formerly open from November through May, GET will now be available for families to enroll year-round.

The year-round enrollment matches the structure of Washington’s 529 investment plan, WA529 Invest. Both plans are now available for Washingtonians to sign up for at any time.

“WA529 is excited to make this enhancement to the GET Pre-

paid Plan,” said Lynda Ridgeway, WA529 Director. “Due to a more predictable state tuition environment and continued streamlining of processes, families now have full flexibility to open an account when it best aligns with their busy schedules and annual budget planning. However, we still encourage families to get started as early as possible to maximize their savings potential.”

With GET, savers buy tuition “units”, and 100 units is worth the equivalent of one year of resident, undergraduate tuition and fees at Washington’s highest-priced uni-

versity (currently University of Washington). This year, for the first time ever, the GET unit price is lower than the current tuition cost, giving savers an instant return on their education savings.

To celebrate expanded enrollment and commemorate National 529 Day, every new GET account opened for a beneficiary 18 years old or younger through May 29 will automatically be entered in a drawing to receive a \$529 bonus deposit in their GET account. Fifteen recipients will be chosen at random on June 1. Families can visit 529.wa.gov/promotions to

read the official rules.

“May 29 is recognized each year as National 529 Day to raise awareness about the importance of saving for future education,” said Luke Minor, WA529 Senior Director. “This year, we’re giving some new savers a head start by awarding \$529 in GET units. It’s a great way to celebrate 529 Day and get people excited about saving for education.”

Since 1998, GET Prepaid Tuition has helped families pay more than \$1.6 billion in educational costs. More than 73,000 students have used their GET accounts

to further their education in all 50 states and around the globe. Washington Education Savings Plans also offers WA529 Invest, a nationally recognized 529 plan launched in 2018 to help Washingtonians save toward college costs.

Washington residents who want to help a student save for future education costs can open a GET or WA529 Invest account at any time online at 529.wa.gov with no enrollment fee. The website also provides helpful resources, including detailed information, charts, planning tools, and answers to frequently asked questions.