

# The Focus On Wahkiakum

Section B--A Special Edition Published by *The Wahkiakum County Eagle*

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## Inside

**Off highway attractions**  
There's plenty to see in western Wahkiakum when you turn off SR 4.....2

**In and around Skamokawa**  
Skamokawa may be an unincorporated town, but it abounds with recreational opportunities and points of interest.....5

**Gray's River dining**  
Al Salazar brings years of restaurant experience to Duffy's Irish Pub .....10

**See what we saw**  
Local photographers went to work at the start of May; see their entries in this year's "Day in the Life of Wahkiakum County and Naselle" photo contest .....12

**Down on the farm**  
A couple jumps on opportunity to operate goat farm and creamery.....14

**In the old days on Puget Island**  
Long time Island resident recalls life as it used to be .....20

**Sites and events to see**  
Highlights for Wahkiakum activities .....22



The Gray's River Covered Bridge is one of the last covered bridges in use in Washington. See page 2.

Andrew Weiler



## Focus on Wahkiakum 2021

The Wahkiakum County Eagle again presents *The Focus on Wahkiakum*, our 14th “visitors’ guide” special edition.

As a visitors’ guide, *The Focus* presents the information visitors to the community need--what to see, where to go, when to be there, and what services are available.

However, *The Focus* is more than that. This year, stories feature some of the county’s most dynamic personalities who personify drive, hard work and community service.

The “A Day in the Life of Wahkiakum and Naselle” photo contest is back in its 10th year with many wonderful entries. Local photographers have shared what they saw on May 1, and some won some prizes. Be sure to pack your camera around on the first Saturday in May, 2022, so you can be part of the effort.

And now: Enjoy!

*Rick Nelson*  
*Publisher*



The Gray's River Covered Bridge on a crisp winter day.

## Driving the by-roads of western Wahkiakum County

**By Karen Bertroch**  
**Bertroch Archive photos**

When visitors drive State Route 4 heading west, there are several historic spots worth exploring. Heading west out of Skamokawa, then coming down the KM (Knappton Mill) Hill from the east, it is a short drive on SR 4 to the old town of Gray's River. There, at the left turn onto Loop Road (take second sign for best turn off SR4), stop at Meserve Park, and from there, across the highway you will see the historic home of Sam and Julia Walker, early settlers in the area. It is still standing, but not restored. When the Walkers first came to the area in 1868, they found a trapper's cabin on Gray's Bay, but Chinook Indians made it clear that the area floods so it was not a safe place. The Walkers moved fur-

ther upstream to a bend in Gray's River. When any boats came up the River, mail was left in a tree near the Walker home. Then in early logging years, steamboats brought passengers and goods for the Meserve Store. When logging became prominent in the area, tugboats pulled logs dropped into the Gray's River on down to the Columbia and then on to sawmills. At Meserve Park, there is a Lewis and Clark sign that will give you information on their journey through the Lower Columbia River.

Follow Loop Road and veer left at the sign showing the way to the Gray's River Covered Bridge a mile or so down the road. The H.P. Ahlberg family came from Sweden in 1875, built a lovely home and established a large dairy farm just below the home site. The original house still

stands north of the bridge. It has many of the early trees planted at the home, so it can be hard to see. Their dairy herd pastured south of the river, then needed to cross the river to get to the milking barn, so the county built a bridge to help all the farmers in the upper valley have access to both sides. The Covered Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Built in 1905 and covered in 1906 in order to keep the heavy winter rain off the bridge planks since it was dangerous for the cows when crossing over to the barn. The bridge was restored with a grant to the county from National Centennial funds. It continues to serve the area well. Land on both sides is open to the public for fishing, swimming, kayaking and photography. Ahlberg Park on the south side is a nice



setting for weddings and family reunions. It belongs to the local Grange since the State of Washington granted funds to buy the 5 acres of land and keep it open to the public. The large trees in the park are also historic. Mr. Ahlberg planted them himself. Both the bridge and the park areas are unique as they provide public fishing, boating and swimming for residents as well as visitors. The north end of the bridge belongs to the Sorenson family, all direct descendants of the original Swedish Ahlberg homesteaders. Back on Loop Road head back to the Gray's River town site, then turn left/west down the highway to Altoona Pillar Rock Road. This historic 9 mile road takes visitors to the banks of the Columbia River where canneries and small communities settled in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Canned salmon from those canneries all up and down the Columbia went all over the world in large sailing ships leaving from the cannery docks and out into the Columbia River. Following the Altoona-Pillar Rock Road, you will see homes and campsites, B&B's and beaches. More Lewis and Clark signs continue to tell their story.

### The pioneer church

As visitors continue driving west on State Route 4, watch for the large Deep River Bridge. Just before the bridge, look for the East Deep River Road sign. Turn right following the River Road to a "T" then turn right again where you see a small sign saying "Church." Follow that valley road a few miles and you will find the Second Historic Site in the west county area, the small historic Deep River Evangelical Lutheran Church. Donated by a landowner at the

time, it sits in a cow pasture. It represents the faith-filled Finnish settlers who came to the Deep River and Naselle (originally spelled Nasel) areas. They came already skilled in farming, fishing and logging so it was a natural place for them to settle. Naselle remains a significant community of Finnish descendants with a bi-annual Finnish Festival. The next one will be on July 29, 30 and 31, 2022. Most of the early Finns were devout Lutherans who valued their church and the ties it helped to create. The little Lutheran Church was built by settlers in both Deep River and Salmon Creek, another Finnish community just "over the hill." With no roads and a lot of mud in the rainy winters, worshippers found it difficult to walk over the high hill in the mud, so a second congregation in Naselle built their own church. The little Deep River Church

**Continued on next page**



The Deep River Pioneer Lutheran Church was standing long before the roads were paved.



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## Continued from Page 3

### The by-roads of western Wahkaikum County

replicates a typical Lutheran Church one would find in Finland. The Church continues to be used for special events, such as weddings, funerals and Christmas programs. It is completely maintained by volunteers and donations. It is very appreciated by photographers who like to take photos of the perfect replica of the Finnish outhouse to the back. Built with grant funds, it is a favorite photo for visitors to take home. The town of Deep River at one time was the bustling center of the area with stores, a theater, a hotel, saloon and daily arrivals of small steamboats that ferried goods to the store and passengers, including loggers and their families who lived miles up the valley in small logging camps. The small cabins were lifted and moved by the logging trains up and down the tracks as needed to get to the logged areas. Up the tracks from Deep River, one small logging camp, "Toonerville," had a school for the logging families known as the Maple Grove School. Eventually they had school buses also. The school building is still standing and can be seen by traveling up Salmon Creek Road several miles. Salmon Creek Road begins a few miles past Deep River before reaching Naselle. The Salmon Creek area has a deep logging history. Many of the old camp cabins have been used to build larger homes over the years since the camps closed. The road is lovely for a beautiful, cool drive on a hot



The store at Deep River Camp.

summer afternoon. Traveling along the back roads off SR 4 can be rewarding and well worth the time. There is much more to see than the highway when traveling through Wahkiakum County. Visiting the Appelo (Swedish for apple island) Archives Center and

Museum in Naselle will give visitors plenty of information about the history of the area. SR 4 itself is a state designated Scenic Byway so taking time to appreciate it is time well spent.

Enjoy your drive!



The covered bridge offers pedestrians an interesting walk.

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# Explorers will be pleased with finds in Skamokawa's nooks and valleys

**Photos and story  
By Kay Chamberlain**

When someone asks where you live, and you tell them you live in Skamokawa (Skuh-MOCK-away), the first thing they say is, "Where in the world is that?!" When you add that it's in Wahkiakum (Wuh-KI-uh-kum) County, you'll likely get the same response! But, believe it or not, this little hamlet has been around since the 1800's, and for those who have traveled to Long Beach from the Longview/Kelso area, via the Ocean Beach Highway (State Route 4), well, they've actually gone right through this little town and this county numerous times and just hadn't really thought much about it. But if you opt to stop in and do a little bit of exploring, you might be surprised at all the things that are tucked away in the valleys and roadways nearby.

Beginning at the west end of town, one of the newer buildings right on the main strip through town, and just east of MP marker 29, is the Duck Inn Restaurant and Lounge owned by Logan Britt. Years ago, the "old Duck Inn" was owned by local, "Skamokawa Pete," Arthur Peterson, but sadly he passed away in an accident and the business was put up for sale. For awhile, there was no restaurant in town at all. However, once the building was purchased, and was totally revamped inside and out, a completely new Duck Inn emerged in 2012. With the recent restrictions due to the pandemic, new outdoor seating areas were built and private "cabanas" were added

to the deck, which allowed more people to continue to come and enjoy some time at the only restaurant and lounge in downtown Skamokawa. These are terrific additions to the property that will be used and enjoyed throughout the year from now on, so you can enjoy the view and a brew and a bite or two! 360-795-6055.

As you proceed west, you will see a road just prior to the local store marked "Steamboat Slough Road." If you turn there, you will find a couple more "out of sight" but yet very popular businesses. One is Columbia River Kayaking situated on the left-hand side of the Skamokawa Landing building, and if you haven't been kayaking before, it's a great

place to learn and then be able to take some easy cruises around the nearby waterways. If you're in the area, stop by 957 Steamboat Slough Road and check them out or if you'd like more info, check them out online or just give them a call at 360-747-1044.

Just a short jaunt down the road from them is the Skamokawa Gardens Nursery at 927 Steamboat Slough Road, owned for many years by a local, Danny Silverman. His lovely baskets are known far and wide and he always starts the growing season with many veggie starts as well. During the prime growing season, he is open every day, but if you have any questions, call: 360-795-3382.

Continued on next page



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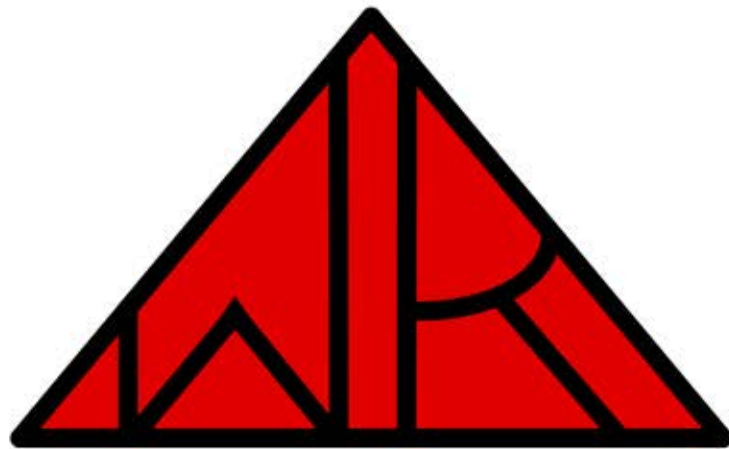
This area is also a very popular place for folks to ride their bicycles and loop around Brooks Slough or go for a nice brisk walk, while spotting the White-Tailed Deer, elk, the osprey, eagles, hawks, herons, muskrats, nutria, otters and more, so bring your camera and be prepared to be amazed.

**F**or those that make a note of mile markers, you will see that MP marker number 29 just so happens to sit right in front of the Skamokawa Resort/Hotel/Store and Post Office, on the south side of the road, as well as the historic Redmen Hall/River Life Interpretive Center on the north side of the road. These older buildings are the "main" part of the town and beings they are quite prominent, they are actually pretty impossible to miss.

Before the current highway was put in, the historic building on the hill was actually the Central School, built in 1894, and it was sitting down on the level of what is now OBH/SR 4. However, with plans for a highway to be built to connect Skamokawa to

Cathlamet threatening its very existence, the townsfolk, along with a lot of hard work and ingenuity, decided they would move the building up the hill to its current location in order to save it. In doing so it escaped the fate of being torn down, unlike the once beautiful Lamont Mansion that had been situated just to the east of it.

After operating as a school for over 30 years, all the schools in the area consolidated, and it was eventually closed. Later on, the Order of Redmen obtained it and used it for some years for their meetings as well as for a place for the community to gather, before it was left to sit empty again. A private owner bought it, then fixed the lower level up so that it was an apartment and rented it out before once again, being left to sit empty. The once big, beautiful building was really starting to look pretty tacky and it was feared this historic building would be torn down if something wasn't done soon. Thankfully, a grassroots group was formed in the mid-seventies, called "The Friends of Skamokawa" and with a lot of fund raising, hard



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Besides its historical and interpretive exhibits, Redmen Hall offers a fabulous view.

work and determination, the hall was purchased, remodeled and once again, became a source of pride to Skamokawa. If you'd like to check out this historic building, stop by and visit on Saturdays and Sundays between noon and 4 p.m. and enjoy the current Gift and Book Shop on the lower level, and you can head upstairs to enjoy the wonderful River Life Interpretive Center, which boasts large historical panels on the walls, along with amazing views. For those who can handle a few more stairs, the view from the bell tower is really a "must see!" 360-795-3007.

**T**he Skamokawa Store/Hotel building has been here for years, as have some of the other buildings near by, but the three story condo building and gazebo to the west of it are more on the newer side. However, these have attracted a lot of tourists to the area with their central location and amazing views of the river, and those gorgeous sunsets are just phenomenal! The local store has not always been open, so when the latest



owners took over, the town certainly welcomed the fact that we could get our staples close by instead of having to make a 20 mile (plus) round trip to Cathlamet. While the condos vary in size, they are all very nice and some are

quite big and roomy, with full kitchens and are great for putting up multiple people, so for large families, they are a big hit. The hotel rooms above the store have worked out great for those wishing for a spot to

**Continued on next page**



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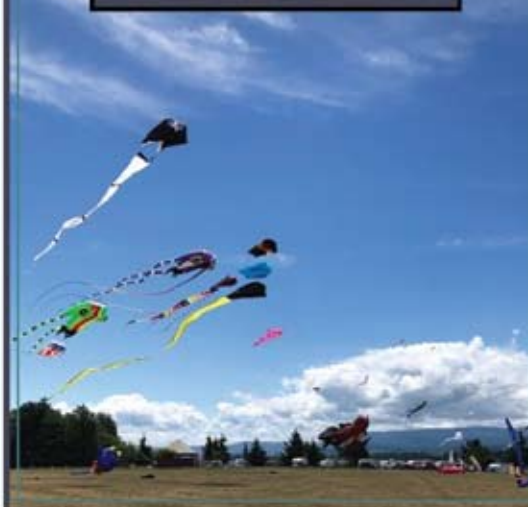
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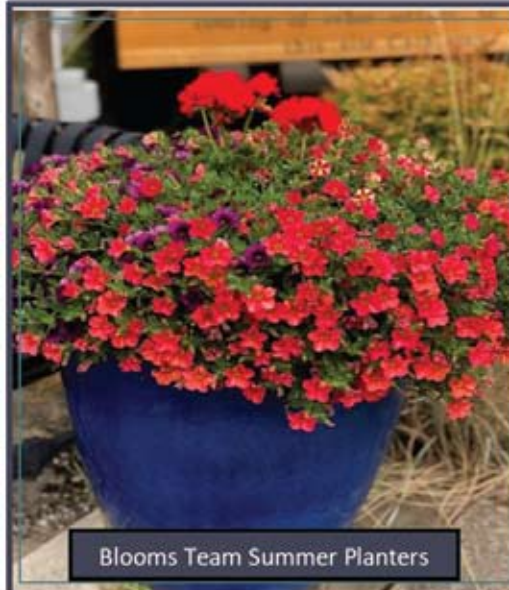
Seasonal Events and Celebrations

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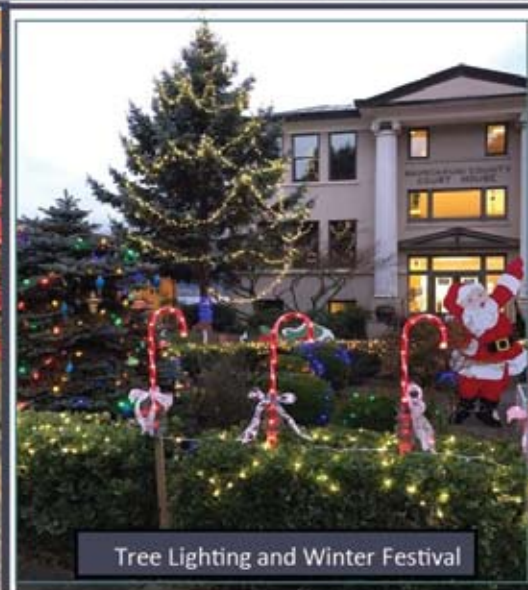
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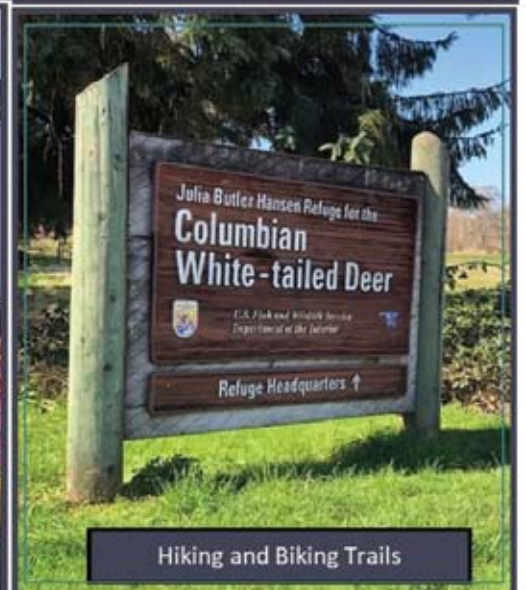
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If you were to leave SR 4 and make the turn onto East Valley Road, which is situated at the base of Redmen Hall, you will soon notice large buildings off to the left side of it. This is the site of the Wahkiakum County Fairgrounds which hosts a multitude of events throughout the year, with the biggest one being their annual fair which is held in mid-August.

After a "virtual" fair last year, this venue is back to normal this year and will take place August 19, 20 and 21, with the theme, "Hats off to the Fair." This fair has been taking place for over a hundred years, and is enjoyed by all who come by, as it still has that "country feel" to it, instead of all the glitz and glamor and high prices that bigger fairs have.

This county fair allows kids to enter their pets, farm animals, posters, plants, hand-made food and garment items, and earn some of their own money which gives them a sense of pride and accomplishment. It's also a time when family reunions and class reunions are often held so they can meet over a burger or an ice cream cone and catch up on all the latest news. For more fair information, call 360-795-3480.

Other events held at the fairgrounds are flea markets on the second Saturday of each month from 9 to 3, bingo games at various holidays and a car show is coming up on June 5, entitled "Cruizin to the Fair," so they welcome you to all of their events.

If you continued out on East Valley Road and went almost to the end of it, you would find a hidden treasure at 44 Old Chestnut Road, as the "Inn at Lucky Mud" is there. This is a gorgeous property with some beautiful

rooms, a private pond as well as other unique features, and one of them is that they have a Disc Golf Course, which meanders through the woods and is definitely a one of a kind for this area. Contact Adam and Sara Fletcher at 360-795-8770 or online.

Coming back from Lucky Mud, you will see a road off to your right, marked "Middle Valley" and if you were to turn out that way, you could find yourself at Gribskov's Glass Blowing Shop on Middle Valley Road. Kyle Gribskov has worked with many famous artists and has had his work displayed all over. He has been a generous contributor to many of the local fund raisers by donating his works for various auctions. It is a special treat to be the highest bidder for one of his sought after pieces. If you happen to be around during the Thanksgiving long weekend, you may want to check out his usual holiday sale then; it's fabulous!

As you continue out Middle Valley, you will come to "the end" where you will then turn onto Oatfield Road and you will see another unique place to stay, "The Inn at Crippen Creek Farm," located at 15 Oatfield Road. Owners Don and Kitty Speranza offer a very special service as they are known for their unique cuisine, cooked up by them, and much of it actually comes right from their farm, so it's a "farm to table" kind of experience and you can't get any fresher food than that! Not only can you stay there and enjoy their wonderful accommodations if you so choose, but if not, you can also just arrange to have a dinner party there which is quite fabulous and a real treat. For all the info about this place, check out their website or call 360-795-0585.



Hot car enthusiasts bring their rods to the Wahkiakum County Fairgrounds; they'll be back soon, on June 5. Eagle file photos by Diana Zimmerman.



Once you find yourself heading back out of the valley and you hit the main highway again, you'll want to take a right, heading west, and cross the Skamokawa Creek Bridge. You will notice a grouping of houses off to the right in a place that is called "Swedetown" by all the locals. In this group is a lovely Bed and Breakfast operated by owner, Kathleen Morgain, called "Twin Gables B & B." This property is unique in that the "twin gables" once used to be two different houses built in the late 1890's and joined together with an added on mid-section, and it's really

lovely. It also has a dock right behind it on the creek, so for those who love to kayak and canoe, this is especially convenient for them. You can stay in the main house, where you can enjoy all the perks of having Kathleen bake up some homemade breads, pies and other dishes for you, or if you'd like more privacy, there's also a "self-catering" vacation rental apartment on the property. Check out the website or FB page or call 360-795-3942.

People who are looking for a place to camp, whether it's in a tent, a yurt, a trailer

or a motorhome, can find an absolutely jewel of a place to stay, when they come to Skamokawa Vista Park, located on the Columbia River and just across the road from Swedetown at 13 Vista Park Road. This gorgeous setting allows you to experience the majesty of the mighty Columbia River, as it's not only got sweeping views of the river, but the sunsets there are absolutely breathtaking! People come from far and wide to stay so close to the river and see these views, while also seeing the huge shipping vessels ply their way up and down the river, while seemingly coming so close you could reach out and touch them! The campground has a couple of playgrounds, a couple of large covered areas, a tennis court, a basketball court and multiple horseshoe pits to keep you entertained while you're not hiking on the trails or strolling on the beach. To make a reservation, go to their website or call 360-795-8605.

If you are a lover of goats and goat cheese, and other goat related products, like their yummy caramel sauce or even lotion, you may want to head a little farther west past the park entrance, to the Skamokawa Farmstead Creamery located at 1681 West SR 4 and check that out. Again, you can check them out online, on Facebook or you can call 360-795-8700.

So, if someone says, "What's there to do in Skamokawa?," we would say, "there's something for everybody," but sometimes you just have to take a little trip off the beaten path to find it all. We hope you'll find your special place in this special village where artisans and authors and entrepreneurs abound amongst the abundance of wildlife and all of nature's wonders.





### Scenes from the fair

Kids enjoy the Wahkiakum County Fair, whether its showing off their animals or getting their own animal from a clown sharing balloon creations.

Eagle file photos by Jim Moten and Diana Zimmerman..



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# Al Salazar brings old Portland, and more, to Gray's River

**Photos and story  
By Andrew Weiler**

Al Salazar, 88, has enjoyed every minute of his 60-year stint owning and operating restaurants and music venues in the Pacific Northwest. From Zig Zag, Ore., to Portland to Grays River, Salazar has built a legacy of offering the public a unique mixture of eclectic antique-filled interiors, dynamic cuisine, and the sweet sound of music. To this day, the owner of Duffy's Irish Pub in Grays River instills the gift of goodwill and good memories with all who have the pleasure of meeting him.

**A**t the age of nine, Salazar moved from St. Louis to Portland where he lived with his parents, three brothers and two sisters. As a teenager living in the 40s, he attended Lincoln High School and eventually developed an affinity toward the restoration and repurposing of antiques.

"I appreciate the work that people put in, in those days to build homes. And anything. They put so much of themselves into it," Salazar explained. He recalled the moment in his life when his obsession began: "When I went to high school, I would sit on the front steps to eat my lunch. Right across the street there was an old ship captain's home, a beautiful home. And on my lunch, I'm looking over there and I always noticed it's shiny door knob. One day they began tearing the house down so I went over and asked if I could have that doorknob. Now that door knob lives upstairs."

**F**rom that day forward Salazar began collecting dozens of other antique door knobs which he personally mounted and framed in his home. He remembered a time while still living with his parents when his mother demanded he dispose of his "junk" quickly piling up in their basement. Salazar thought to himself: "You can't get rid of things like stained glass and other stuff. That's all passion."

Salazar eventually attended Multnomah and Western Business colleges

and went on to work with his father in the Portland restaurant scene. His father was part owner of the Bohemian Restaurant when Henry Thiele's and Jack Cody's places were around. Salazar described the cuisine of that era as old Portland cooking which included braised oxtails, liver and onions, lobster Thermidor; a lot of seafood, red beans with rice.

"It's what other restaurants were doing," Salazar explained. "Because in that time they didn't have these companies that package your food up like today. And you basically had to make your own food at your own restaurant, your own recipes. They weren't like pre-packaged frozen food that most people serve."

**A**ccording to Salazar, when he was a kid most Portland restaurant owners knew each other and competition was rare. Since the community was tight knit, Salazar had the chance to work at several restaurants and became heavily influenced by culinary practices of old Portland cooking. Eventually he was called into action in the Korean War, serving with Portland's 403 Troop Carrier Wing.

Salazar would go on to build high rises in the city which prompted the formation of Salazar Improvement Company in Milwaukee, Ore. However, after realizing that his severe allergies were connected to working construction in the city he initiated trips to the coast and remote areas where his symptoms would subside. One destination in particular where he felt comfortable and healthy was Zigzag, Ore. So he decided to leave his profitable construction endeavors to buy property in Zigzag where in 1970 he started Salazar's Restaurant. It was best known for its antique-decorated interior, especially its many varied light fixtures, according to a Pamplin Media archive.

"But there was nothing in Zigzag," Salazar reminisced. "So I say to myself, I'm going to buy this piece of property up there. And I'm going to build a restaurant just to be there.



Gray's River restauranteur Al Salazar

Because I said yeah, well I think I can cook, but it worked!" Salazar's Restaurant would be a launching pad for its first time owner.

**T**he success of his first restaurant prompted Salazar, in 1980, to return to Portland and purchase a second venue, the well-known music hall, Pine Street Theater. Pine Street Theater was an opportunity for Salazar to make a splash in the Portland music venue scene while also finding ways to impactfully support his community. For up-and-coming bands and artists Pine Street became a vehicle for launching careers. Salazar hosted numerous charity events for local organizations and is known for helping the homeless community

through his business.

"I like to be able to give something away and not answer to anyone," Salazar said.

As a private business owner he feels indebted to his employees for the value they bring to the table. He cites his past and present teams as one of the reasons for his success. If his employees are happy, then the operation goes more smoothly, more money is made, and his employees are rewarded. It's a viciously enriching cycle.

**I**n 1988, three years after buying and beginning to operate a third venue, Union Jacks Club on Burnside, Salazar ran for mayor of Portland.

"I only wanted to do some things



that I thought would improve Portland, which I still think they would have," he said.

Serendipitously, during an election parade in the St. Johns neighborhood in Portland, mayoral candidate Al Salazar noticed an eye-catching antique on the route. That antique was the National Cash Register's exhibit hall built in 1905 for the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland and later relocated. Salazar subsequently decided to drop out of the mayoral race citing displeasure of the election process. Following his restaurant and music venue trajectory, he purchased the old building and undertook its restoration which eventually manifested into Duffy's Irish Pub (the first one).

Over the course of his journey as a business owner Salazar continued to collect antiques which furnished each one of his venues. The craftsmanship of each antique carefully restored are symbolic of the effort Salazar puts into designing culinary, musical, and eclectically decorated experiences for his patrons.

For several decades Salazar simultaneously operated up to four different venues but didn't bat an eye. Eventually, it got to be too stressful and the evolving music scene presented new challenges not worth facing. Eventually, Salazar and Carl Simpson, his friend and former serviceman from the Korean War, decided they would look to retire at the same time. Carl managed Irish pubs in Portland so they discussed co-operating a restaurant and music venue together somewhere near the coast.

"We figured we would retire somewhere and then I found this place in Grays River. I stopped and looked at the river and I thought, I think we'll buy this and do it," Salazar explained.

## At the pub

Duffy's stands along SR 4, with the Gray's River flowing out the back door. The interior shines with polished wood.



In 1996, after Salazar began selling his Portland venues and finally his first restaurant in Zigzag, Duffy's Irish Pub in Grays River was born. His business partner Carl passed away before the business opened.

For over two decades Duffy's Irish Pub has served Wahkiakum County and the many patrons who've come from Portland to relive the memories of Salazar's old

Portland cooking and antique furnishings. In fact, most of the furnishings at Duffy's are from previous venues including chandeliers, event posters, and part of a concert stage. Every inch of the interior space is emblematic of a time and place in Salazar's lifelong journey.

Although the pandemic has caused financial hardships for Salazar's pub, he's kept it alive with some help.

Grays River residents Loraine Schroeder and Wes Ware have been there at Salazar's side to manage building maintenance and front of house operations.

As the world enters a post-pandemic world, the prospect of Duffy's opening back up are still uncertain. Salazar wants to keep both his employees and the public safe and will look to public officials to decide what to do.

After a 60-year career

serving the public and the recent pandemic, Salazar took a moment to reflect: "I always figure that we only got so much time, you know, and it goes fast. I wish I could have enjoyed more of my shows and not have to oversee them. I wish I was part of the audience. So, enjoy every minute of life."

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# A Day in The Life Of Wahkiakum And Naselle

## Presenting the Winners

**W**e at *The Wahkiakum County Eagle* are pleased to announce the winners of the 10th Annual “A Day in the Life of Wahkiakum County and Naselle” photo contest.

We invited readers to shoot a photo on May 1, 2021, in the Wahkiakum County and Naselle areas.

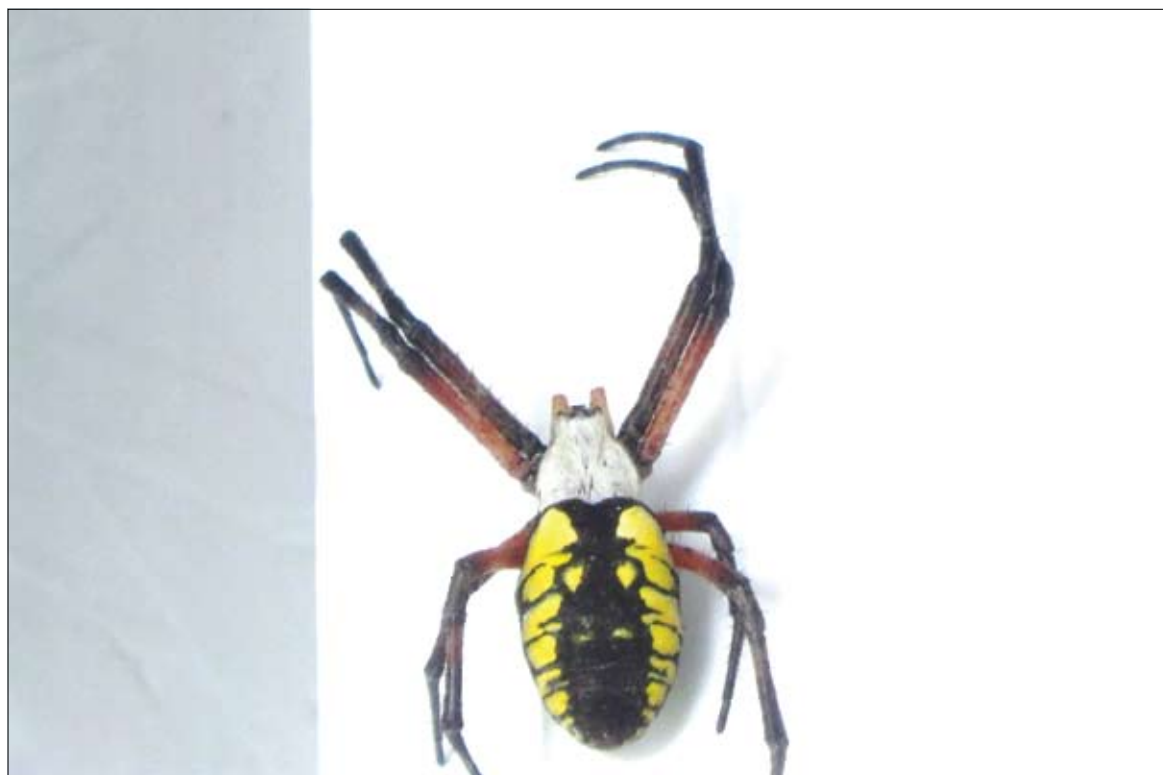
Two divisions were offered; we received entries in both. As usual, judging was very difficult. Photos will be posted on *The Eagle’s* website, [www.waheagle.com](http://www.waheagle.com) under the Photos tab at the top of the page.

### General rules were

- \* All photographs must be taken in Wahkiakum and Naselle environs.
- \* Participants must be residents living within the contest area.
- \* Entries may be color prints or high resolution digital images.
- \* Photographers may enter a maximum of four photos.

We adjusted lighting and contrast levels slightly to take into account the effects of printing.

**W**e know you’ll enjoy these photos and suggest you be ready for the next Day in the Life photo shoot on the first Saturday in May, 2022.



**First Place, adults**

**Clara Berkshire:** Yellow garden spider



**First Place, Youth**

**Annelise Vik:** Land of evergreens





**Kim Sharp:** Keep your eye on the ball



**Kim Sharp:** Did anyone bring marshmallows?



**Annalei Aegerter:** Sunrise of a new season



**Jessica Vik:** Lunch at the summit



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# Opportunity strikes quickly for new cheesemakers

Story and photos  
By Diana Zimmerman

In November of 2019, Becka Roland and Ronnie Rhyner were settling into their new home in Vancouver when they came across a movie on Netflix that caught their interest.

"It was the dumbest romantic comedy," Roland said. "It was so dumb."

She laughed, reliving the moment.

"Oh! This is fun. Farms! Let's watch it!"

"Plus it had Josh Duhamel in it," Rhyner interjected. "We don't see him in anything anymore."

"I know," Roland said. "He's getting old. He's like a silver fox now. He's very handsome. So he's a little farmhand and this lady owns this goat farm and makes goat cheese and then..."

"Her niece," Rhyner reminded Roland.

"The niece's husband dies and she comes to live with her on the farm to recover," Roland continued.

"Two kids," Rhyner says, prompting Roland.

"Two kids, yes. And then they fall in love," Roland said. "They went to the farmers market and sold goat cheese and raised goats."

A week later, Roland had found a goat farm for sale online, and declared it to be fate. Now the two are the new

owners of the Skamokawa Farmstead Creamery, which currently includes about 90 goats, two cats, a peacock and a peahen, three dogs, three horses, and a Kunekune pig named Petunia.

"She was out roaming all day and then I couldn't find her; she just does what she does," Roland said. "I don't know where she goes."

"She thinks she's a dog," Rhyner said.

"Oh and two chickens that lay their eggs wherever they want," Rhyner added. "It's always an Easter egg hunt."

The two didn't necessarily set out to buy a goat farm, but they had talked about getting a hobby farm when they retired, which they hoped to do while still young, about 15 years from now.

"It just came super soon," Roland said. "We didn't expect it to fall into our lap, but here we are."

"I wasn't super sold on the idea until we came here," Rhyner said. "It was the teenage goats. They were so friendly. And Becka told me, 'If we get this, you can quit your job.'"

They laughed.  
Sold!

Rhyner had been a union carpenter in Chicago, most recently working as a superintendent for a flooring company that did epoxy and



Ronnie Rhyner and Becka Roland are the new proprietors of Skamokawa Farmstead Creamery.

urethane floors.

"I knew zero about that when I started and I knew slightly more when I quit," she said.

It turns out that running a creamery is a lot more work, but it's infinitely more fulfilling, and while Rhyner would like to sleep in once in awhile, she's discovered she's a lot happier.

Roland is a nurse and has continued that work for the time being. When the income from the creamery stabilizes a bit more, she will retire and join Rhyner full time at the

creamery.

"I'd rather be here," Roland said. "This is a lot more fun."

Though they've only been doing this for six months, Roland and Rhyner are already well versed on the different breeds and the milk they produce, breeding, de-worming and other matters of care, feeding, milking, and more.

"I grew up on a hobby farm," Roland said. "It wasn't a working farm but I knew enough about animals, and with my science and medical background it was actually super easy to figure it out. I read a bunch of vet journals

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and our vet is awesome, she taught me a whole lot of things. It's just what we do."

"The vet remembers my name," Rhyner said drily. "My own doctor doesn't do that."

**T**he two are even learning to work around a bit of goat mischief.

The goats get fed grain every day, and while their keepers may have believed the bowls were secured, and so were the goats, they quickly realized that not only were some of them escape artists, but that goats had figured out how to toss those supposedly "secured" bowls, whether they had food in them or not, just for fun. And it wasn't always one goat at a time.

Luckily, Rhyner's construction background has come in handy, and she was able to make changes that have slowed those clever goats for the time being.

**B**reeding is ongoing, and so far, there have been 67 babies, including one set of quadruplets.

"We've had so many boys," Roland said. "At least 60 percent boys, probably more. We haven't had a girl in a minute. We don't name the boys. I try to find them pet homes. I don't think that happens, but we try. We can't keep them all."

"We can't keep the boys, because they are too closely related to other goat girls," Rhyner said.

**"Y**ou can go up and down the line, but you can't go across," Roland said. "Brothers and sisters can't breed. Up and down is okay. Sometimes they do that when they have desirable genetics. All the girls here came from good milkers so we are going to keep them. We have some that we are going to retire because they didn't recover well from their pregnancies or they are getting old. It's rough on their bodies."



The pasture and barn, where the goats are milked, and the cheese and other creamery products are made.

They have a few different breeds of goats at the creamery, and each breed produces a different milk. Roland and Rhyner are using this to their advantage. They have also added alfalfa to the goats' diet, which makes the milk come out a little sweeter.

"One thing I like about our cheese is it doesn't taste goat-y," Roland said. "It makes me happy. I know that's why a lot of people do not like goat cheese. I promise our cheese does not taste like that."

They've added several new flavors, including honey,

which comes from a neighbor, an everything bagel seasoning cheese, and a vanilla cajeta.

"We want to expand to hard cheeses," Roland said. "I hope to build a cave in the hill the house sits on. Eventually, my

grand plan is distill whey into vodka."

**W**hile they continue to expand the herd, they are finally

**Continued on Page 17**

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**Right:** Roland and Rhyner place male and female goats who are ready for breeding in their own pasture on the farm. They call it The Love Shack. **Far right:** The goats get alfalfa in their diet, which sweetens the milk. **Below:** This little billy goat was a whole day old. **Below, right:** A peacock and a peahen are part of the menagerie at the Skamokawa Farmstead Creamery.



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## Continued from Page 15

### Goats and cheese . . .

turning their focus to producing more cheese, with the help of two employees. And they are researching more places to sell it, which includes regional restaurants, farmers markets, and some stores.

Roland has also been using the goat milk to make soap and lotion.

"My hands have never been softer," she said.

**T**he reporter reflects: "I spent the better part of an hour with Roland and Rhyner, and so intent was I in trying to get a story about goats and life on the farm, that I didn't see there was another story right in front of me. Those last few minutes, as I sat and watched the pair

talk to each other, I realized, it didn't matter if I was there or not.

"And now, as I listen to my recorder, I understand that it was like that the whole time.

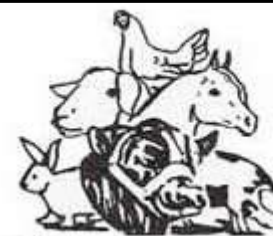
**"I** hope you will forgive me this sentimental moment. I'm sure I'm not alone in saying that love is a mystery. It is to me. There are some things I understand, like the hard work that comes with it, and sacrifice, and choosing kindness, which sometimes comes easy, and sometimes does not. But, if I'm honest, there are still so many aspects of that great mystery that I know nothing about, and have never understood.

When life is like that, you

learn to celebrate love whenever you see it.

And so I sat and smiled, watching as two people, who clearly liked each other, bantered back and forth, finished each other's sentences, and delighted in each other's company.

It doesn't really matter what they are doing, so long as Roland and Rhyner are doing it together.



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Part 2, A Day in the Life photo contest entries



Clara Berkshire: Loop Road elk



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# Longtime resident recalls “old” Island life

**Photo and story**  
**By Diana Zimmerman**

Hans Fluckiger was born in Yakima but he's been on Puget Island for a lifetime.

“My dad was a cheesemaker,” Fluckiger said. “He and my mom came into this country from Switzerland, through Ellis Island. In those days you had to be sponsored. He was sponsored by a family in Wisconsin who had a cheesemaking job for him.”

“Things were tough in Switzerland,” he added. “I think my dad might have been pretty fortunate with the sponsor he had in Wisconsin. Some were sponsored by someone who would hire them out to another farmer and keep their wages.”

Fluckiger's oldest sister was born in Wisconsin before his parents migrated to Washington. They stopped over in the Chimacum area where their middle child, another daughter, was born. From there, Fluckiger said, they went to Yakima, and his dad worked in a creamery there. After Hans was born, they spent a short time in Morton, and then headed south in 1937 when his dad got a job making cheese and butter at a co-op creamery on Puget Island.

The Puget Island Fire Station stands now where that creamery once was, and Fluckiger's dad, Hans Sr., worked there until the co-op closed, about five years later.

That's when all the dairies on Puget Island, Skamokawa, and up the Elochoman started shipping all their milk to a creamery in Clatskanie, Oregon.

“When we moved here, we pretty much called the island

Little Scandinavia, because it was all Norwegians and Swedes,” Fluckiger remembered. “I think besides our family, there might have been three other Swiss families and that was it. In those days, you felt like kind of an outcast, not being Scandinavian.”

The Puget Island bridge was nearly done when the Fluckigers arrived to the area, but it wasn't ready for traffic. People continued to make their way to Cathlamet, or what seemed to be an even more important hub at the time, Clatskanie, by ferry.

“Most of the people, when the ferry was running, did most of their shopping in Oregon,” Fluckiger said. “They had a big locker plant in Clatskanie where a lot of the farmers kept their meat. Some farmer would want to pick up four packages of hamburger and two packages of steak out of their locker. The milk truck drivers would do that and bring it back with the empty cans.”

The Fluckigers made friends with another family whose children were close in ages to their three kids. They lived on South Welcome Slough for about a year and then leased a farm and had 14 cows, across from Our Sav-



Hans Fluckiger

our's Lutheran Church.

“I was pretty well raised on that farm,” Fluckiger said. “Growing up on the farm had a lot of advantages. I think most of the parents expected the kids to work, and we did.”

“It seemed like everybody had a job but they also had 15-20 acres and a few milk cows, and with our gardens and farming, were self sufficient,” he said. “I would say that 80 percent of the acreage on the island was dairying. Milk cows or beef cows. A lot of the men were fishermen. A lot of the wives did the farming, and the fishermen did the fishing.”

Peppermint was an important crop on the island at the time.

“There was pretty good money in it,” Fluckiger said.

“At one point, the bank in town was privately owned, and they kidded there was more peppermint oil in the bank than cash. You would see them wheel it in in small barrels.”

The peppermint oil they raised on the island at that time was a stronger type of oil, Fluckiger said, and they would mix it with oil that was grown east of the mountains.

The crop was never the same after the flood in 1948. It also changed the landscape, and a lot of lives.

“We had water up to the eaves,” Fluckiger said. We always kept up the place well. The fellow that owned it always promised my folks that he would sell the place to them. After the flood, he tried to sell it to them right away.”

His dad had some thoughts about that, and he moved his family to Cathlamet for a little while, before they returned to another location on the island.

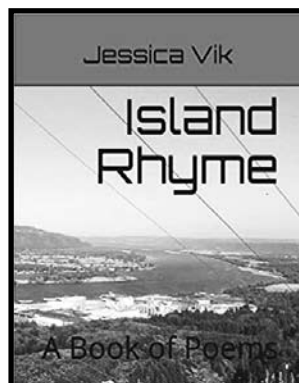
Fluckiger attended elementary school on the island for six years. The classrooms were on the middle floor of the three story building, the gymnasium was on the top floor, and on the first floor, there was a cafeteria and a kitchen.

There was a chimney going up through the gym floor at one end, laughed Fluckiger.

There were two classes per room. For a time, all eight grades were there, but eventually, the seventh and eighth grades headed over to Cathlamet for school.

“The principal at the school [on the island] was Andy Shold,” Fluckiger said. “He was a super guy. We had a terrific hot lunch program. It was all local women who took care of that. It was delicious food. I'm sure some of the kids never ate so good at home. Things were still tough after the depression.”

Though his dad had been trained as a cheesemaker, he tried the fish traps for a year while they were still legal in Oregon after the co-op shut down. He also worked as a milk tester and spent some time in a sawmill up the Westport Slough,” Fluckiger said. “Tugboats took in two ocean going ships at a time to load lumber. Wauna and Bradwood were saw mills. There were lots of jobs. Even though he



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wasn't making cheese anymore, I think Dad felt pretty fortunate."

**F**luckiger laughed. "He started taking these home courses," he said. "I think my two sisters and I are the most finger printed kids in the county because he practiced on us and decided to go into law enforcement. That's how he ended up running for sheriff. He was sheriff for three terms." "He loved the job," Fluckiger said. "I don't understand the hours he put in, but he really liked that job."

**H**is mom, Hilda, got involved in church, especially after people discovered she was an organ player. She gave lots of piano lessons over the years.

Everyone worked hard, and social life was very important. 4-H was a big deal, and the Granges were booming. People participated in a garden club and went to the fair every summer.

There was always a huge celebration on the 4th of July.

"Jessie Sawyer sold war bonds and stamps," Fluckiger said. "She could recite poetry and sing, and she did a super job. The whole community was there. For Halloween, the school had big dormers, and they would have booths for the Halloween Carnival, and the whole community was there for that."

"We always got together to play baseball out in somebody's pasture," he said. "The coaches in town were always glad to see the farm boys, no matter where they came from, turn out for football, because they were in shape when they turned out."

**W**hen Fluckiger was young, he would sweep a shop nearby, for as much ice cream as he could eat. He also had a paper route when he was 10 years old.

"Kids always had jobs helping people or each other," Fluckiger said. "Making hay. Milking the neighbor's cows if they went away for a few days."

Young Fluckiger also got involved in Boy

Scouts.

"Bob Hughes who owned the hardware store in town was our scoutmaster," he said. "He was a super disciplinarian. He was like a sergeant. We would go to Vancouver, and some of those troops had fancy tents, but we just had pup tents. In our competition, we would sweep everything. He did it the quick way, because it was all timed events. It didn't have to look fancy."

"At one point we had four Eagle Scouts," Fluckiger continued. "I was a Life Scout. I didn't make Eagle because Hughes gave up the leadership. The fellow who took over for him didn't have the discipline. Bob Hughes threatened us with a peavey handle. Andy Shold was the same way. Back in those days you were disciplined. It didn't hurt anybody."

"Those were the ones you remembered," he said. "You did what they wanted you to do and they were good teachers. Most of them would be in court now."

**F**luckiger played football and basketball in high school, but didn't last long on the diamond after getting beamed by a ball. He would turn his head away every time a ball came his way after that.

"Coach," he said, "I don't think I'm much help out here."

**A**t that age, there was always time for a bit of mischief.

"The sheriff had a paddy wagon they called it," Fluckiger said. "The sheriff was Bob Wiester. A nice guy, but we liked to take advantage of him. The paddy wagon didn't have a lot of horse power. I had a '49 Chevy, and I had the manifold split, so it made a lot of noise. I was coming down the town hill, and in those days, that was the state highway. I was backing off the stick shift, and it was popping and cracking, the muffler was making all kinds of noise. There was someone else behind me that was the same way."

"We got stopped where the sheriff's car's come out," he continued. "I think there were three or four in my car, but about 20 of us

in all. The sheriff gets out and we were going to get the lecture. The tavern owner was there, and I don't think he liked kids. A couple of us faded into the back, and let the air out of the back tire of the paddy wagon. When the sheriff got done lecturing and said 'Now you remember this,' we rapped our pipes and took out of town, and he started after, flop flop flop."

It was the next year that Fluckiger's dad would run for sheriff.

**W**hile in high school, Fluckiger began working at the grocery store on Puget Island. He continued to do so for 10 years and eventually started working for Crown Zellerbach in the timber division.

"My dad always said, do your job and a little bit more and you will come out okay," Fluckiger said. "I did. I had a good career with Crown."

**Continued on next page**

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**See The Eagle online at [www.waheagle.com](http://www.waheagle.com)**





Events and sites to see

The easing of the covid-19 pandemic may allow resumption of community events that were canceled in 2020. There’s plenty to see and do in Wahkiakum County. 1. Skamokwa Vista Park hosts a kite festival, coming June 26. 2. Anglers flock to the Elochoman Slough Marina to pursue sturgeon, salmon and steelhead. 3. The Puget Island ferry, the Oscar B., is the last in use on the lower Columbia River. 4. & 5. Cathlamet’s Bald Eagle Festival is set for July 16 & 17, pandemic permitting. 6. Commemorative markers for the Lewis & Clark Expedition can be found at County Line Park, Puget Island Ferry Landing, Elochoman Slough Marina, Skamokawa Vista Park, and Grays Bay. Eagle file photos.

Continued from Page 21

Hans Fluckiger . . .

After Crown got taken over, my wife and I formed a little corporation and I went out and did the same kind of work for contractors. I drew one unemployment check in my life. I’ve got my dad to thank for that. He figured if there was work out there, you ought to be looking for a job.”

In 1958, when Fluckiger was grown, he and some of his friends started the fire department on the island.

Farmers, fishermen, and loggers volunteered. “We had fun. We were good friends. We fished together, and smoked fish together,” Fluckiger said. Fluckiger met his future wife, Georgia Hollar, in high school. They got engaged after senior year, and were married for nearly 64 years. He misses her every day. They raised two children, Glenn and Deborah.







## Ruth Doumit Designs

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**We Support Economic Development!**

Elochoman Marina

### Farmer's Market/Trunk Sale

Fridays 3 to 6 p.m., May 28 - Sept 10

*Locally grown herbs, produce,  
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**Hand crafted soaps and crafted art.**

This is where foodies hang out and  
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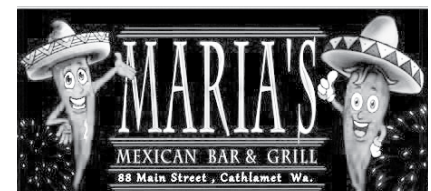
*Enjoy a pint on our patio or grab a  
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Tacos, Burritos, Tortas and more!





# Wahkiakum Food and Farm Network

The **Wahkiakum Food and Farm Network** is dedicated to encouraging awareness and purchase of Wahkiakum-grown farm products and to developing relationships among Wahkiakum County farms, value-added producers and the local community.

If you are a farmer or supporter of Wahkiakum small farms and would like to connect with our group, please ask to join our Wahkiakum Food and Farm Network group page on Facebook or contact any one of the farmers listed below.

Artisan Cheeses and Handcrafted Butter  
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Patrick & Hollie McKay-Beach

139 W Birnie Slough Rd.  
Cathlamet, WA 98612  
(360) 560-1150  
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<http://www.facebook.com/littlebarnfarm>

Grassfed, grass-finished lamb and beef  
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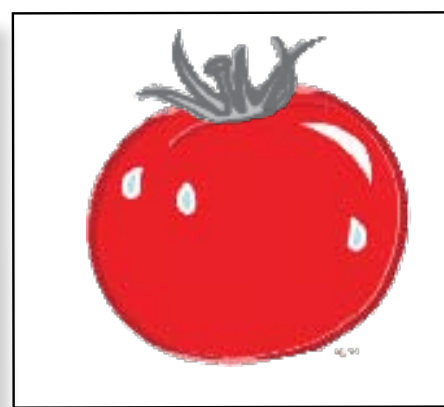
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**Elochoman Marina  
Farmer's Market/  
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Fridays 3 to 6 p.m., May 28-September 10  
Cathlamet Marina

Locally grown herbs, produce,  
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Rick & Lori Cagle

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and grow heirloom vegetables,  
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See us at the Wahkiakum County Fair  
Farmers Market on Tuesdays 4 to 7 p.m.  
Facebook - talltimbersfarmstead  
Email: talltimbersfff@gmail.com  
360.703.7291



**BLUE SKIES FARM**  
of Puget Island, LLC

31 Blue Skies Lane  
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Cathlamet, WA 98612  
(503) 887-2315

www.blueskiesfarmpi.com

We feature fresh local produce, honey, and products like Bloody Mary mix, Pot Roast simmer, pickled beans, and assorted jams. Coming in late Summer 2021 we will have our guest house for rent for the perfect week or weekend getaway. Find us at blueskiesfarmpi.com or our Facebook page for updates and details.

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