

Measles threat worries schools

By Sandy Stokes

An outbreak of measles in British Columbia and its spread to Seattle prompted La Conner School District to send a letter home to parents on Monday, urging them to make sure their children's immunizations are up to date.

According to the county Health Department, more than 70 cases of measles were confirmed in British Columbia. At least one Canadian measles victim traveled to Seattle, potentially infecting

others.

Coming down with measles now means "a student could be out for the rest of the year," said Sandi Pacoitti, the communicable disease manager for Skagit County Health Department. By law, a kid with measles has to stay home for 21 days, she said.

This threat is from the serious form of measles, not the milder rubella, once known as "German" or "three-day" measles.

Measles spreads easily and makes people very sick with a high fever, a cough, runny nose and red, watery eyes followed by the disease's characteristic rash.

Victims of the current outbreak have been so ill, about half have sought emergency room treatment, and several have required hospitalization, including one needing intensive care.

Paciotti said there are no cases reported yet in Skagit County. But that doesn't mean there won't be. The bug has an incubation period of up to 21 days between exposure and the onset of symptoms. And measles is contagious to others for four days before the carrier even knows they're sick.

Children 18 and under can receive a measles vaccination, called an MMR immunization, at Skagit County Public Health Department for \$15 plus \$19 for the office visit. For adults, the immunization is \$69 plus \$19 for the office visit.

Contact the Skagit County Health Department at 360-336-9477.

Boat Parade Saturday

Saturday, May 1 will offer proof that summer is approaching.

Dozens of boats, some of which may be sporting retro yard ornaments, will live up the Swinomish Channel for the Swinomish Yacht Club's annual Opening Day Boat Parade.

The parade is themed, "Get your Flamingo On," which leaves room for lots of imaginative boat décor.

It starts at 3 p.m. and cruises from the La Conner Marina, past the town's waterfront to Shelter Bay.



FLYBOYS – These La Conner Middle School students were in the airplane building class and are now in the after-school Advanced Aviation Club to fly their planes in the gym. Displaying their class projects are, from left, Jacek Knudson, Keith Carlton, David Thomas.

– Photo by Sammie Bisson

Soaring in the classroom

By Alexander Kramer

Students at La Conner Middle School are busy cutting, gluing, and even flying planes they make in class.

Middle school teacher Vince Cicotte, a 13-year veteran of La Conner schools, has been teaching kids to build and fly model airplanes for almost a decade.

It started years ago, when Cicotte brought a remote-controlled plane to school to fly during his lunch breaks.

"I just had a plane on my classroom wall because the kids liked

it, and I used it like a teaching poster," says Cicotte. "Sometimes during lunch, I'd fly it around in the field, and kids loved to watch it."

One day, Maureen Harlan, who was the school principal then, asked Cicotte if he'd like to create a class around plane-building.

District Superintendent Tim Bruce and the School Board supported the idea.

The class is a semester-long elective. It incorporates note-taking and quizzes, like other school classes. Also, "this class gets kids thinking, teaches problem solving, and gets them trying and doing new things," Cicotte said.

In class, students build various types of flying model planes, from extra light, rubberband-powered indoor planes to larger, electric-powered park-flyers that are remote controlled.

Middle school student Emily Markert says she really likes the class. "I like all of it," she said.

Her classmate Logan James says he likes the opportunity for "working independently in the class."

Cicotte keeps magazines of building plans and also designs his own planes. Students select a plan, and then get to work cut-

ting, gluing, and assembling — a process that takes several weeks.

As they handle tools, including X-Acto knives and Super Glue, the students are required to don safety glasses from the moment they walk into the classroom until everything has been put away at the end of class.

"It's a really good system; the kids listen and really get to work," said David Rapella, a classroom volunteer, who is a model airplane enthusiast. "They are able to work independently on their projects, but also help each other out with the process."

When he was younger, Rapella used to build model airplanes with his brother. Now he enjoys the opportunity to pass on his skills to a new generation.

Rapella is also a member of the Rotary Club of La Conner. He convinced his fellow Rotarians to support the class as a club project. Each year, the Rotary provides \$1,000 to pay for supplies, including balsa wood, motors and propellers.

Cicotte said Rotary's contribution really helps out. "We use about \$400 per semester, or \$800 a year in materials," he said. "We might spend another \$400 replacing work tools, motors and batteries."

The show is on!

La Conner residents and businesses have raised almost enough money to put this year's 4th of July fireworks show back on the calendar.

Thulen Farms and Pioneer Potatoes, Charles and Dana Heald, La Conner Country Inn, La Conner Pub & Eatery, Swinomish Yacht Club and Rotary Club of La Conner all added their cash to the fireworks fund this week, bringing the total raised to \$4,305.

The La Conner Chamber of Commerce set a \$4,700 goal to pay for the half-hour show over Swinomish Channel.

WAVE Broadband, Shelter Bay Community, Dunlap Towing, Palmer's Restaurant, Nell Thorn, Liz Theaker, Janis Hatch and *La Conner Weekly News* have also pitched in for the fireworks.



GREEN WALKER

– By Don Coyote

The greenest home in town

By Alexander Kramer

For years, La Conner residents Gary and Leigh Giovane have been eco-conscious, looking for greener options in their daily lives.

Very soon, they will take another greener step.

This week the Giovanes will have solar panels and solar water-heaters on their house.

"We've wanted to do this for literally decades," says Gary Giovane, who teaches math at La Conner High. "I thought I could maybe do it myself but never did."

Recently, they saw an ad for Sunergy Systems and decided to see whether a sales person would come up and run an inspection.

"At first, they see how much energy we consume, and then see what our property can handle," says Giovane. "From there they come up with a plan."

The Giovanes already ranked in the lower 5 percent of energy usage in the country — but they want to further reduce their impact on the environment.

To do that, 12 solar panels will be mounted on the back of the roof, which faces east, and two water-heating systems will be installed on the south side of the roof.

Still, the Giovane's new system

will not take them completely off the grid.

"If the grid goes down, so will we," said Giovane. "We won't be a producer of energy, but the system will account for 65 percent of what we use."

"I'm really surprised that we're the first family, as far as I know, in La Conner to have this," says Giovane. "I've never seen myself as a revolutionary."

The entire project will cost him about \$32,000. Tax breaks and other incentives will help offset his costs.

"Up to 30 percent of the project's installation cost becomes a federal tax credit," says Tyler O'Farrell, program implementer for Puget Sound Energy.

The Giovanes can expect a tax credit of about \$9,600.

Puget Sound Energy offers two more incentives — the utility's net-metering program and the state-funded Renewable Energy Program.

The net-metering program is a credit system, kilowatt hour for kilowatt hour with Puget Sound Energy. When a house produces energy, "and any excess will go back to the grid and it becomes credit," said O'Farrell.

When a resident installs solar, their service meter is switched

out for one that tracks how much electricity the home uses from the grid, and how much is sent back to the grid. The result is a lower electric bill.

The Renewable Energy Advantage Program is an actual cash benefit for homeowners funded by the state.

Depending on how much energy is generated, a homeowner can get paid up to \$5,000 per year every year until 2020, just for generating electricity.

The program pays up to 54 cents for every kilowatt hour produced, regardless of whether the home uses all the electricity or sends it out to the grid.

The catch is that the highest pay is for systems in which the components are manufactured in Washington State.

O'Farrell said that so far there is only one company in the state that manufactures the panels, and just one Washington company makes the inverters.

If only the panels are from Washington, the homeowner is paid 36 cents per kilowatt hour; if only the inverter, the rate is 18 cents.

Out of Puget Sound Energy's 1 million customers, there are 615 who qualify under the Renewable Energy Program. Of those, 71 are in Skagit County.



ECO-COMFY HOME – Gary and Leigh Giovane are having solar panels installed on their home on South Third Street in La Conner. Their rooftop will soon produce enough solar-generated power to meet most of their electricity needs.

– Photo by Alexander Kramer