

41ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION

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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest online at www.thefigtree.org • check The Fig Tree Facebook page daily for news and links

# Art is a way to teach about the Holocaust

By Mary Stamp

For four years, University High School art teacher Jennifer Gale Compau invited just her art portfolio class, students on a path to become artists, to enter the Jessica Stein Memorial Art Contest for the Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust.

This year, she offered the opportunity to all five of her art classes and arranged to show the 90-minute documentary “Carla the Rescuer” at the school.

Along with other faculty, some on the school board, community members and members of Temple Beth Shalom and Congregation Emanu-El, 450 students viewed it on March 5.

History teacher Paul Schneider, who is a member of Human Rights Spokane, and other teachers also brought their classes to see it. Several other teachers want their classes to view it on another day.

The film connects with the 2025 prompt for the annual art contest, “Survival and Life After the Holocaust.”

Previously, there were five to seven entries, but this year 30 students are creating pieces for the 2025 contest, in lieu of other



Jennifer Compau, University High School art teacher, conveys message with her art.

The 2025 Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust takes place 80 years after the end of World War II and 30 years since Spokane’s first Community Observance of the Holocaust.

The observance on the theme “Survival and Life After the Holocaust” begins at 7 p.m., Wednesday, April 23, at Temple Beth Shalom, 1322 E. 30th Ave.

Along with a children’s candle processional, a candle lighting ceremony and speakers, it includes a display of art pieces and announcement of the winners of the annual Jessica Stein Memorial Art Contest.

class projects.

“I see how impactful it is for students to research stories and create art. It shows how studying the Holocaust affects the lives of students today,” Jennifer said.

The students watched videos—like the documentary on Spokane Holocaust survivor and educator Carla Peperzak—of individuals who lived through the Holocaust and their lives after that. Then they designed an original work of art around these stories and people that impacted them.

Continued on page 4

## NATIVE Project dedicates its new Children and Youth Services Center

The NATIVE Project, which started in 1985 as the Indian Youth Leadership Program, expanded over 35 years into providing medical, dental and behavioral health, a pharmacy, wellness, patient care coordination and prevention services for Natives and Non-Natives in a building at 1803 W. Maxwell.

On March 21, The NATIVE Project dedicated its new Children and Youth Center at 1907 W. Maxwell, moving the children’s and youth behavioral

health, the drug and alcohol treatment and the culture and prevention programs across Elm St. from the health clinic into a new four-story building that opened on Feb. 18.

“This building is for our children and all the community’s children,” said Toni Lodge, CEO and one of the founders of The NATIVE Project, at the dedication held in the center’s ceremonial room, named to honor the late Kalispel tribal elder Francis Culluoyah.

A canoe in a showcase in that room—made by Dr. Shawn Brigrman of the Spokane Tribe—and other canoes in the building symbolize to kids who come that they are on a journey, Toni said.

This building, designed based on kids’ suggestions, is a place for kids to talk to someone and be in community.

“When we welcomed the first patient, there was zero debt on the \$11.6 million it cost to build the facility,” she added, so the building will be passed on debt free as a place for Native children and all children to heal and have fun when they come for therapy.

Half the funds were from the Indian Health Service (IHS). Rick Mueller, director of the Urban Indian Health Program at IHS from Washington, D.C., spoke of their commitment to advance Native children’s health and wellbeing. He honors The NATIVE Project for its decades of commitment to culturally informed healing and growth. He said the building incorporates art

Continued on page 5 & 6

## Proceeds higher than ever

The Spring Benefit Lunch on March 8 in the Hemmingson Ballroom at Gonzaga University was the largest event The Fig Tree has sponsored, with more than 310 guests filling 43 tables.

As of March 26, including the Breakfast-time Benefit online on March 12 and gifts that have come in since then, The Fig Tree has raised \$44,418 of its goal of \$50,000, with gifts and pledges still coming in. That is in contrast with \$35,159 raised as of March 26 in 2024 and \$30,0334 in 2023.

“We are thrilled to have so many express through their giving the importance of The Fig Tree and Resource Directory in these times,” said Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate. “Many of the 127 new guests who came gave \$50 to \$100 and more, which speaks of the power of the speakers and the need for our media approach.”

The speeches of Cameron Conner, Pingala Dhital, Kassahun Kebede and Kristine Hoover are on The Fig Tree website along with the mission video created by Hamilton Studio. They are also on pages 7 to 9 of this issue, with comments of board members David Gortner, emcee, and Raymond Reyes, who gave the appeal for donations.

Full comments speakers for the mission video created by Hamilton Studio are also online: Liv Larson Andrews of the Northwest Intermountain Synod, Linda Braune of Dorothy Day Labor Forum, Mennonite pastor Gary Jewell, moderator of The Fig Tree board, retired physician Bruce Dentler, Ali Norris of Mission Community Outreach Center, April Eberhardt of The Black Lens, high school student Nikita Haberman, EWU student Tevita Fakasiieiki, and Nick CastroLang of the Spokane Regional Health District.

“With their stories and affirmations, we feel renewed for our work,” said Mary Stamp, editor. “We hope those viewing and reading the speeches will be inspired to add to the donations.”

To see the videos, visit thefigtree.org/benefit2025videos.html.

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The Fig Tree 1323 S. Perry St. Spokane, WA 99202-3571

## Religion News Briefs

### Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100  
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111  
Fax: +41-22 788 7244 www.oikoumene.org

#### Faith leaders, others issue call for COP30

Nearly 50 Latin American and Caribbean church leaders, faith representatives, ecumenical organizations, Indigenous community members and climate experts convened in Brazil to issue a call for climate action ahead of COP30.

The document, "A Call to Action towards COP30," was delivered to the Brazilian Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Marina Silva, as she visited the group. The text reflects on the current reality of the climate emergency and the irreversible consequences of climate change. COP30, the UN climate conference, will take place in November 2025 in Brazil.

"Our territories, understood by us as sacred, are being destroyed," the call reads. "We witness the destruction of the Amazon, other ecosystems and the people who live there, caused by large-scale agriculture, mining and fossil fuel extraction."

The call notes that these activities, in the name of "progress," seek only the unlimited and concentrated accumulation of capital. "Those who protect our lands—environmental and human rights defenders—are increasingly being persecuted," the call reads. "The road to COP30 cannot fall into the traps of recent years: stalled progress on phasing out fossil fuels, last-minute deals and broken promises on climate finance."

It calls governments to respond to the climate emergency and act with the urgency needed. It also calls on governments and the international community to deliver on climate finance promises, ensure implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund, accelerate a just transition away from fossil fuel dependency, support communities to adapt to climate change and prioritize the voices of those most impacted by climate change.

"The commitments of COP29 fell far short of the finance developing countries need to tackle climate change," the call notes. "The Loss and Damage Fund should be put in operation immediately, with streamlined, priority access for affected communities."

#### Ecumenical accompaniers show someone cares

Accompaniers in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Jordan Valley, and South Hebron Hills show "someone from the international community cares." A new group from the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel reported on incidents in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and South Hebron Hills.

The latest group is the sixth successful implementation since the war started Oct. 7, 2023. The WCC Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel has managed 80 accompaniers since then and expanded to South Hebron Hills.

From Jan. 27, 2024, to mid-March 2025, accompaniers carried out 3,296 activities and visits, and reported 4,323 incidents, with 5,094 international humanitarian law violations. Of those, 2,590 cases were referred for immediate assistance by the International Committee of the Red Cross, Israeli, Palestinian, international and United Nations organizations.

#### WCC continues role in Colombia's peace

As part of its ongoing commitment to fostering peace in Colombia, the World Council of Churches (WCC) announced a transition in its representation in that country's peace process. The WCC, United Nations, Organization of American States and Roman Catholic Church are permanent accompaniers in the peace dialogue between the government of Colombia and the Estado Mayor de los Bloques of the FARC-EP.

This transition occurs at a time of humanitarian crisis in Catatumbo, reinforcing the urgency of the WCC's mission. "Through reconfigured and expanded representation, the WCC reaffirms its commitment to supporting a just and sustainable peace in Colombia," said Peter Prove, director of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. "We pray for wisdom and strength for all engaged in this vital work."

## REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

### Research underway to update directory

Research on updates for the 2025-2026 Resource Directory is underway with emails going out asking those listed in the directory to send in any changes to names, addresses, phone numbers, emails, Facebook pages and information on services provided.

Directory editor Malcolm Haworth also checks on websites, makes phone calls and welcomes agency and congregation leaders to send in updates, even if they do not receive an email.

In addition, other staff members—Mary Stamp, editor, Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate, and Kaye Hult, administrative coordinator—have emailed and are phoning directory advertisers and community partners to invite their renewals.

They will begin making phone calls for those who have not renewed by March 31 and to new advertisers and partners.

"We continue to receive calls from people in the area in need

of assistance for housing, food, rental assistance and other forms of support," said Malcolm, "and we continue to hear from our constituents about their use of the directory to meet urgent needs."

The staff will also be recruiting people to assist with deliveries in the summer and fall, after the Resource Directory is published in July.

For information, call 535-4112 or email resourcedirectory@thefigtree.org.

### Libraries will collect non-perishable food

During April, Spokane County Library District is expanding its annual spring food drive "Bites and Books—Turning the Page on Hunger" to include all county libraries plus Spokane Public Library and Liberty Lake Municipal Library. They are partnering with Second Harvest and KHQ.

Libraries will collect non-perishable food to be distributed by Second Harvest and other food banks in the county.

The project is designed to address food insecurity, which the U.S. Department of Agriculture defines as "limited or uncertain

availability of nutritionally adequate, safe foods and limited or uncertain ability to acquire foods in socially acceptable ways."

Feeding America, the national organization with which Second Harvest operates, said one in seven people in the U.S. is food insecure. In Spokane County, 13 percent of the population and 19 percent of children are food insecure.

Partners Inland Northwest, the largest food bank in Spokane Valley, sees food insecurity increasing. In January 2025, it served 8,510 households with 16,375

individuals, a 74 percent increase from 2024. Of these households, 2,684, or 32 percent, were new food bank clients. Other food banks in Spokane County are experiencing this same trend.

In the past, greater Spokane area residents have responded to food drives, showing they want to help end food insecurity.

People may donate non-perishable food at drop-off locations at libraries during April.

For information, visit seld.org/your-food-donations-to-bites-books-helps-turn-the-page-on-hunger/.

### Group posts prayers for Earth Month

People of faith believe that caring about the environment begins with prayer and connecting with the divine, with each other and with all of creation, said John Wallingford who has organized Hope for Creation conferences for two years with the Episcopal Cathedral of St John the Evangelist.

Prayers for the earth, environment, nature and creation will be accepted from April 1 to May 3, and read on the cathedral's Facebook page through the second week in May.

Interested persons will read prayers as an offering from

sacred communities as part of the observation of Earth Day. The prayers will be posted on St. John's Facebook page during Earth Month.

Believing that prayer sustains people and calls them to engage on issues of concern, the Hope for Creation Team developed "Catching our Breath: Prayers for Creation" to invite Inland Northwest people of all faith communities to offer prayers about the environment and all of creation—prayers of joy and celebration, prayers of lamentation or forgiveness, and prayers asking for help and healing.

John invites prayers—of less than one minute—stemming from such questions as the following: "What are our hopes and dreams for the healing of the environment? What are our concerns or fears for the world of Nature? What are the yearnings of our hearts for the future of the Earth?"

Prayers will be anonymous, but names of the faith group will be included to show the breadth of involvement. Submission assumes consent. The source of copyrighted prayers must be acknowledged.

For information, email HFC@StJohns-Cathedral.org.

### Nonprofit fills the gap for people in need

Spokane Valley Community Advocates (SCVA), whose volunteer, secular and virtual operation fills gaps in aid in the community, seeks a monthly

donor of \$290 to cover the cost for their storage unit.

The storage unit houses home essentials and donations such as clothing, hygiene products, baby supplies and medical necessities, for their REACT Neighbor-2Neighbor contribution program.

SVCA also seeks sponsors to provide \$30 per individual or family each year for their

REACT Rapid Engagement Program, providing assistance like gas vouchers, haircuts for interviews, prescription co-pays and laundry support. The program, a lifeline for many, is on hold because of funding limitations.

An IT volunteer is also needed to help with SVCA's website.

For information, call 312-7869 or email info@s-v-c-a.org

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### Riverkeeper hosts Earth Day River Cleanup

Spokane Riverkeeper is hosting an Earth Day River Cleanup event for people to make a positive impact beginning at 10 a.m., Saturday, April 19, at High Bridge Park.

This event is part of Riverkeeper's ongoing efforts to protect and preserve the Spokane River.

Volunteers of all ages may come to remove litter and debris from the riverbanks and enhance the natural beauty of the river.

"We are excited to celebrate Earth Day by giving back to our community and the environment," said Jule Schultz, waterkeeper for Spokane Riverkeeper.

"This event is an opportunity for people to come together, make a positive impact and show their commitment to protecting our river," he added.

Supplies will be provided, and volunteers should dress appropriately for outdoor work.

After the cleanup, participants are invited to sip on a cup of coffee from PNW Espresso-go while learning from community partners who will have information tables to share about their efforts to protect the local environment.

For information, visit [spokaneriverkeeper.org/volunteer](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org/volunteer).

### Growing Neighbors sets weekly conversations

During Lent, Growing Neighbors is holding community conversations on "The Serviceberry" by Robin Wall Kimmerer at 11:30 a.m., Thursdays.

The book, which includes many of Growing Neighbors' core values and practices, is written in an approachable way for people of all backgrounds and invites conversations on how to live out one's faith in one's neighborhood.

For information, call 541-286-5059.

### Thrive and Public Library plan art festival

Thrive International, Chrysalis Gallery and the Spokane Public Library are holding an International Art and Cultural Festival from 1 to 5 p.m., Tuesday, April 15, at the Spokane Public Library, 906 W. Main.

The festival will showcase various artists selling their work, celebrating diverse cultures and offering a chance to learn about them.

For information, visit [spokanelibrary.org](http://spokanelibrary.org) and [thriveinternational.org](http://thriveinternational.org).

### PJALS schedules spring membership meeting

Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane (PJALS) hosts its Spring Membership Meeting from 5:30 to 7 p.m., Thursday, April 24, at a location TBD.

This is an opportunity to learn more about PJALS work, including issue priorities, to strengthen relationships and to enjoy conversation and food.

PJALS will provide program and financial updates and member-driven issue priorities for 2025-26.

For information, contact [slichty@pjals.org](mailto:slichty@pjals.org).

### Methodists offer website on immigration

The Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church has set up a page on its website responding to the current immigration crisis in the U.S.

It includes resources from across the denomination, offering guidance on immigration response resources and resources for immigrant families.

For information, visit [pnwumc.org/immigration-justice](http://pnwumc.org/immigration-justice).

## Presbytery shares 'stewarding property' ideas

The Presbytery of the Inland Northwest will gather faith, city and county leaders to share ideas for "Stewarding Faith Property for Community Good" from 9 a.m. to noon, Wednesday, April 30, at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, 645 S. Richard Allen Ct.

"We seek to bring together these leaders to address community needs," said Drew Peterson, who is the land stewardship guide for the Presbytery of the Inland Northwest and also pastor at Knox Presbyterian.

City leaders will outline community needs and resources. Faith leaders will explore how to steward their land and buildings to meet neighborhood needs.

The keynote speaker, Mark Elsdon, is co-founder of RootedGood, which supports faith leaders working on property development, finances and mission alignment and social enterprise. He is also author of "We Ain't Broke" on hidden resources for mission and ministry, and editor

of *Gone for Good* about negotiating the coming wave of church property transition.

Consultants for the Ezra 3 Project of RootedGood will lead conversations on that project.

"We hope to help pastors and church leaders discover the sacrificial spirit of the early church," said Drew, "and to remind them of the words of Martin Luther King Jr., writing from the Birmingham jail and saying, 'unless the church can rediscover the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions and be disregarded as an irrelevant social club with no meaning.'"

"I believe in the revival of the church through a rediscovery of the sacrificial Spirit of God, who compels us to steward all that we have and offer it to God to serve our neighbors," said Drew.

Organizers remind participants that as congregations with property and buildings, "we are not owners but stewards," he said.

Inspiration also comes from the Presbyterian Church USA guidelines that call for congregations to consider their land and buildings as tools to accomplish God's mission in the world.

"We want to spark imaginations about how congregations with parking lots, vacant land and buildings can accomplish God's mission. We are stewards of what belongs to God to spread God's goodness in the community," Drew continued.

Organizers plan to share examples of local congregations that are developing and have developed affordable housing, like Bethany Presbyterian, or that opened part of their buildings as homeless or respite shelters, like Morningstar Baptist and Westminster United Church of Christ. Another example is that when two local Church of Christ churches merged to form City Light Church, they decided to use their second building to house nonprofit services.

For information, call 924-4148

## Sravasti Abbey sets classes on Buddhism

Sravasti Abbey will hold weekly "Beginning Buddhism" classes in Spokane from 6 to 7:30 p.m., Wednesdays, at Spokane Buddhist Temple, 927 S. Perry St.

"Beginning Buddhism provides a foundation in understanding the Buddhist worldview from the Tibetan perspective," said Thubten Kunga, of Sravasti Abbey, a Buddhist monastery founded in 2003 near Newport.

A rotating pair of nuns from Sravasti Abbey will lead the class using the book "Open

Heart, Clear Mind" by Venerable Thubten Chodron, Buddhist teacher, founder and abbess of the abbey.

Venerables Thubten Jigme and Thubten Dekyi will focus on working effectively with emotions.

Classes include discussion and guided meditations.

In addition, Sravasti Abbey hosts Standing Up for Compassion Retreat, led by senior Buddhist nuns Venerable Thubten Semkye and Venerable Thubten Jigme from Friday to Sunday,

April 4 to 6, at 692 Country Lane in Newport.

The retreat will focus on developing internal tools like wisdom, compassion and ethics that enable engagement with the world when the moral compasses of families, communities and countries are going haywire. Teachings will identify harmful emotions and why compassion and ethics are allies.

For information, call 447-5549, email [office.sravasti@gmail.com](mailto:office.sravasti@gmail.com), or visit [sravastiabbey.org](http://sravastiabbey.org).

## MiA serves immigrants experiencing abuse

Working with first- and second-generation immigrants, Mujeres in Action serves those facing domestic violence and sexual abuse and provides mental health services for survivors.

"Mental health care is taboo in many cultures, because it is associated with not being strong enough to face life's adversities," said Monica Rey Serantes, MIA

mental health counselor.

She counsels people who face domestic violence while they are redefining themselves and adapting to a new country, culture, financial and work contexts.

Monica said counseling requires time, patience and support in a safe, neutral space.

"We all deserve to live with health and well-being, which

includes access to psychological support to process the challenges we encounter daily, to explore alternatives for our lives and to make our own decisions," she said. "We all deserve to be heard, validated and cared for in a judgement-free space, where we can work towards fulfillment."

For information, call 599-5527 or visit [miaspokane.org](http://miaspokane.org).

## ESL school needs tutors

Country Homes English Language School seeks volunteers to help as tutors for their students.


Each tutor is paired with one or two students and asked to commit to a school year for each day they wish to volunteer. Minimum age for students is 18.

The school runs from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., Mondays and Wednesdays.

For information, call 466-3414 or email [office@chchristian.org](mailto:office@chchristian.org).

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# Jennifer Compau says that art gives voice and shape to life, truths

*Continued from page 1*

When the students watched the documentary “Carla, the Rescuer,” they were prompted to look for visual clues to “find something to spark their creativity,” she continued.

**Jennifer set up some visual clues on the stage during the viewing:** 1) a bike tire and bag of sugar—because Carla had traded sugar for a tire, 2) a Dutch resistance armband, 3) a 1940s nurse’s uniform from her grandmother—saved by her historian mother Nancy Compau, and 4) scissors and cut paper—Carla cut pieces of paper in half so when people met they matched the paper and knew they were connecting to the right person.

In addition, Jennifer showed them art created by students in previous years.

**“Students see the survivors’ lives as part of history,”** said Jennifer, noting that one student said her grandmother was Jewish and grandparents of another had been in concentration camps.

Jennifer said the film, “Carla, the Rescuer,” inspired students and they wrote thank you notes to Carla. She shared a few excerpts.

• “Watching the movie about you was touching and heart-breaking. Thank you for being so strong and talking about what happened. I am inspired by how brave you were. It makes me feel I should do the same for people who need help. I can’t imagine what it was like to hide Jews knowing you might be caught by the Nazis. I strive to be that brave.”

• “I was humbled by the many acts of selflessness displayed by

you during such an oppressive, perilous time as World War II. You risked everything to do what you did. Today, you still display that bravery, selflessness and resolve to tell your story to untold generations of people through interviews, school visits and the documentary.”

• “Hating someone because of their beliefs, skin color, sexuality or anything that makes them different is one of the most ignorant, cruel crimes. I used to be unkind to people I perceived as different. Now I try to be patient, kind, educated and accepting. I am so sorry people let hatred take over their souls and cause pain and heartbreak for you and so many others.”

**In addition to teaching art techniques and issues that can inspire art,** Jennifer creates her own art to express her visions.

Much of her art focuses on promoting peace and anti-violence—opposing war, gun violence and self-inflicted violence.

She often reprints an image she carved on a wood block during the war in Bosnia on maps of areas of the world. The image depicts an Indigenous woman, holding onto nature and sending up prayers for peace as bombs drop.

**When war breaks out,** Jennifer prints that image on maps. She recently used maps of Ukraine, Russia, Palestine and Israel and gave prints to refugees and Temple Beth Shalom.

“It expresses prayers of and for every person on each side of a conflict when wars break out and bombs rain down,” she said. “Art is prayer.”

Jennifer feels a link to Carla, because her grandfather and father worked for the Dutch bank that funded the Dutch resistance. Her grandmother volunteered as a “gray lady” at the veteran’s hospital in World War II.

**Jennifer first attended** Lewis and Clark High School but graduated from Gonzaga Prep in 1983. Then she moved to Portland to study art and design. She married and lived in Scottsdale, Ariz. She then ran contemporary art galleries and worked as an art curator.

After she divorced, she returned to Spokane, where she worked for the Cheney Cowles Memorial Museum and raised her three children. She earned a bachelor’s in fine arts and art history at Gonzaga University and a master’s in teaching at Eastern Washington University. She then taught art and humanities there. She also earned a master’s degree in organizational leadership at Gonzaga University and worked at the Center for Organizational Reform.

**Jennifer taught at-risk** high school students at Contract Basic Education and then at Mica Peak and School to Life before coming in 2017 to teach art at University High School.

Recently, she asked the 171 students in her five classes if they had previously studied the Holocaust. Only one or two from each class had.

“The void in understanding history is daunting,” she said.

That was hard for her to comprehend having grown up in a family—she is the fifth generation in Spokane—that has valued

their ancestors. Her mother, a historian, and her father, an attorney, were committed to social justice and welcomed international exchange students in their home.

Her family attended Presbyterian churches, and she attended the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane for many years. She is now active in Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, as an outlet for her belief in the inherent worth and dignity of people and the inclusion of all people.

She also studied Buddhism with the Dalai Lama’s teaching but has returned to focus on Jesus. She is now learning Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, and studying the Lord’s prayer, Psalms and Beatitudes in Aramaic.

**“I’m inspired by Jesus’** teaching and disappointed how some use Jesus’ story in ways that are the antithesis to his life and teachings,” she said.

“My parents and grandparents connected with history and advocated for people all over the world,” she said. “In elementary school, I volunteered with my mother at CROP Walks and World Relief. I grew up with students from Japan, India, Italy and France in my home, so when I raised my children, we also

hosted international students,” she added. “Through global understanding we realize people have more in common than anything that divides them.”

Jennifer, who works for peace at a community and personal level, believes inviting students to participate in the Holocaust Observance art contest as a way to continue that commitment.

**When the students create** their own art pieces about the Holocaust, it’s more than a lesson, she said.

“Art is a universal language that puts voice and shape to things,” said Jennifer, who supplies resources and tools for students to use to express what they find.

“Special ed students can express themselves in art. I hold the time and space for each student to create something original of their own,” she said.

**“I love to see students grow** in a way that changes who they are as they make art to submit to the Holocaust art contest,” Jennifer commented.

Some of her previous students were excited to learn that their art pieces were shown in the documentary and will have an impact on those who view the film.

For information, call 747-3304 on the observance or email [vflats.af@gmail.com](mailto:vflats.af@gmail.com).

## Family Promise of Spokane rehoused 235 families with 805 individuals in 2024

Family Promise of Spokane reports that in 2024, it rehoused 805 individuals in 235 families across Spokane County.

This milestone underscores Family Promise’s commitment to ending family homelessness through tailored housing solutions, said Joe Ader, CEO of Family Promise of Spokane.

“Rehousing more than 800 people out of homelessness in one year is unprecedented and a testament to the power of our community,” he said. “This achievement reflects the role Family Promise plays in ensuring families have the stability and support they need to thrive in Spokane.”

Family Promise of Spokane is part of the national Family Promise network, which has helped more than 1 million people secure stable housing since its founding.

During a recent visit in Spokane, Cheryl Schuch, national

director of Family Promise, highlighted Spokane’s accomplishment as a model for other communities:

“The work in Spokane is nothing short of remarkable,” she said. “Their success demonstrates how a holistic, community-based approach to homelessness can create lasting change for families.”

Family Promise of Spokane’s success stems from its people-over-programs and scattered-site

model that allows for greater privacy, stability, and personalized care. They use case management, flexible funding and a focus on unique needs of families as key factors in helping families get and keep long-term housing stability.

While pleased with the milestone, Joe knows that the need remains high and there is still work to be done.

For information, visit [familypromiseofspokane.org](http://familypromiseofspokane.org).

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# Toni Lodge's life is about activism, change, persistence and children

Toni Lodge's life has been about change.

She has been part of making change for children and youth, families and the community by providing leadership to found and shepherd The NATIVE Project in West Central Spokane.

**"I put into action** my beliefs, faith and desire for a good future for my grandchildren, their grandchildren and all children," said Toni, who is CEO.

A member of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribe on the Canadian border in North Dakota, she shared her journey to starting and building up The NATIVE Project and recently opening its new Children and Youth Center.

Toni learned in the 1970s that change is possible through community will, activism and legislation. Spirituality and activism were part of her teen years.

"I have seen how times have changed," she said. "As a young Native woman, I had different opportunities than my grandmother had. I was able to work for corporate news organizations."

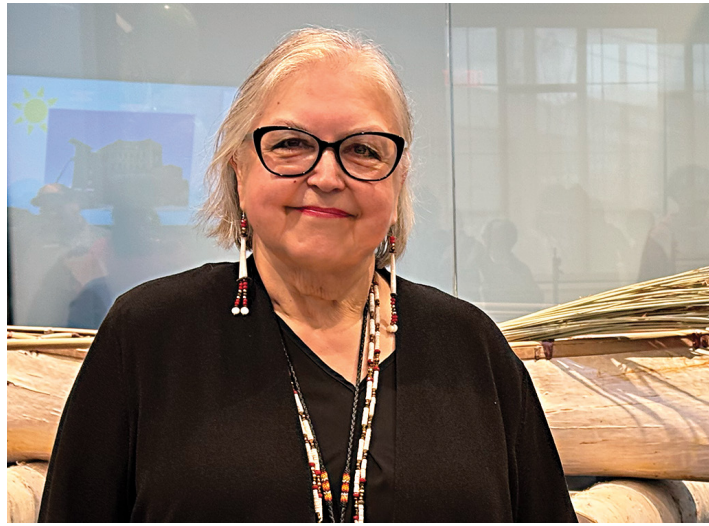
**Having studied journalism** at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, she worked with newspapers such as National Native News, Knight-Ridder News and United Tribes Indian College in Bismarck, N.D.

"I was drawn to journalism because in the 1970s was an exciting time with changes in civil rights, Indian activism and women's rights. I wanted to know what good things could happen," she said.

That decade was the end of attempts at assimilation from the federal government's termination policy and boarding schools' indoctrination for Native people. The American Indian Movement introduced new changes for America and promoted sovereignty, self-determination and restoring cultural traditions and tribal languages for Native people.

**Toni, as a young reporter** covering this era, said she had "a front-row seat to see good change" with the passing of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act and the Indian Child Welfare Act, which resulted from activism.

"My tribe and community was in a traditional colonized church, but after the Religious Freedom Act in 1978, we could legally practice Native religion. It was freeing," she said, explaining that her community began publicly practicing traditional cultural spirituality that emphasizes being connected with the



**Toni Lodge, the NATIVE Project, stands in front of the traditional canoe in a showcase in the ceremonial room of the new Children and Youth Center.**

land, water and earth.

"Before then, we only practiced our cultural and spiritual ways in our homes, where we kept the celebrations and practices alive," said Toni. "When we could celebrate publicly, young people could learn together rather than one at a time, regaining a sense of community at events like ceremonies, sweats, sun dances and powwows."

**As people practiced** ceremonies, the language was revitalized, which Toni said was important in restoring people's wellbeing. For 30,000 years, tribes had health practices. Indian doctors healed people, helped with birthing, taught prevention and prayed with people they cared for, she said.

Keeping that tradition, The NATIVE Project staff may pray with people as they mix modern and traditional medicine practices.

"We share with each other what our grandmothers used to do," said Toni.

**Clinic staff can ask** patients what they eat, how often they walk, go in the woods, sing, pray and have social time along with discussing symptoms and using medication to treat what's wrong with patients.

The medical providers and behavioral health staff know that university studies agree with traditional knowledge that people in relationships live longer.

"Medical and mental health care are more than what is wrong with a person. They are also about what is right with them," Toni said.

"In our culture, relationships are a big factor in wellness," she observed. "We are part of a family, a community and a tribe. It's

important to go to ceremonies, powwows and events together."

**After Toni came** to Spokane to be with a sister in 1979, she worked with Indian Health Services, a local tribe and Spokane Public Schools.

She married and had four children and now has 10 grandchildren.

"Now is the best time of my life," she said, "but having children and grandchildren makes me more committed to work with kids and the future."

**In the early 1980s**, Toni and other Native professionals working with children and youth knew kids were not doing well and wanted to provide activities. She felt the public-school Natural Helpers program had good ideas. Other professionals had more ideas.

In 1985, they formed the Indian Youth Leadership Program. She and co-founder Clint Small wrote a federal grant and were funded on the first try.

In 1989, they incorporated as The NATIVE Project.

**NATIVE stands for** Native American Treatment Intervention Education.

She and three friends gave up school district jobs to serve on the staff, and 11 others agreed to serve on the board.

They started The NATIVE Project by listening to community members to learn about needs for mental health, and drug and alcohol treatment programs.

"One brick at a time," she said, they added the medical, dental and pharmacy services, and programs for parents and families. Then they incorporated care coordination, culture, exercise, meals, nutrition, leadership

training, youth camps and a place where youth can be activists.

**"With 30 percent** of the Indian community in Spokane being from birth to 18 years old, we decided we needed a significant amount of our energy dedicated to direct services for this age group," said Toni. "According to the 2020 census, there were 26,000 Native Americans in Spokane—about five percent of the population—but that's an undercount."

The NATIVE Project serves people from 300 tribes, not only urban Indians but also many from the Colville Confederated Reservation and other nearby reservations, as well as from Montana, Alaska and Canada.

"Spokane is the eighth largest U.S. city for urban Indians. Many came in the 1950s under the Indian Relocation Act, a genocide law designed to get people off the reservations, hoping they would join white society and disappear," Toni said. "It did not work but left the city with many Native people who were cut off from family, community and tribes."

**"We keep adding services.** The new building came about because of our commitment to children and youth. Since COVID, more youth felt depressed, isolated and disconnected. We connect them, so they are less anxious," said Toni, noting that use of marijuana and alcohol continues to be common.

The new Children and Youth Center has more space for activities and interaction, rather than private rooms for therapy with a counselor.

The architect incorporated

ideas of staff, board and kids into shared rooms and fluid spaces, including a music room with a piano, guitars and hand drums, a space for dance and exercise, an art therapy room, a yoga and meditation room and a ceremonial room for talking circles and cultural groups.

The 12 behavioral health staff and support staff have moved into the new space and are changing their approaches in the new environment.

**In the other building**, clinic programs are expanding into the vacated behavioral health space. Now they can add more medical offices, dental chairs, pharmacy space and adult mental health.

In that building, staff saw 500 kids a year for therapy and treatment and 1,500 for prevention and cultural activities. The medical and dental clinics see 6,000 patients a year.

Aware of the genocide Native Americans have experienced, Toni has tried to undo the damage "one kid at a time, one year at a time, pushing back the damage so we will be around for hundreds of years and longer," she said.

**"I want my grandchildren's** grandchildren to be here long after I'm gone," she said. "The worst happened to us. Because what is happening now is bad, we push back harder. We need to keep pushing and never stop."

"Persistence is in my DNA," she affirmed. "So is love. One has to love the kids to work at the NATIVE Project."

For information, call Helen Goodteacher, communications manager, at 325-5502 or visit [thenativeproject.org](http://thenativeproject.org).

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# Yakima Interfaith Network releases statement on welcoming strangers

To coordinate the faith community's response to changes in immigration policy, the Yakima Immigration Response Network (YIRN) wrote an interfaith statement that illustrates how people of diverse faiths are united in concern and compassion for the stranger, the immigrant, the refugee, the asylum seeker and the migrant, said Christie Love, senior pastor at Englewood Christian Church in Yakima.

**"We are sharing** the letter with elected officials and news outlets to challenge the national conversation around immigration," she said. "We remind leaders, clergy, lay leaders and people of faith that no matter our religious belief or expression, we are all called to care for the least of these and show kindness and hospitality to those in our land."

In early January, 100 people attended a YIRN meeting in Wapato to discuss how the community could organize to respond to changes.

Ten working groups formed to provide rapid response, a state hotline, know-your-rights

training, support for students, advocacy, faith response, medical response and more.

"The medical group became aware that many would not seek medical care, so they formed the Yakima Free Clinic to do home visits," Christie said.

The interfaith group formed because they know that sacred texts of faith groups support care for the stranger, immigrants and refugees.

Members of that group plan a prayer service on Sunday, May 4, at the Millennial Plaza in downtown Yakima.

The faiths also plan to survey congregations in April to learn how they plan to respond in case of raids and develop a database so people can connect quickly.

"This is a marathon because people will be vulnerable for a long time. We need to listen to needs and adapt as appropriate," added Christie, who began at Englewood Christian in May 2024.

Ninety-six individuals and faith communities signed the statement as of March 21, with

an invitation for others in the Yakima Valley to sign on. The faith communities that have signed the statement are Catholic, Christian (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal, Sikh, Unitarian Universalist and United Methodist.

The website also lists letters of support for immigrants from nine denominations and interfaith coalitions.

The following is the statement:

"The call to care for those in need and to welcome strangers is consistent in all faith traditions. These commands are sacred actions, rooted in the dignity and value of every human being, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, language or citizenship status. As Yakima Valley faith leaders, faith communities and people of all faiths, we affirm the importance of honoring individuals without bias due to an individual's citizenship status.

"We enthusiastically affirm the innumerable contributions that migrants, asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees have historically made and continue to

make in our nation, state and local community. These neighbors contribute to the success of our economy, work in our healthcare systems, help build and repair our neighborhoods, volunteer with local nonprofit organizations and share their cultures to help make our communities better places for all.

"We denounce the practice of mass deportations without criminal convictions. We oppose all policies and practices that seek to criminalize, detain, incarcerate or subject individuals to unsafe and unhealthy circumstances as a result of a lack of legal status.

"We raise strong objections to any actions that seek to create unnecessary trauma for families by separating them from one another, and we believe that under no circumstances should minor children ever be separated from their primary caregivers.

"We stand in strong opposition to actions taken against displaced individuals who have followed all legal channels and met all previous program requirements to be in this country.

"As people of faith, we come together to stress the moral imperative that our values, ethics and teachings place on ensuring that all people have the support needed to live in safety and security and their fullest potential. We urge our elected officials to uphold the sacred values of welcoming strangers and caring for one another when considering policies that target migrants, asylum seekers, immigrants, refugees and other vulnerable community members."

For information, email yakimaresponsenetwork@gmail.com or visit yakimaresponsenetwork.org/advocacy/faith-communities.

## Elders' efforts result in building for kids

Continued from page 1

showing animals and indigenous symbols to "create a space for mentoring future leaders, challenging stereotypes and addressing economic disparities."

"It's the first time the IHS has provided half the funds to build an urban Indian clinic," he said.

The second largest funding source was The NATIVE Project's reserve funds. Other funds were from the Washington State Legislature via the Department of Commerce, the City of Spokane, HRSA, Inatai Foundation, Spokane County Commissioners, Empire Health Foundation, the Kalispel Tribe and Innovia Foundation.

City Council President Betsy Wilkerson, who was a key speaker at the event, said, "It's a vital sanctuary of hope rooted in Native culture for all young people. The NATIVE Project is about our community's rich diversity, offering programs that allow youth to explore their cultural identities."

The architects for the project were Womer & Associates, the project manager was Wenaha and Associates, and the contractor was Halme Cascade General Contracting Co., of Medical Lake. Womer and Wenaha are a Native-run companies.

Toni said the building is also the result of the prayers and work of elders and ancestors. She explained that the seven stones in The NATIVE Project logo represent seven generations, and the four feathers represent the four directions.

"The logo represents the past



The NATIVE Project Children and Youth Services Building is at 1907 W. Maxwell.

supporting the present while we plan for the future," Toni said.

Francis was one of the elders inspiring the project. He died last August. His sister, Shirley Blackbear, and daughter, Marie Cullooyah, spoke at the dedication, describing Francis as a humble, giving, smiling, teaching man who was always learning and always helping people.

On a video taken near the end of his life, Francis told youth experiencing hard times that others had experienced worse situations. He encouraged them to help others, and to respect, love and learn from other people.

He said, "That's why the Creator put us here."

Toni said the impact of The NATIVE Project's programs is evident in the fact that one third of the current staff were in its programs as children and now as college graduates are giving back as leaders.

The NATIVE Project is now accepting appointments for children and youth behavioral health visits with patients from the ages of five to 18 years of all ethnicities. They accept most insurances.

For information, call 325-5502 or visit nativeproject.org.



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# David Gortner says The Fig Tree touches and transforms lives

David Gortner, priest at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Coeur d'Alene and director of national Episcopal initiatives for clergy leadership and congregational mental health education, served as emcee for the 2025 Fig Tree Benefit Lunch.



Board member David Gortner served as Benefit emcee.

"I'm delighted to serve on The Fig Tree board and be immersed in the wonderful work of the staff and volunteers who bring us monthly news and the annual Resource Directory," he said, noting that over its 41 years, The Fig Tree has become part of the fabric of life in the Inland Northwest.

"It has touched lives, shared stories of transformed lives, empowered people and connected them with life-changing resources. It has encouraged relationships among us as a diverse people across many com-

munities," he said

David added that the Benefit Lunch gathers people "to meet, renew relationships and raise their vision to the higher calling of faith in action for the sake of the common good.

"Words have power. We have to keep believing this. Words

have power to lift up or to burden down, to enlighten our vision or to dull senses, to inspire or to discourage. Words have power to turn our senses, minds and hearts towards what is truly important," he added.

Acknowledging that the gathering was on the unceded lands of

Indigenous peoples of the region, he stated The Fig Tree's commitment to share stories about them to build understanding and respect, and to work for reconciliation and justice.

David affirmed the power of "the witness and wisdom of those who have shared with us" and invited others to journey in solidarity with the Indigenous people here, to act upon the truths they share and take actions that will create restorative justice for all people."

Looking at the crowd of 310, he recognized that those gathered included many leaders of nonprofits, faiths, cities and neighborhoods who contribute to the public good and come to express their gratitude and support.

"We celebrate the enlightening, inspiring, helping work of The Fig

Tree and offer our support for all it does for us across the region."

David then prayed, thanking God for "the faithful work of so many who have made possible the wide-reaching service of The Fig Tree in this region." He expressed gratitude for "its work today and its embrace of people of all faiths" who follow God's "call to care for the world around us and for all who face needs and challenges in life."

David prayed for "guidance for the ongoing work of The Fig Tree, especially in this time of upheaval in our nation and world."

He closed with a prayer by Howard Thurmon for light in darkness, courage in fear, hope in despair, peace in turmoil, joy in sorrow, strength in weakness, wisdom in confusion, forgiveness for sins and love in hate.

# Columnist found people who want to do good through The Fig Tree

Cameron Conner, a community organizer and a visiting professor at Tufts University, who grew up reading The Fig Tree and is now a columnist for it, shared his commitment to it.

"My family has worked with fair trade partners in Nepal for 40 years. Ten years ago, when a 7.9 earthquake struck northwest of Kathmandu, many partners lost their homes and livelihoods," he said. "Within 24 hours, we began raising funds and coordinating with our partners to deliver emergency relief supplies."

Cameron told of The Fig Tree's quick response, of working with his family to capture the story and of sharing it in the next issue.

"The attention this story brought not only helped raise funds to deliver life-saving aid as aftershocks continued, but it also brought together a community of people across Spokane who cared and wanted to help," he said. "Many would never have known had it not been for The Fig Tree."

Over the months, as immediate relief turned into long-term recovery, the community The Fig Tree helped create stayed together and The Fig Tree continued coverage long after the media spotlight moved elsewhere, he commented, noting that this memory is key when he thinks of The Fig Tree's impact on his life and the community.

"For me it distills why the world needs The Fig Tree," Cameron said.

"Beyond the incredible stories of inspiration it lifts up, beyond informing us of the amazing things going on right down the street we might never have otherwise known about, The Fig



Community organizer Cameron Conner is now a columnist.

Tree weaves us together into community striving towards a collective vision for the world," he summed up.

Cameron summarized French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville's insight on the importance of newspapers like The Fig Tree: "In democratic countries, people [often] do not see one another and do not know where to find one another. A newspaper gives publicity to the feeling or idea that had occurred to them all simultaneously, but separately." Then they see the "light" of each other "in the dark" so they can "meet and unite."

Cameron affirmed, "That is what The Fig Tree does. It shines a light to guide our wandering spirits, long seeking each other, at last to meet and unite."

He observed that The Fig Tree's response to the earthquake—pulling together people

who shared love for a country on the other side of the globe—was what "it has done that on countless other occasions."

As an organizer, Cameron knows one of the most powerful things is to "bring people together to realize we are not alone."

Growing up reading The Fig Tree made Cameron realize he was not alone.

"There were people out there who wanted to do good. People who I could ask for help and advice, who I could rely on and learn from," he said. "The stories we tell become the world we live in. The Fig Tree stories shaped my world. They gave me imagination for the kind of person I wanted to become and the kind of people I wanted in my life.


"It's hard to find your people in the crowd," he said. "I am forever grateful to The Fig Tree for helping me find mine.

"Thank you to everyone who has given their heart and soul to the Fig Tree so that we might be here today, with each other—all wandering spirits aiming toward the light," he said. "We are here to support The Fig Tree today and in the future. We must also use it to find people we want to flock to. Build relationships, build connections, and see what kind of a future we can illuminate with that collective light."



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## Kassahun Kebede reported that Fig Tree story bore fruit in a library

Kassahun Kebede, an associate professor of sociology at Eastern Washington University, knows that local journalism has the power to connect communities and generations.

In its November issue, The Fig Tree covered his Libraries for Ethiopia initiative.

At first embarrassed and stressed by the attention, Kassahun said the story made him happy and hopeful because it raised awareness of and support for the “noble cause of spreading the joy of reading.”

“Growing up in rural Ethiopia, I didn’t own a book until I graduated from college. This experience fueled my passion for literacy, motivating me to establish Libraries for Ethiopia, a nonprofit to improve literacy there,” he added. “My vision is simple yet profound: to provide children in my village and beyond the chance to travel to many places, meet many people and understand the



Kassahun Kebede starts a library in his hometown in Ethiopia.

world through reading.”

He felt stress as he wondered if he could deliver on the goal.

“The Fig Tree’s article served as a catalyst. It connected my vision with the Spokane community and beyond. It highlighted the stark realities of literacy in Ethiopia,” he said, explaining that there are no bookstores or libraries in rural Ethiopia, the adult

literacy rate there is half the rate in the U.S., and there are only 149 public libraries in all of Ethiopia.

“These facts helped readers understand the urgent need for libraries in Ethiopia and inspired action,” Kassahun noted, pointing to the article’s impact.

It inspired St Stephen’s Episcopal Church, to support the project at a Valentine’s Day

“Share the Love” event.

“My childhood story of borrowing my teacher’s only textbook resonated with The Fig Tree readers, illustrating the transformative power of books,” he said.

Another response came from Spokane’s former mayor, Sheri Barnard, who sent him a message and donation.

“This support from community leaders amplified the project’s visibility and credibility. I thank The Fig Tree and Marijke Fakasiieiki for writing my story,” Kassahun said.

“The generational impact of this story will be significant and lasting,” he added, telling of encouraging students to pursue their dreams when he shared his story at a local middle school.

“My advice to them to give a kid a book, not an iPad, left a lasting impression on students,” he said, sure some of them would grow up to inspire others.

Although it took two years,

his initiative has made tangible progress, he said, “thanks to the increased awareness and support generated by The Fig Tree’s article. A library is being renovated in my hometown, Sendafa-Beke, bringing my vision of providing access to books and knowledge a step closer to reality.”

As the article covered the urgent need for literacy resources in Ethiopia and encouraged the community to act, Kassahun said, “it exemplified the power of sharing personal stories and showed how local journalism can connect communities across continents, fostering positive change and empowering future generations through the gift of literacy.”

He noted there is a reason why, in African folklore, the Sycamore Fig is called the queen of Africa’s trees. “It has deep roots that draw underground water closer to the surface, creating life-giving streams. What a fitting name for this newspaper.”

## Kristine Hoover is grateful for The Fig Tree making the world better

Kristine Hoover, director of Gonzaga University’s master’s in leadership studies, felt honored to help address The Fig Tree’s theme about sharing wisdom and connecting generations for its March 8 Benefit Lunch.

“A big thank you to The Fig Tree for bringing us together today and each month with stories that do just that—bridge the gap between generations and share valuable insights,” she said.

Kristine explained that one way she resonates with the 2025 benefit theme, “Sharing Wisdom: Connecting the Generations” is through her work with Clement Lye creating the documentary, “Carla the Rescuer,” which premiered in January.

“The Fig Tree played a role in spreading the word about the film,” said Kristine, telling of messages from Fig Tree readers who learned about it through several articles.

“Carla Peperzak’s story began in 1923—101 years or four generations ago. She continues to make news today with her inspirational leadership,” she said.

“The Fig Tree has been a constant presence in our community, introducing audiences to Carla over the decades with more than two dozen stories highlighting her efforts,” Kristine said. “She has spent countless hours being interviewed by The Fig Tree and has long supported its important role in our community.”

Kristine said the documentary connects generations as a story about sharing the history of WWII and the Holocaust with generations today.

“It reflects on how a sophisticated country like Germany became the breeding ground for Nazism. Hitler didn’t come to power through genocide and



Kristine Hoover helps create documentary on Carla Peperzak.

murder, but in a time of resentment, using extreme nationalism and scapegoating,” she said.

Carla’s story reveals the personal toll this time had on her family and many others—her father lost his business, and entire groups were excluded from professions like teaching and medicine. During the Holocaust, 6 million Jews and more than 3 million others were murdered because of their ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, disability or sexual orientation.

“The film is a story of generations,” Kristine continued, “because Carla is most proud to have 54 members of her family today. Antisemitism took three-quarters of her family and many friends. Today, the story of her family’s survival is told by four generations—including her great-

granddaughter, Aubrey, who is now the age she was in WWII.

“Carla embodies leadership, showing us self-awareness, moral courage and a deep sense of community. She was a medical student who was fluent in German and became involved with the Dutch Resistance. During unimaginable hardship, she transformed from being a typical teenager to a resilient, aware individual who understood her own power rather than feeling helpless,” added Kristine, aware that even those who have not seen the documentary may know much of her story from reading The Fig Tree.

Carla still shares her story.

“We must appreciate The Fig Tree’s work to provide us with these important stories. They help us reflect on what is right

and wrong, inspire us with lives of purpose and service, and keep inviting us to promote unity and action for the common good,” Kristine said.

“Thank you to The Fig Tree for your unwavering commitment to help us move toward healing and making our world

a better place, spreading hope and calling us to action. Through The Fig Tree’s stories, we’re reminded that, together, we can make a difference,” she said.

“Our supporting The Fig Tree, a community treasure, amplifies the hope and positive change we can create.”



# Pingala Dhital said Fig Tree editor reminds her of the value of elders

Pingala Dhital, who is originally from Bhutan but ethnically Nepali, told of working at Thrive International, an organization that supports refugees and asylum seekers, especially assisting with youth, women and housing.

As part of the Mahima Project in the women's program, The Fig Tree interviewed her in September.

**"I am filled with gratitude as I share my journey,"** she said. "Coming to America as a refugee was incredibly challenging. We lost connection to our core selves when we were forced to leave our homes forever. Arriving in this beautiful city, everything was different. The weather, the lifestyle and the high-tech environment were beyond our imagination. We knew no one, and navigating this new world was overwhelming."

Pingala found one of the biggest cultural shocks was the



**Pingala Dhital teaches refugee women at Thrive International.**

treatment of elders.

**"In my culture, elders** are deeply respected, held in the highest regard and seen as the wisdom keepers," she said. "They guide us. Their voices shape our lives. In the U.S., I found that elders are often set aside in retirement homes or adult care facilities, and their wisdom is not sought after.

"The value of individualism was new to me, and I felt the absence of a deep emotional connection across generations," Pingala said.

**One day in 2015,** Mary Stamp called to talk about the earthquake in Nepal.

At first Pingala wondered if people Spokane really cared about what happens in faraway

countries. On a phone interview, she said she quickly realized that Mary cared.

"When we finally met last year to discuss the Mahima Project, our conversation was more than an interview. It was a shared experience," Pingala said. "In speaking with her, I found a connection I had long been missing. In my struggle to survive, I had lost the essence of life, the deep emotional ties that keep us grounded."

**"Mary didn't just ask** questions. She listened with the patience of someone who has spent a lifetime valuing human stories, understanding that each one carries weight, meaning and history. On that moment, she reminded me of the elders in my culture, the ones who hold wisdom not just in their minds, but in their hearts," Pingala observed.

When the story was published in The Fig Tree, she said the response "was incredible. People

reached out wanting to support my work, volunteer or simply connect. It was heartwarming. It brought back a long-lost sense of belonging.

"This experience showed me that The Fig Tree is more than just a publication," she said. "It is a bridge between people, a force of love, connection and community."

**"At the heart, Mary carries** wisdom not just from experience but from an unshakable belief in the power of stories to bring people together," Pingala said. "She listens with a heart wide open, offering kindness and guidance like an elder who knows the way but never forces the journey."

"Mary is what my culture teaches us to honor. She reminds me why elders are the backbone of a community, why their wisdom is sacred and why their love is irreplaceable. Spokane is blessed to have you!" Pingala affirmed.

# Raymond Reyes makes compelling appeal for supporting The Fig Tree

After 36 years of teaching and leadership at Gonzaga University, Raymond Reyes retired in 2024. At GU he served as a professor in the School of Education teaching graduate and undergraduate courses, an associate vice president, an associate provost and chief diversity officer.

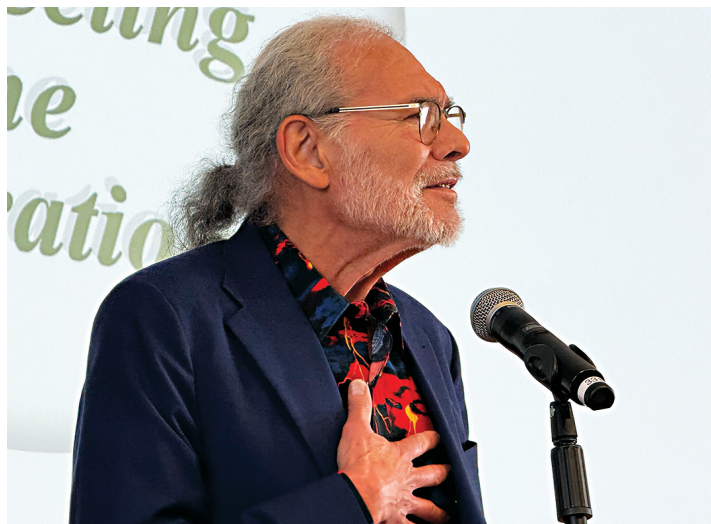
As a member of The Fig Tree board, he invited those gathered at its March 8 Benefit Lunch to support the work with their donations. The following is his appeal.

**"Are you feeling the love?"** he asked, inviting attendees to put their hands on their hearts and feel their heartbeats. "Are you alive? Say, I'm alive. Put your thumbs up."

Inviting attendees to look at their thumbs and realize each thumb print is unique, Raymond reminded them that among the nearly 9 billion "humanoids speaking over 6,000 languages, nobody else has that thumbprint."

Then he asked guests to look to their left and right to see they are surrounded by beauty and say to those nearby, "You're beautiful."

**"So, we've established** that we are alive and hold the gift of life, that we are unique, that we are surrounded by beauty, the aesthetic of being, and that we are distinctively prepared to make a difference in the world with our generosity," he said. "You have all the ingredients to transform



**Raymond Reyes, retired from Gonzaga, is on Fig Tree Board.**

and to be a great transformer."

Next, he asked the group to say, "In order to G-E-T you have to A-S-K," reminding them that "love in your heart is not love until you give it."

Raymond then asked, "Are we living in times that we need to be more informed? Are we living in times when we need more inspiration? Are we living in times that we need to be more involved?"

**"To inform, inspire** and involve is The Fig Tree's DNA," he said, adding that the four speakers at the event "gave voice to their lived experience, their soul song."

He said those with thumbs and cerebral cortexes "have to make a choice and a commitment to

be human. We need to make a choice and commitment in this historic moment."

**He then invited guests to give** generously and be responsible for "our freedom at this critical historic time."

Affirming they can make a difference, he asked them to do more than they have ever done before.

Raymond announced that The Fig Tree established a sustainability endowment fund at the last board meeting to assure the long-term viability of The Fig Tree.

He added that Fig Tree writers do peace journalism and solutions journalism, needed now more than ever.

"The Fig Tree has 41 years

of informing readers. It is a prophetic voice in these times to inspire us in nurturing involvement and engagement," he said.

**Raymond invited guests** to consider different ways they can connect people as they support publishing the newspaper and resource directory.

"Are you having a good time today? It's like a reunion, seeing people we haven't seen in a long time," he said, affirming the benefit is also an opportunity for connecting.

"Now it's time to walk the talk. Go to [thefigtree.org/donate](http://thefigtree.org/donate).

html or send a check," he invited,

**Raymond then suggested** four ways the Fig Tree helps people act for social justice: 1) Its journalism keeps people close to the issues, challenges and opportunities. 2) It changes the narrative, helping people reimagine a different story. 3) It provides practical hope to stretch people's imaginations as they remain grounded. 4) It invites people to move out of their comfort zones, so they are motivated to move and change.

In closing, he asked people to donate and sign up to volunteer.

**Keep donations flowing to The Fig Tree**  
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# GetLit Festival seeks to inspire creativity

The 27th Annual GetLit! festival, organized by Eastern Washington University College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, celebrates the power of the written word, gathers authors of the Pacific Northwest and highlights local literary talents from April 10 to 12 in local venues.

There are two days of readings, craft classes, open mics, panels and literary happy hours.

“Our goals are to inspire creativity and to encourage conversations on topics like the climate crisis and spirituality, so people can learn and grow,” said Kate Peterson, director of GetLit

The closing panel, “Mothering the Future: New Nonfiction on Parenting and Environmental

Change,” will be held from 6:30 to 8 p.m., Sunday, April 13, on YouTube. For it, Martha Park, author of *World Without End: Essays on the Apocalypse and After*, will explore faith, motherhood and the climate crisis.

Sharing on the panel with Martha on eco-parenting and ecofeminism will be Christina Rivera, author of *My Oceans: Essays of Water, Whales and Women*; Chelsea Steinauer, author of *Mother, Creature, Kin*; Jessica Johnson, author of “Mettlework,” and Jennifer Chas, author of *We Are Animals: On the Nature and Politics of Motherhood*.

The link for the closing panel is [youtube.com/watch?v=v5zYlatZ48o](https://youtube.com/watch?v=v5zYlatZ48o).

Headliners include authors Maggie Smith and Danez Smith, and Li-Young Lee, author of six books of poetry.

More than 65 other authors will participate in events at [getlitfestival.org](https://getlitfestival.org).

“Our virtual lineup includes diverse topics and authors. We pair writers at different stages of their careers—from debut novelists to poets with dozens of bestselling and prize-winning collections,” said Kate.

She added that the virtual lineup allows people outside Spokane to “taste what we’re doing here at the festival.”

For information, visit [inside.ewu.edu/getlit](https://inside.ewu.edu/getlit).



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# Cathedral celebrates centennial of its construction over four years

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

On Sept. 20, 1925, the site for what is now the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist at 127 E. 12th Ave. was dedicated as a “Beacon on the Hill” and a “Light for Christ” in a troubled world.

Today, 100 years later, its centennial committee, co-chaired by Nina Beegle and Darryl Gurecky, desires for St. John’s to be not just “a beacon on the hill” but also “a cathedral for the city.”

As an example, Nina said St. John’s hosted with others the Hope for Creation Conference to showcase local caretakers of air, water and land and affirm Spokane’s leadership in environmental care and renewal.

**What is the cathedral?** It has three interwoven functions.

- It is the official seat of the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Spokane, currently the Right Rev. Gretchen Rehberg, and the center of its many diocesan activities.

- St. John’s is the largest parish in the diocese whose current dean is The Very Rev. Heather VanDeventer.

- Its role is as a center for public gatherings and respectful engagement, as well as cultural activities emphasized by its physical location overlooking downtown Spokane.

The Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist was the fulfillment of the dream of the Right Rev. Edward Makin Cross, the third bishop of the Missionary Diocese of Spokane. He served the diocese from 1924 to 1954.

This Cathedral was the successor of All Saints Cathedral (1889 to 1929) and two other episcopal parishes of Spokane, St. Peter’s and St. James’ Mission.

**Construction began** in the middle of the roaring twenties and Spokane’s population had increased rapidly with the railroads connecting Spokane to major commerce centers on the East and West Coasts, as well as in Canada.

The bishop envisioned a grand cathedral like the magnificent Gothic cathedrals of Europe. To accomplish this, he engaged Spokane architect Harold Whitehouse, who designed the building in the English Gothic style with French influence. Between 1925 and 1929, the main part of the cathedral, the nave, was completed before the Great Depression halted construction.

“The architect’s attention to detail was amazing,” commented Nina, as she pointed out elements in the construction of the solid masonry of the nave, which used sandstone quarried



Nina Beegle shows the cathedral’s baptistry.

in Tacoma and Boise. “His plans and notes are such a resource to have in our archives, and we hope to share this in one of the several exhibitions planned during our four years of anniversary celebrations.”

Jennifer Ogden, secretary of the centennial committee, explained, “The centennial celebrations occurring from 2025 to 2029 are being planned around four key anniversaries in the cathedral’s history: its site dedication on Sept. 20, 1925, the groundbreaking on Nov. 17, 1926, the laying of the cornerstone on June 10, 1928, and its consecration on Oct. 10, 1929.”

**In this first year** of celebration, the committee is planning at least three special activities.

- The first is an outdoor service to be held on Sunday, Sept. 21, commemorating the land dedication.

- In the fall is a gala event, featuring a dinner, followed by dancing in the aisles of the Cathedral.

- The third opportunity this fall will be to display an interactive handwritten, hand-illuminated Gospel of St. John from the St. John’s Bible Project.

“It is magnificent, done in the medieval tradition with illuminations for our time,” Nina said.

In 1998, Saint John’s Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minn., commissioned calligrapher Donald Jackson to produce a hand-written, hand-illuminated Bible with the technology and vision of today.

The goal of The Saint John’s Bible Project was to ignite the spiritual imagination of peoples

throughout the world by presenting the Bible as a work of art that illuminates the Word of God for a new millennium in a way that is relevant to the 21st century.

**Various special** aspects of the cathedral will be featured throughout the centennial celebration.

“Our stained-glass windows were done by two of the premier studios in the United States—Connick Associates and Willett of Philadelphia—and many years apart but even with their differences in style and color they blend in beautifully,” Nina explained.

Whitehouse and Bishop Cross worked closely with the stained-glass artist of the era, Charles Connick and his studio in Boston, to design and craft the windows, following the medieval tradition for them to be a tool to educate the faithful. The windows on the south side of the nave feature important figures in the Old Testament, while the north side features those from the New Testament.

**In 1933**, the central portion of the Rose Window was put in place, but it was not completed until 1955, well after the end of World War II.

The second phase of construction began in 1948 after the end of the war. At that time, the north and south transepts and the tower were completed.

Sometime prior to 1980, the Connick Studio closed, and future windows were put in place following the design of Whitehouse and Connick but crafted by the Willett Hauser Architectural Glass Company of

Philadelphia. Some of the more recent windows also feature local Spokane history including the faith journey of Spokane Chief Garry, which was installed in 1958.

**The most recent addition** to the cathedral was a Columbarium built in 2000 just outside of the passageway between the Welcome Center and the cathedral proper where there are stained glass windows honoring the women of St. John’s and a former bishop.

“The original architect determined that, unlike many of the cathedrals in Europe, no person would be interred in St. John’s itself,” Nina said, explaining why they needed to have a Columbarium—a structure to hold urns with cremated remains of the dead—on the cathedral grounds.

**Not just the building** but also parishioners of St. John’s through the years will be featured in the celebrations.

“Cathedral member Evan Olson is putting together a set of oral history videos of parishioners that we hope to feature on our website. He started with some of our long-time members, but I don’t think they will be posted until the third phase of our celebration,” said Nina.

“I know he has done videos of Joan Degerstrom who had been coming to St. John’s as a child since the first stages of construction, of Kay Rafferty, the granddaughter of the architect, of Cate Moye, who is the daughter of Dean Richard Coombs and grew up in the deanery across the street, and of Stan Fergin, who contributed to Expo 74 and was active in the parish most of his life,” she added.

**Events planned** for the next three years have not been developed in as much detail yet, but in 2026 there will be an exhibition focused on the pre-history of the cathedral from Sept. 17 to Nov. 15, and an outdoor service commemorating the groundbreaking on Sunday, Nov. 8.

**For the third phase** in 2028, they have planned a service commemorating the laying of the cornerstone on Sunday June 11, and an exhibition focused on the art and architecture of the cathedral from Sept. 14 to Nov. 12, in collaboration with the Northwest Museum of Art and Culture and feature particularly the Native American presence in the windows.

Finally, in 2029 to commemorate the consecration of St. John’s, they plan a week of services from Sunday to Saturday, Oct. 21 to 27.

Nina affirmed, “All are welcome at these events—civic, nonprofit, faith, business leaders and engaged citizens. All points of view are needed in a cathedral for the city. The dignity of each person will be respected. Sessions, except for fundraisers, are free with no registration.”

For information, visit [stjohnscathedral.org](http://stjohnscathedral.org).

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# FāVS News presents community gathering on bridging the divides

FāVS News presents “Uniting the Inland Northwest,” a community gathering on bridging the divides, from 3:30 to 7 p.m., Sunday, April 27, at the Montvale Event Center, 1019 W. 1st Ave. in downtown Spokane.

Itohan Idumwonyi, who is on the Humanities Washington Speakers Bureau and a Gonzaga University religious studies professor, will speak on “Ubuntu” philosophy that emphasizes community building as a way to re-approach relationships to break barriers and care for one another.

“Ubuntu directly helps us navigate beyond superficial solutions to rethink and foster human connectedness,” Itohan said.

Tracy Simmons, who started FāVS in 2012 and is the editor, said they held coffee talks and forums in coffee shops until COVID.

“After Trump’s election in 2016, we noted polarization, so we held a Good Neighbor Conference at Gonzaga to help people who voted in different ways be good neighbors. “Uniting the Inland Northwest” also hopes to help people be better neighbors,” she said.

“Our goal is to use journalism to bridge diverse communities and educate people on religious and ethical issues,” Tracy commented. “Beyond formal sessions, we hope people will talk in the hallways and form relationships.”

Three of six breakout sessions are at 5 p.m. and three at 6 p.m.

The following are the 5 p.m. panels:

- “Walking in Their Shoes: Understanding Homelessness in Our Community,” with FāVS board member Rebecca Cooney, John Chatburn of Spokane Housing Authority and Angela Chapman of Transitions Ministry.

- “How Food and Faith Unite Communities,” with Adriana Janovich, Kathy Davis of Dinner Table at West Central Abbey, Maisa Abudayha and Ross Carper of Feast World Kitchen and Michelle Triant of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church.

- “The Next Generation’s Vision for Unity,” with FāVS associate editor Cassy Benefield,

Ian Sullivan of Odyssey Youth Movement, Kate Burke of River City Youth Ops, Himani Agrawal of Spokane Hindu Temple and Community Center and Kevin Illidge of Youth for Christ.

The 6 p.m. panels are:

- “Understanding LGBTQ+ Faith Experiences,” with FāVS reporter Mia Gallegos, Traci Gillig of Washington State LGBTQ Survey, Heather VanDeventer of St. John’s Cathedral and Mark Cuilla, diversity, equity and inclusion specialist and member of Salem Lutheran.

- “Interfaith Dialogue in Polarized Times,” with Naghmana Sherazi of the Office of Equity in the Office of the Governor, the Rev. Gen Heywood of Faith Leaders and Leaders of Con-

science, Andrea Hainsworth of Spokane Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Ven. Thubten Chonyi of Sravasti Abbey.

- “Building Bridges with Refugee and Immigrant Neighbors,” with Carla LaFayette of Life Center, Luis Castillo of Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane, Keri Bambock of World Relief and a representative of Thrive International.

There is no charge for this FāVS fundraiser, but guests are asked to register.

For information, email bobstout@favs.news or visit eventbrite.com/e/uniting-the-inland-northwest-tickets-1254890644699?aff=oddtdeator.

## Latinos En Spokane listens to, serves and empowers immigrants

Latinos En Spokane (LES) is offering services to help local immigrants become successful in seeking to be part of the community in the Inland Northwest.

The nonprofit has worked for eight years to support citizen participation, culturally led development and empowerment of the Latino and immigrant populations in Spokane County.

They go to the community, listen to needs, build trust and provide technical support and

wrap-around services directly to families navigating the complexities of immigration, education, healthcare, housing and city resources in Spanish and English.

Latinos En Spokane offers legal services, social services, small business support, Climate Action and Resiliency and El Mercado—a market for food, small businesses and services.

They are starting a “Ser y Crecer” program for youth, to address issues of cultural connec-

tion, drug use and homelessness experienced by Latino youth.

Local media have covered stories of raids, with at least 30 people being detained in Spokane County in the past two months.

Videotaping by neighbors or family or friends has highlighted the need for the immigrant community to know their rights and know that ICE is changing to early morning raids.

Latinos En Spokane offers know-your-rights trainings, so

people know what to do in case ICE visits them, especially if they don’t have a warrant. It is important that people are educated and empowered to recognize danger and to know they do not have to give information.

A May Day gathering will be held from 5 to 8 p.m., Thursday, May 1 at the Riverfront Park Clocktower.

If a friend or relative is detained, they suggest calling Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network hotline at 844-724-

3737 or LES on Facebook or Instagram at Latinos En Spokane.

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[www.gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents](http://www.gonzaga.edu/ClimateEvents)

## YWCA sponsors ‘Equity for All 2025’

YWCA Spokane is sponsoring Equity for All 2025, an event to advance equity and justice. It will be held from 5 to 7 p.m., Thursday, April 17, at Hamilton Studio, 1427 W. Dean Ave.

This year’s theme, “Restorative Practices in Community,” explores how restorative approaches and circle work build stronger, more connected communities. Attendees will experience these practices through discussions, performances and a restorative circle.

“Restorative practices have the power to heal, strengthen relationships and build trust within communities,” said Jeanette Hauck, CEO of YWCA Spokane.

“Attendees will experience the transformative impact of Circle Practice.”

The immersive experience will stir conversations and advance YWCA’s mission of eliminating racism and empowering women. It will feature a panel discussion led by local leaders in restorative practices and circle work.

Local artists will explore themes of community, equity and restorative justice through performances.

Participants will engage in a Circle Practice to deepen understanding and connection. They will also have the opportunity to network with others committed

to equity and social change.

This year’s Equity for All is presented in collaboration with the Spokane NAACP’s Building Restorative Communities Initiative, an effort to promote restorative justice.

Providence is a sponsor and Hamilton Studio is providing the space and recording the session for later viewing.

Ongoing engagement opportunities and information can be found at [ywcaspokane.org/blog](http://ywcaspokane.org/blog) and by following YWCA Spokane on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

For information, visit [ywcaspokane.org](http://ywcaspokane.org) or register at [ywcaspokane.org/equity4all](http://ywcaspokane.org/equity4all).

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## ‘One Community, One River’ is Conference theme

The Spokane River Forum (SRF) Conference will be held Tuesday and Wednesday, April 22 and 23, at the Centennial Hotel in Spokane.

With the theme “Our Community, Our River,” leaders and participants will stimulate collaboration on work to ensure a healthy Spokane River system that benefits everyone. They will

also explore policy, technical issues and public engagement for the future.

They will also present local and regional approaches to interconnected issues from habitat restoration to aquifer protection.

The Spokane River Forum Conference addresses protecting the river, aquifer and watershed.

In addition to the conference’s

focus on the area’s watershed, the SRF offers ways to be involved and join the conversation around protecting the river and aquifer.

For information, visit [spokaneriver.net/conf](http://spokaneriver.net/conf).

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# The Lands Council summarizes shifting emphases over its 40 years

By Kate Vanskike

In 2025, The Lands Council (TLC) celebrates 40 years of preserving and protecting Inland Northwest public lands to promote healthy forests, water and communities.

The 1974 World's Fair hosted in Spokane was the first world's fair to focus on environmental topics. Out of the international celebration, the slogan "reduce, reuse, recycle" became a household term.

A decade later, other developments emerged around environmental causes in the Inland Northwest, leading to the founding of The Lands Council.

Notably, the organization that became The Lands Council was begun and led by medical doctors not by forest rangers, biologists or ecologists.

John Osborn and fellow interns at Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center sat in a break room near the intensive care unit to organize for protecting trout streams and elk habitat.

In a 2024 interview with KYRS radio host Carol Ellis, John said the Spokane Resident Physicians Action League, as it was called, focused on protecting the headwaters of the St. Joe and Clearwater rivers and a 200,000-acre wildland known as Mallard-Larkins that they also wanted protected in the national wilderness preservation system.

"We changed our name in 1985 to the Inland Empire Public Lands Council because our work had extended beyond wilderness, and so we were getting involved in forest planning and the congressional appropriations process," he said. "Then we were increasingly involved in trying to stop the massive over-cutting of the corporate lands that are based on the Northern Pacific River Land Grant."

When the issue of toxins from mining arose, the group changed its name again, this time to The Lands Council (TLC).

"Council has meaning. It really was a council of conservation leaders from the hunting, angling and environmental communities, a powerhouse of leaders in conservation from various communities that came together to try to deal with these pressing issues," John said.

Early staffers were activists—constantly opposing those who would ransack forests and using litigation at every opportunity. Lawsuits were the name of the game in the 1980s and 1990s. Healthier forests are the result.

John and crew were also creative, producing a monthly newsletter called Transitions,



Watershed restoration director Kat Hall, seated, with seasonal workers Jaelyn Wesche, Abby Dallabetta and Sylvia Coppers, and Justyce Brant, right, urban forestry director, plant trees.

which was mailed to members of Congress to educate them on practical, yet critical issues like the safety of the water supply. The newsletters included political cartoons like those in national newspapers. They are now in the University of Idaho online archives at lib.uidaho.edu/digital/transitions.

Under Mark Solomon, executive director from 1995 to 1999, TLC did a "Get the Lead Out" campaign, producing a video and mailing 10,000 VHS tapes to residents, educating them on how to contact their representatives. The videos warned about 165 billion pounds of toxins flowing into the waters of the basin of the Silver Valley, washing down into the Coeur d'Alene River into Coeur d'Alene Lake and then into the Spokane River.

Mark introduced another tactic that proved helpful to the environmental cause: offering conferences and workshops demonstrating how activists could learn to find solutions with those who opposed their work.

"I wanted people to be well aware of how the process worked and identify whether they were capable of compromise," he said in an interview this spring. "It was particularly illuminating for the staff, some of whom believed that compromise was 'selling out' before the exercise. That changed."

Creating alliances with unlikely friends continued in the 2000s under the leadership of Mike Petersen, who built relationships with lumber companies to protect regional forests. One outcome was creating the Northeast Washington Forest Coalition, which has set an example for forest cooperatives across the nation. Under Mike, staff also addressed oil trains and wildlife issues.

Over time, the work of The Lands Council shifted from a focus on political advocacy to stream restoration through tree

planting, which allowed the organization to engage the community in the work of helping nature thrive against the odds.

Another creative solution has been harnessing the natural work of beavers, first relocating the dam-builders and then learning to mimic the work with beaver dam analogs.

Today, under the leadership of Amanda Parrish, who was a staffer for 12 years before becoming executive director, The Lands Council is adapting once more.

While community tree-planting, stream restoration and forest coalition work continues, the staff now includes a climate justice director to support initiatives concerning communities most affected by ecological realities.

"At its roots, TLC's mission is still similar to the original spirit of what John and others built," Amanda said.

A key difference is a move from the rural areas into the urban core, where The Lands Council provides free street trees in neighborhoods that are most in need of shade and cooling.

"There are mental health benefits from access to natural green spaces," Amanda said.

There are other ways The Lands Council weaves justice work into environmental action. A key example is its connection with Geiger Corrections Center, where TLC's longest-serving staffer, Kat Hall, has inspired and trained inmates to plant and care for seedlings that crews later plant around Spokane County.

Much like the doctors in the beginning, and the activists and ecologists who followed, today's Lands Council thrives on connecting with the city's Urban Forestry Department, the county's Conservation District, the state's Department of Ecology and most importantly, to regular citizens who want to do

something good for the land and for the community.

Today, as threats of federal funding cuts call into question the sustainability of these programs, organizations like The Lands Council rely increasingly on philanthropic support.

During Earth Month 2025 and throughout the 40th anniversary year of the region's longest-serving environmental nonprofit, The Lands Council is recruiting people to be involved in donating financial support or joining the next tree planting.

In the spirit of The Lands Council's early leaders, its staff and board urge people to write letters to elected officials, asking them

to support conservation efforts.

For information, visit [landscouncil.org](http://landscouncil.org).

Kate Vanskike is a tree hugger whose love for the natural world was sparked, in part, by old-time hymns she played in the church where her father was pastor. Currently serving as president of the board for The Lands Council, she enjoys walking barefoot in the woods near her home in Spokane Valley.

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## In the crisis and chaos, it's now time to be love, justice and peace

In this crazy time, when things seem to be falling apart, upside down, halted, then restored or semi-restored, litigated and won at least temporarily, we are glad to be editing The Fig Tree and not chasing the media circus designed for a reality TV audience.

It's hard to keep up with shock and awe, but we realize it is an attempt to control and confuse media and people.

Thankfully, not all media succumb to chase just the BREAKING NEWS of drastic cuts and changes to global relations. Many, like us, offer background and ask questions to stir thinking: What does it

save to leave food rotting in warehouses? Do we cut off farmers who take pride in feeding the world? What do our faiths say?

In the midst of the chaos, we are glad to follow our role of informing, inspiring and involving people with newspaper stories of people who care and Resource Directory data to change people's lives. Both work to pass on wisdom.

Our media and events exist for times like these. We are to hopeful as we persevere on the path toward the beloved community, in which all are welcomed, respected and valued.

We though many are one—created by

and in the image of the Creator. We are family, sharing stories, wisdom and ideas to weather these times for the sake of future generations. The work for God's love, justice and peace is ongoing. We are to persist and be resilient.

We need new models of journalism, locally run, nonprofit media that provide news for people not for profit.

In an era when most newspapers, TV stations and online media are owned and run by billionaires to make more money, not to preserve democracy, it's no wonder that many relish the current anxiety-producing chaos that keeps people coming back.

The shackled Venezuelan immigrants, loaded on a plane and arriving in an El Salvador prison with heads shaved and dressed in white, were made-for-TV Holocaust images, showing media that the constitutional crisis is here, not in the future.

We invite people of faith and conscience to put their faith and values into action by writing, calling, rallying and voicing their desire to operate by the constitution. We need to be the love, justice, freedom and peace we seek to see in our families, communities, nation and world.

**Mary Stamp - editor**

## Democracy is best means to reach freedom, equality, justice, peace

Given that democracy is worth saving, where should we go from here?

Let us begin with the premise that a government is formed and accepted in our current world according to its ability to safeguard and promote certain values. These values include freedom, equality, justice, peace and the right to dissent—in short, the values displayed on revolutionary banners throughout history whenever people fought for a better world.

Monarchy, mercantilism, feudalism, theocracy, oligopoly and nearly every form of governance flirted with throughout human history boil down in one way or another to the principle of rule of the many by a few.

The key assumption of these governments is that one group of elites is best equipped to decide for the whole, be it the wealthiest, the divinely ordained, those of royal blood or another small elite.

Absolute power offers little room for accountability to values of human aspiration.

Save a few altruistic exceptions that

promote the values of freedom, equality and peace out of "benevolence," absolute rulers have historically had little reason to make decisions other than those that promote their own self-interest. There were few ways, outside of bloody, brutal revolution, for the majority of people to advance their interests.

What makes democracy unique among its political peers is that it requires rulers to attend to the interests of those they rule in order to maintain their power. It does this by creating levers which everyday people can use to make life better or worse for those at the top without having to go through the trouble of a revolution to make the same point.

However, the existence of these levers does not ensure politicians will act in the best interest of their people. There are many other interested parties—corporations, wealthy patrons, political allies—for whom democracy also extends the levers to be manipulated. They are proficient at doing so. They organize money, influence and members, duping the rest

of us into thinking our elected officials have our best interest at heart, and encouraging us to sit placidly until the next election—by which time the outcome—or the limited options we have—have been decided by others.

Living in a democracy does not mean those with power will represent us. Rather it means it is easier to make them do so, but the responsibility ultimately rests with the people to organize around their needs to set up such a racket that representatives cannot afford to ignore them. We have to use the levers of power, because if we don't, others will.

The cruel joke of many democratic revolutions is that once people have power, they must constantly exercise it or lose it. There is no "going home." This mistake took place in South Africa after Apartheid. This mistake is also what civil society groups made after the end of martial law in the Philippines.

It is the mistake we are making today in the United States.

Often when people achieve democracy,

they think the fight is over, they have won their freedom and the government will represent them and respond to their needs instead of opposing and oppressing them.

A democratic government does not default to promoting the interests of the people, Democracy is neutral. It allows anyone's voice to have a place. The benefit for people is that for the first time in history, democracy gives all people the chance to be a part of this conversation rather than living at the mercy of it.

We must keep in mind President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's response to a union delegation that once visited him: "Okay, you've convinced me. Now go out and bring the pressure on me!"

Democracy was never meant to be an end in itself. It was not a status to be reached at which point all would be well.

It is merely the best political means available toward the achievement of the values of freedom, equality, justice, peace and the right to dissent.

**Cameron Conner  
Columnist**


 Letters to the Editor

# Sounding Board

Commentaries

## Comments address getting older, politics like sports, a full multi-faith calendar

**Getting older** with all its realities, both good and not-so-good, that are often difficult to admit, accept and live with.

Most like to think of the wisdom and experiences we might have acquired. Many of us may not be as aware of our ability to be flexible—both in terms of our bodies and in terms of our minds.

As we age, many of us find it difficult to make changes without significant effort. We may start saying, "That's the way it's always been done." "I don't understand kids nowadays." "What is happening in the world?"

The world is changing. It may feel like the sky is falling. The church is changing, and many don't like the way it's changing. Some changes are out of our control. Some require us to question and take some action, while others require that we be flexible.

I have discovered that I need to take a deep breath, think, pray and ask, "Is this situation out of my control?" Trying to change things that are out of our control can use up too much energy and deplete us so I don't have the energy or focus to work on the things I can impact.

It is easy to worry and fret over things without asking: What can I do? When am I going to take this action? What resources do I need? It can take a lot of time, but it can also be rewarding to play a part in affecting even some small part of things that need to be challenged.

For me, the most difficult option is being flexible. Sometimes, I do not like the way things change. It may feel uncomfortable, strange or wrong, but those observations may simply be my own feelings, inflexibility and discomfort, not

necessarily whether a particular change is bad or wrong.

As I get older, the lines sometimes blur between my perceptions, comforts and inflexibility, versus change that is helpful, necessary and good. I wonder what it would be like when things change in our churches, conference and neighborhoods. Before we make judgments, we first take a deep breath, think, pray and ask ourselves if this change might actually be for good.

**Rev. Daniel Miranda  
Inland and Seven Rivers District  
Superintendent & Missional Strategist**

**We treat politics too much** like sports. Elections are framed as a tournament like March Madness, where candidates are eliminated through the primary season until two final contenders square off in the championship match. The winner celebrates under showers of confetti, while the loser chokes back tears in front of their dejected fans. In sports, the winner hoists the trophy high, puts their feet up, and enjoys the satisfaction of their victory as well as freedom from any further pressures or responsibilities.

For both the winners and the losers, once the "game" is over there is little to no work to do in the "offseason."

While this narrative makes for compelling media coverage, the "politics as sports" motif could not be more antithetical to the reality of a healthy democracy.

Elections aren't the finish line—they are the prelude to American democracy. The real work happens between the ballots, when the backers of winning candidates hold their representatives accountable for substantive legislative progress.

This is also the time when the minority works to ensure their voices are included in the conversation about policies which serve the common good.

Recently, I've seen a couple of powerful examples of democracy finding its voice.

On March 11, I was in Washington D.C. to meet with lawmakers of both parties to advocate for positive solutions to our broken and recently dismantled immigration systems. In addition to productive dialogues with those on both sides of the aisle, I was encouraged by the sheer number of people visiting the halls of Congress to raise their voices on all kinds of issues.

Security lines to get into the buildings were out the doors, and checkpoints were busier than most folks had seen in a long time. I've seen similarly strong participation in local and state advocacy efforts too.

In early March, our new Congressman, Michael Baumgartner, spoke out in support of Ukrainian refugees. When Ukraine is experiencing a profound lack of support from the U.S., our representative responded to the voices of the Slavic community and their allies in Eastern Washington and has chosen to join their fight for recognition and justice in contrast to other leaders in his own party.

These examples may seem small, but they are significant. Our voices matter. If we choose to use them, we may see the renewal of American democracy—not a face-off between two political entities, but a team effort creating a more perfect union for all of us.

For those who share my commitment

to supporting refugees—particularly the more than 3,000 Ukrainian refugees living in Eastern Washington—I encourage you to use your voice to call Rep. Baumgartner and thank him for his public support of our refugee neighbors.

**Mark Finney - pastor at Emmaus Church, member of Human Rights Spokane Board, and executive director of Thrive International**

**Our multi-faith calendar** in March was brimming with diverse celebrations and holy days, reminding us of the rich tapestry of faith traditions that enrich our community. From the solemn observance of Ramadan and Lent, which both began in early March, to the joyous festivities of Holi and Purim, and the celebration of Nowruz, this month offers a unique opportunity for reflection and multi-faith understanding.

These varying expressions of faith, all arriving in the same season of rebirth, invite us to consider the shared human experience of seeking connection, justice, meaning and renewal.

As spring begins and we are blessed with more sunlight, I have found myself thinking more about renewal and sustainability. How can we sustain ourselves and our movements? How can we renew our commitment to justice and compassion, especially in the face of opposition day after day?

The answer to me lies in community. We must lean on each other in these times and work together.

**Brianna Dilts  
Eastern Washington organizer  
for Faith Action Network**

# Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed  
Submit events to [development@thefigtree.org](mailto:development@thefigtree.org) by the third Friday

- To June 1** • **Samurai, Sunrise, Sunset**, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, Tues to Sun 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 456-3931, [northwestmuseum.org](http://northwestmuseum.org)
- Apr 1-May 3** • **Catching Our Breath: Prayers for Creation**, submit earth month prayers to [HFC@StJohns-Cathedral.org](mailto:HFC@StJohns-Cathedral.org)
- Apr 1, 8, 15, 22, 29** • **Tuesday Gallery Talks**, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, 11 a.m., 456-3931, [northwestmuseum.org](http://northwestmuseum.org)
- Apr 1, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 24, 29** • **Tree Potting Days** at Turnbull Wildlife Refuge, 26010 S. Smith, Cheney, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., 559-3030, [joshua\\_contois@fws.gov](mailto:joshua_contois@fws.gov)
- Apr 1-30** • **Bites & Books: Turning the Page on Hunger** Community Food Drive, county and city libraries, [scl.d.org](http://scl.d.org) and [spokanelibrary.org](http://spokanelibrary.org)
- Apr 2, 9, 16, 23, 30** • **Spokane Community Against Racism (SCAR)**, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, noon, [scarspokane.org](http://scarspokane.org)
- Apr 3** • **Fig Tree Benefit and Board meetings**, Zoom, noon - Benefit, 1 p.m., Board, [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto:mary@thefigtree.org)
- **"Chef Matt's Heavenly Kitchen,"** cooking class, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center Chef Matt McDaniels, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., 448-1244, [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- **Side by Side Concert: Spokane Symphony & EWU Music**, EWU Showalter Auditorium, Cheney, 7:30 to 11:59 p.m., 359-2241, [jmarshall@ewu.edu](mailto:jmarshall@ewu.edu)
- Apr 3, 29** • **Dementia Friends Information Session**, Cheney Library, 610 First, 10:30 a.m., 893-8280, Deer Park Library, 208 Forest, 29, 6:30 p.m., 893-8300, [scl.d.org](http://scl.d.org)
- Apr 4** • **Spring Resource Carnival**, Spokane Neighborhood Action Partners, County Fair & Expo Center, 404 N. Havana, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., [henrich@snapwa.org](mailto:henrich@snapwa.org)
- **First Friday, Spokane**, Spokane's local artists, 5 to 8 p.m., [downtownspokane.org/first-friday](http://downtownspokane.org/first-friday)
- **First Fridays, Pend Oreille Arts Council**, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., [artinsandpoint.org](http://artinsandpoint.org)
- **Here from the Start**, Spokane's Historic International District, AHANA Multi-Ethnic Business Assn. and Cat on a Window Productions, Magic Lantern, 25 W. Main Ste 150, 6 p.m., [square.link/u/Rf4svl7R](http://square.link/u/Rf4svl7R)
- Apr 4-6** • **Standing up for Compassion** with Venerables Semkye and Jigme, Sravasti Abbey, in person and online, 3 p.m. to 2 p.m., [sravastiabbey.org/event/](http://sravastiabbey.org/event/)
- Apr 5** • **Eco-Anxiety Café**, Manito United Methodist, 3220 S. Grand, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., register at [350spokane.org/eco-anxiety-cafe/](http://350spokane.org/eco-anxiety-cafe/)
- **April Showers Auction**, The Lands Council's 40th, dinner and auction, Riverside Place, 1110 W. Riverside, 5 to 8:30 p.m., [thelandscouncil.org](http://thelandscouncil.org)
- Apr 6, 13, 20, 27** • **SCAR Coffee**, Saranac Commons, 19 W. Main, 9 a.m., [scarspokane.org](http://scarspokane.org)
- Apr 7-11** • **Nature's Awakening Spring Break Camp**, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Harmony Woods, excursions to James Slavin Conservation Area, [harmonywoods.org](http://harmonywoods.org)
- Apr 8** • **Idaho Gives: Expanding Your Reach 2025 Training**, webinar, 11 a.m. to noon and noon-1 p.m. Mon and Tues, <https://web.idahononprofits.org/events>
- **Eastern Washington Legislative Conference Team**, Zoom, 1 p.m., 535-4112, [kaye@thefigtree.org](mailto:kaye@thefigtree.org)
- **PJALS Action Committee**, Zoom, 5:30 p.m., [sjackson@pjals.org](mailto:sjackson@pjals.org)
- Apr 9** • **Romeo & Juliet**, Civic Theatre benefit for Mission Community Outreach Center, sponsor Kiwanis of East Spokane, 1020 N. Howard, 6 to 9 p.m., 499-5809
- **Dementia Friends Information Session**, Moran Prairie Library, 6004 S. Regal, 6:30 p.m., 893-8340, [scl.d.org](http://scl.d.org)
- Apr 10** • **Reuse Workshop**, Mobius Discovery Center, 331 N. Post, 10 p.m., 321-7137, [artsalvagespokane.com](http://artsalvagespokane.com)
- **Free Immigration Clinic**, Latinos En Spokane, 1502 N. Monroe, 5 to 7 p.m., [latinosenspokane.org](http://latinosenspokane.org)
- **Dementia Caregivers**, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 6:30 p.m., 893-8350, [scl.d.org](http://scl.d.org)
- Apr 10-13** • **GetLit! Festival, 40+ Literary** in-person & virtual events with 65+ writers from the region and beyond, [getlitfestival2025.sched.com](http://getlitfestival2025.sched.com)
- Apr 10, 24** • **Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. 818-6733, [facebook.com/spokanedup](http://facebook.com/spokanedup)
- Apr 11** • **Second Friday Artwalk**, Sherman Ave., Coeur d'Alene, 5 to 8 p.m., (208) 415-0116, [artsandculturecda.org](http://artsandculturecda.org)
- Apr 11, 12** • **Rebuilding the Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movement** Together, Pacific Northwest Nuclear Weapons Conference, Seattle First Baptist Church, 1111 Harvard, [tinyurl.com/NoNukePNW](http://tinyurl.com/NoNukePNW)
- Apr 12** • **Zero Land Fill Spokane**, Spokane Hardware Supply, [lidanpc@inlandnw@gmail.com](mailto:lidanpc@inlandnw@gmail.com)
- **Active Living Expo**, Mirabeau Park Convention Center, 1100 N. Sullivan, Spokane Valley, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., (208) 651-7362, [events@spokesman.com](mailto://events@spokesman.com)
- **Holistic Festival**, Centerplace Event Center, 2426 S. Discovery, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., [holisticfestivals.com](http://holisticfestivals.com)
- **Climate Chats Café**, connect with Asians for Collective Liberation at First Avenue Coffee, 1011 W. First Ave., 1 p.m., [rsvp@bit.ly/climatechatscafe](mailto://rsvp@bit.ly/climatechatscafe)
- **Rock the Runway**, benefit for The Arc of Spokane, Spokane Convention Center, 334 W. Spokane Falls Blvd., 4:30 to 8 p.m., 279-7000, [events@arc-spokane.org](mailto://events@arc-spokane.org), [arc-spokane.org](http://arc-spokane.org)
- Apr 13** • **Sharing the Dharma Day**, at Sravasti Abbey Community, YouTube and in person, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m., [sravastiabbey.org/event](http://sravastiabbey.org/event)
- **Annual Ramen Fest and Spokane Buddhist** Temple Open House, 927 S. Perry, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., [spokanebuddhisttemple.org](http://spokanebuddhisttemple.org)
- **The Endless Nakba: A Palestine Film Series**, Magic Lantern Theatre, 25 W. Main, 4 to 7 p.m., [inwclp.com](http://inwclp.com)
- Apr 14** • **PFAS in the Spokane River**, public meeting with West Plains Water Coalition, Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, 4340 W. Whistalks Wy, 7 p.m.,

- livestreamed at [youtube.com/live/SF0VgZTu--Y](http://youtube.com/live/SF0VgZTu--Y)
- Apr 14-16, 17-19** • **"Participation in the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ,"** Immaculate Heart Retreat Center, 14-16 Women's Retreat, 17-19 Men's Retreat, Bishop Michael Warfel, 448-1224, [ihrc.net](http://ihrc.net)
- Apr 14, 28** • **Native Cultural Craft Nights**, American Indian Community Center, 1025 W. Indiana, 5 to 7 p.m., 535-0886, [aicinfo509@gmail.com](mailto://aicinfo509@gmail.com), [aicinc.org](http://aicinc.org)
- Apr 15** • **Building Great Board Fund Development Practices**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, The Hive, 2940 E. Sprague, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., [nonprofitwa.org/event](http://nonprofitwa.org/event)
- **International Art & Cultural Festival**, Thrive International and Chrysalis Gallery, Spokane Public Library, 906 W. Main, 1 to 5 p.m., [thriveinternational.org](http://thriveinternational.org)
- **"Active Hope for a Livable Future: Divesting from Fossil Fuels,"** Hemmingson at Gonzaga, 6 p.m., 313-6942, [gonzaga.edu/climateevents](http://gonzaga.edu/climateevents)
- Apr 17** • **"Building Restorative Practices in Community,"** YWCA Equity for All 2025, Hamilton Studio, 1427 W. Dean, 5 to 7 p.m., [equity@ywca.org](mailto://equity@ywca.org)
- **NAACP Monthly Meeting**, Spokane Community College Building 6, Student Lair, 6:30 to 8 p.m., [spkncpbr@gmail.com](mailto://spkncpbr@gmail.com), [facebook.com/spokane.naacp](http://facebook.com/spokane.naacp)
- Apr 18** • **Taste of Hope**, benefit for ISAAC Foundation, Shriners Event Center, 7212 W. Westbow Blvd., 6 to 9 p.m., 325-1515, [hello@theisaacfoundation.org](mailto://hello@theisaacfoundation.org)
- Apr 18-19** • **Grand Opening**, Museum of North Idaho, 720 E. Young, CdA, (208) 664-3448, [info@museumni.org](mailto://info@museumni.org)
- Apr 18-22** • **Unveil the Trail Earth Day CleanUp**, Friends of the Centennial Trail, 465-5064 x 133 or [rianna.bidon@parks.wa.gov](mailto://rianna.bidon@parks.wa.gov)
- Apr 19** • **2025 Earth Day River Clean Up**, Spokane Riverkeeper, High Bridge Park, 212 A St., 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., [spokaneriverkeeper.org](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org)
- **iNaturalist: City Nature Challenges**, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne, 2 p.m., 893-8350, [scl.d.org](http://scl.d.org)
- **Pride Summit**, Spokane Pride at nYne Bar & Bistro, coordinate Pride, 232 W. Sprague, 3 to 5 p.m.
- Apr 20** • **Easter Sunrise Service**, Greenwood Memorial Terrace, 211 N. Government Wy, 6:30 a.m., [mwinslow@fairmountmemorial.com](mailto://mwinslow@fairmountmemorial.com)
- Apr 22** • **Graduating in the Age of Trump**, Brian Henning, Gonzaga institute for Climate, Hemmingson Auditorium, 6 to 7:30 p.m., [gonzaga.edu/climateevents](http://gonzaga.edu/climateevents)
- **City of Spokane Earth Day Community Workshop**, West Central Community Center, 6 to 7:30 p.m.
- **"Moving from Lament to Community Resilience,"** A Vigil for the Healing of the Earth, Faith Leaders and Leaders of Conscience, Tribal Gathering Place by Spokane City Hall, 6 p.m., 926-7173
- Apr 22-23** • **"Our Community, Our River,"** Spokane River Forum Conference, The Centennial Hotel, [spokaneriver.net/conf](http://spokaneriver.net/conf)
- Apr 23** • **"Survival & Life After the Holocaust,"** Spokane Community Observance of the Holocaust, Temple Beth Shalom, 1322 E. 30th, 7 p.m., 747-3304
- **Common Ground**, documentary, Spokane Riverkeeper and Washington Department of Ecology, Garland Theater 7 p.m., [spokaneriverkeeper.org](http://spokaneriverkeeper.org)
- Apr 24** • **Sierra Club Outing, Bowl & Pitcher** Riverside State Park, [sierraclub.org/washington/upper-columbia-river](http://sierraclub.org/washington/upper-columbia-river)
- **The Lowe Down**, Spokane Symphony Music Director James Lowe, Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, 2316 W. First, 12 p.m., 456-3931, [northwestmuseum.org](http://northwestmuseum.org)
- **PJALS Member Gathering**, 6 to 7:30 p.m., location TBD, [slicity@pjals.org](mailto://slicity@pjals.org)
- Apr 25** • **Spokane Valley Arbor Day**, Mirabeau Park, 13500 E. Mirabeau Pkwy, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., [spokanevalleywa.gov/240/Arbor-Day-Celebration](http://spokanevalleywa.gov/240/Arbor-Day-Celebration)
- **Travel as a Political Act**, Rick Steves, KSPS, Northern Quest Resort & Casino, 100 N. Hayford, Airway Heights, 443-7700, [ksp@ksp.org](mailto://ksp@ksp.org)
- **Cheers for Kids**, benefit for Vanessa Behan, Barrister Winery, 21 and over, 6 to 9 p.m., [e.givesmart.com/events/HnZ/](http://e.givesmart.com/events/HnZ/)
- **Music and More Trivia Night**, Holy Names Music Center, at Southside Community Center, 7 p.m., [hnmc.org](http://hnmc.org)
- Apr 26** • **Earth Fest**, Turnbull Wildlife Refuge, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- **Cool Canopy Spokane Valley Tree Planting**, The Lands Council, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
- **Daughter of Dachau: Sharing the Voice of Her Father**, North Spokane Library, 44 E. Hawthorne - 10 a.m.; Spokane Valley Library, 22 N. Herald, 1 p.m.
- **Arbor Day Fair**, Finch Arboretum, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- **El Mercado**, West Central Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., [latinosenspokane.org](http://latinosenspokane.org)
- **Earth Day Block Party and ReCraft Fair**, West Central Abbey, 1832 W. Dean, 2 to 5 p.m., [spokanezerowaste.org](http://spokanezerowaste.org)
- Apr 26-27** • **Communal Grief Retreat**, [harmonywoodsretreat@gmail.com](mailto://harmonywoodsretreat@gmail.com), [harmonywoods.org/event/grief-rituals/](http://harmonywoods.org/event/grief-rituals/)
- Apr 27** • **Uniting the Inland Northwest**, FaVS News, Montvale Event Center, 1019 W. First, 3:30 p.m., [bobstout@favs.news](mailto://bobstout@favs.news)
- Apr 30** • **Stewarding Faith Property for Community Good**, Presbytery of the Inland Northwest, Bethel AME, 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., [drew@presbyinw.org](mailto://drew@presbyinw.org)
- **The Power of Connection: Opening Doors** to Opportunity, SNAP fundraiser, Spokane Central Library 906 W. Main, noon, [snapwa.org/connect](http://snapwa.org/connect)
- May 1** • **Fig Tree Development/Benefit and Board** meetings, Zoom, noon - Development, 1 to 3 p.m. - Board, 535-1813, [mary@thefigtree.org](mailto://mary@thefigtree.org)
- **May Day Gathering**, Riverfront Park Clocktower, 5 to 8 p.m., [latinosenspokane.org](http://latinosenspokane.org)
- May 3** • **"Voices of Our Ancestors,"** Whitworth Lu'au, Whitworth University, dinner HUB, 5 to 6:30 p.m., program, Field House 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., 777-1000
- **"Separated by Land, Connected by Water,"** EWU Lu'au, Reese Court, 4 p.m., secure. [touchnet.net/C20347\\_ustores/web/store\\_main.jsp?STOREID=45&FROMQRCODE=true](http://touchnet.net/C20347_ustores/web/store_main.jsp?STOREID=45&FROMQRCODE=true)

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# Plastic pollution in ocean motivates leader of Spokane Zero Waste

Elyse Hochstadt's journey to founding Spokane Zero Waste (SZW) began when she learned about the Pacific Garbage Patch, the island of plastic pollution floating in the Pacific Ocean.

"Now, 11 years later, my focus and that of SZW is on textiles, because most textiles today are made of plastics, and that's something we can have direct agency over," Elyse said.

SZW offers Mend-It Café, a free textile repair event; ReCraft LAB, a social enterprise that trains immigrant and refugee women in sewing trades and upcycles flexible material waste from local businesses, and Up-cycle Fashion Lab, which offers mending and sewing classes for youth and adults.

They also work with local fiber producers to develop a regional fiber industry based on the Fibershed model that supports a textile system based on regenerative agriculture.

Five contract staff run the programs.

**In these efforts, SZW has diverted** more than 2,000 pounds of textiles from the waste stream, served more than 500 people and made more than 543 mends to clothing and household textiles at Mend-it Cafés.

The cafés are held monthly from February through November at locations such as Spokane Falls Community College, Bellwether Brewing, Spokane Public Library and Art Salvage. Groups can request to schedule a Mend-It Café.

"We repair jeans, coats, curtains, zippers, textile toys, backpacks, hats—any type of textile," said Elyse. "We provide the service for free and invite donations. Stipends for 42 menders and supplies are provided through grants."

**ReCraft LAB now trains refugees** at Thrive International in Spokane one day a week for eight weeks and contracts with graduates to turn textile and flexible waste—like vinyl banners from the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture—into tote bags, meditation cushions, clothing, aprons and napkins.

Spokane Zero Waste then helps sell the items. For example, they invite restaurants to buy up-cycled aprons and napkins from repurposed materials, rather than order cheap ones online from China made with low-paid labor.

"We use local workers paid a living wage, source local materials and prevent textiles from entering the waste stream," said Elyse. "Working with our sewists helps businesses meet their sustainability goals."

**An initiative with local fiber producers** promotes the use of wool as fertilizer in the form of pellets, as weed barrier mats, as home insulation, as bedding and as sound dampening.

"Wool nourishes the soil, retains water and deters weeds. Fresh fleece can be a weed barrier," said Elyse.

**Spokane Zero Waste also educates** people to advocate for producer responsibility related to plastic waste.



Elyse Hochstadt holds an upscaled tote bag.

To reduce plastics in the environment, the organization is advocating for legislation and grassroots advocacy, such as promoting Washington State's 2025 Recycling Reform Act (SB 5284), calling for producer responsibility to include the whole life of plastic products and packaging," said Elyse.

In 2024, it was called the Re-Wrap Act; in 2023, the WRAP Act. With different names, this is the fourth year of seeking to make it state law.

"Producers do not want to pay to recycle materials," she said. "Waste haulers also oppose it, believing it will reduce their workload."

"In reality, it shifts recycling costs from cities and counties to producers," Elyse said. "It also reduces confusion about what can and cannot be recycled."

**Elyse shared her journey** into this work. At the age of eight, she moved with her family from New York, where her family had been involved in the garment industry, to live through her school years south of Denver. For college, she studied at San Jose State College, graduating in art and communication in 1989. She later earned a master's degree in art in 2006 at San Francisco Art Institute.

For 15 years, Elyse was a graphic artist in the Bay area. She and her partner also formed a Kitchen and Bath Studio and Design Shop in 2008.

"**Having become aware** of the garbage patch around 2006, I began the Stamp Out Plastic campaign. For that, I set up booths at farmers markets, grocery stores, yoga studios and other locations, offering cloth bags and lino block stamps I created that said, 'No More Plastic.' I invited people to stamp bags and take them free to use for produce, instead of plastic bags," she said. "This was my way as

an artist to raise awareness and show an alternative.

"Plastic bags were the focus because their use time is so short, but their environmental impacts last decades. I gave away nearly 500 bags," she said.

She explained that cloth bags help retain moisture with most produce, particularly greens, carrots and broccoli, so the food lasts longer, and the bags can be tossed in a washing machine when they are dirty.

**Elyse became involved** in public engagement as she learned about "the world of waste" while running a retail store until 2017. She led educational workshops, set up a website and posted on social media about waste rehabilitation and reduction strategies to guide people how to personally reduce their footprint.

Her focus was on personal change, until she realized that personal responsibility is only

part of the solution.

**After Elyse and her partner** moved to Spokane in 2017, she became interested in effecting systemic change and partnered with Elizabeth Merriam, who started the Spokane Zero Waste Facebook group.

"We did some events together and then Elizabeth generously gifted the group to me to run, because she saw I had something more in mind," Elyse said.

During COVID, she formed the nonprofit with a grant from NextCycle, a program of the Washington Department of Commerce.

After COVID, Elyse connected with several women to do resource tables at events in Spokane. That helped her develop the organization, ramping up opportunities to reduce textile waste by teaching classes on mending, repairs and upcycling.

**SZW educates people** on what today's textiles are made of.

"They are mostly plastics," Elyse said. "Nylon, polyester, acrylic and elastin are all plastic and loaded with chemicals, like fire retardants or stain resisters, not to mention the chemicals involved in making plastics. We absorb those chemicals through our skin when we wear these garments."

She spelled out other environmental concerns.

- Textiles are packaged in plastics and transported around the globe.

- When laundered—both in washing and drying cycles—garments shed microplastics into the water and air.

- There are so many steps in making a fast-fashion garment—petroleum extraction, production, use and waste—that it can be confusing for people to understand the many steps and

their impacts.

"We need to curb fast fashion production, or we add more plastic to the waste stream," she said. "We also see more and more how recycling is a hoax. The materials pile up, destroying environments around the globe."

Elyse hopes Spokane Zero Waste will be a trusted partner to work with others for human health, environmental sustainability and the wellbeing of all living creatures.

Spokane Zero Waste supports the Right to Repair Bill to address tech waste by requiring manufacturers to make repair information, parts and tools available, so people can fix, rather than replace, a broken phone.

"The root of overproduction is the culture of consumption. We are taught to buy more and look for bargains, but we live on a finite planet," Elyse explained. "We should focus on quality over quantity to promote the health of the planet. Everything is connected. Water and air pollution will affect us."

SZW also partners with Growing Neighbors to reduce food waste and increase community composting. They teach youth to work in nature, be connected with natural systems, grow and eat healthful fresh foods, and understand how the food cycle impacts their health. In a pilot project GRO-SPO—Gardening, Reducing Waste, Outdoor Education—Spokane—high school students will teach elementary students to grow gardens and understand cycles of nature.

Spokane Zero Waste seeks to change systems that make waste—with a focus on textiles, food and plastics.

For information, call 510-717-3731, email [elyse@spokanezerowaste.org](mailto:elyse@spokanezerowaste.org) or visit [spokanezerowaste.org](http://spokanezerowaste.org).

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