

41ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION

Stories inside

Veteran speaks 80 years after first bombs - p. 5

Art workshop fosters understanding - p. 8-9

Indian Center serves everyone - p. 11

Preschool organizer fulfills dream - p. 16

CALENDAR ON PAGE 15

FEATURES 80+ EVENTS

The Fig Tree

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Monthly newspaper and website covering faith in action throughout the Inland Northwest
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Alliance connects people to have impact

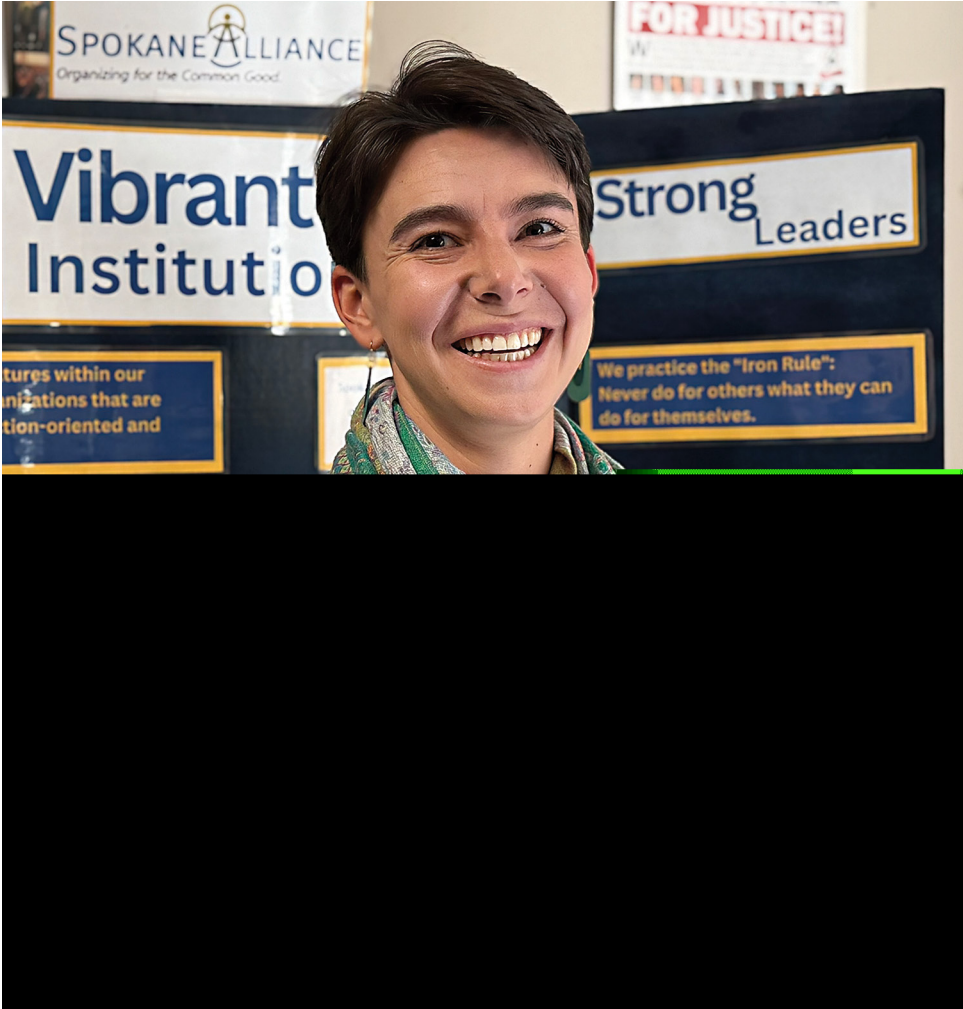
By Mary Stamp

Laurel Fish, senior organizer with the Spokane Alliance, knows that many solutions to issues people face are not realized because people lack the social and political will and skills as individuals to enact policy changes on their own.

The Spokane Alliance gathers people in faith communities, labor unions and community organizations like nonprofits and childcare providers to share and listen to each other’s stories and concerns—on healthcare, housing, homelessness, childcare and other issues. In the process, they identify common threads for working and acting together so they have an impact.

As the grandchild of Jewish refugees from Poland, Laurel was raised militantly secular but knew that her grandparents survived because people of diverse faiths took risks.

“As I reflect on that part of my history, I respect institutions of faith as they work with secular institutions to bring their best and highest values into public life,” she said. “It’s powerful when institutions work together to bring meaning, solidarity, kindness and



Laurel Fish works with Spokane Alliance to strengthen institutions and leaders.

compassion to do what individuals can’t do alone,” Laurel said.

Her parents were role models for her political engagement. In grade school, she testified at the Spokane City Council against drilling in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

In high school, she participated in Los Hermanos Youth Solidarity group at St. George’s School and Lewis and Clark High School, a project of Phyllis Andersen in Huisisilapa, El Salvador, and at 14 raised funds to travel there to mentor students.

She saw how people she cared about were affected when a paper mill dumped waste into what the community called “Rio Sucio” or “Dirty River.” It flowed through their community and was where they bathed and washed their clothes.

After graduating in 2009, she spent a year in San Salvador, El Salvador’s capital, with Salvadoran students and working there and in rural communities.

Returning, she studied cultural anthropology at Stanford, earning a bachelor’s degree in 2014. In college, she helped friends navigate the immigration system for asy-

Continued on page 4

Attorneys in the Keenen v. Aryan Nations trial speak 25 years later

Because it is the 25th anniversary of the landmark Keenan v. Aryan Nations civil trial, Coeur d’Alene attorneys Ken Howard, Jr. and Norman Gissel will be the featured speakers for the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations (KCTFHR) 26th Annual Human Rights Banquet.

Ken and Norm, the two local attorneys who worked with the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) on the case, will speak at the 6 p.m. banquet on Saturday, Sept. 27, at the Best Western

Plus Coeur d’Alene Inn, 506 W. Appleway.

They will discuss how the trial came about, how they prepared for two years with Morris Dees and the SPLC legal team, how the trial proceeded and what followed the victory by plaintiffs Victoria and her son Jason Keenan.

“This trial was one of the most significant trials against Nazis and neo-Nazis in American history,” said KCTFHR board secretary Tony Stewart.

Along with presenting details of this civil rights case, a victory over the forces of hate and criminal enterprise, the task force will honor “these two noble men,” Tony added.

Norm became the Keenan’s family attorney after Aryan Nations security guards attacked them on July 1, 1998. He recruited Morris and Ken to prepare a civil suit.

An Idaho native, Norm earned a bachelor’s degree in 1962 from the University of Idaho (UI) and then served in the U.S. Air Force from 1963 to 1967, leaving as a captain.

After serving two years as an Idaho assistant attorney general, he returned to the UI to earn a juris doctor degree in 1970. He was in private law practice from 1972 until 2014.

He served six years on the North Idaho College (NIC) board of trustees and received numerous awards—the Idaho State Bar Outstanding Service Award in 1989, the KCTFHR Civil Rights Award in 1998,

Continued on page 6

New Resource Directory is available in print, online

The 2025-2026 Resource Directory: Guide to Congregations and Community Agencies was published over the summer. Copies were mailed and bulk orders were delivered in late August.

Updated booklets of the different sections are now available online at thefigtree.org/directorybooklets25-26.html and corrections will be worked into the website version in the fall.

Directory editor Malcolm Haworth said this year there were many changes in agencies because “these times are fluid.” There are always continual changes, so agencies should send updates to resourcedirectory@thefigtree.org.

“We continue to raise funds to make up for fewer ads this year, reaching out to add community partners and sponsors,” said Marijke Fakasiieiki, development and editorial associate.

“To recognize the community partners and say thank you, we are listing them here and in the ad on page 3,” she said.

Community partners are Banner Bank, Sisters of the Holy Names, Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington, Second Harvest of the Inland Northwest, Washington Trust Bank, Innovia Foundation. Launch Northwest, Molina Health, Rotary 21 Spokane, Gonzaga University, The NATIVE Project, Goodwill Industries, Aging and Long Term Care of Eastern Washington, City of Spokane, Northwest Intermountain Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Jasmin & Associates, Liberty Park / St. Paul’s United Methodist church, YWCA Spokane, Northern Lights Disciples of Christ, Lifeline Insurance and Kiwanis Club of East Spokane.

“Volunteers made a difference. Second Harvest volunteers helped deliver more than 6,500 copies to 52 locations, and about 20 Fig Tree volunteers delivered another 4,000,” Marijke added.

For information or to donate, call 535-1813 or visit thefigtree.org/donate.html.

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Religion News Briefs Around the World

World Council of Churches News, PO Box 2100
CH - 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland Tel: +41-22 791 6111
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WCC head condemns assault on Gaza

On Aug. 21, World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Jerry Pillay condemned Israel’s announced large-scale assault on Gaza City. “Striking a densely populated area, under blockade and aid restrictions, violates international humanitarian law—including prohibitions on indiscriminate attacks, disproportionate force, collective punishment and denial of humanitarian relief,” he said. “The WCC supports the UN Security Council’s call for a ceasefire and the International Court of Justice’s order for Israel to halt its Gaza offensive.

“The International Criminal Court underscores the urgent need for accountability. We call for an immediate ceasefire, full protection of civilians, unimpeded humanitarian access and compliance with international law,” he said calling all states to fulfill their duty under the Geneva Conventions.

“The WCC prays for all victims, calls for the release of all hostages and reaffirms that a just peace can only be built on dignity, equality, and the rule of law,” Jerry concluded.

WCC releases social ethics action documents

The WCC recently released the “Life and Work Digital Collection: A Century of Ecumenical Social Ethics and Action” with more than 300 publications and up to 35,000 pages that embody more than 100 years of serious, sustained ecumenical reflection on ecumenical social ethics and action since the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925.

The WCC invites people to visit the collection and be inspired by a living legacy of the WCC’s work for life, justice and peace at oikoumene.org/resources/publications/life-and-work-digital-collection.

WCC central committee has a prophetic voice

As the World Council of Churches (WCC) central committee met from June 18 to 24 in Johannesburg, South Africa, it celebrated the legacy of South Africa’s churches and their leaders, who embodied courageous Christian witness in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid.

“Prophetic voices like Desmond Tutu, and the unwavering faith of countless communities led churches to play a critical role in resisting oppression and forging hope,” the committee said, praising how the South African Council of Churches stood as a faithful, prophetic voice for justice, dignity and peace.

It expressed “lamentation and outrage” as the crisis in Palestine and Israel escalates to levels that violate international humanitarian and human rights law, and basic principles of morality.

It reaffirmed its longstanding commitment to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, and to international law as a framework for peace, justice and accountability.

It commemorated 80 years of the United Nations, particularly its founding principle of multilateral cooperation.

It affirmed that “in this perilous moment, churches and Christians are not to silently observe the disastrous trajectory of our nations and world towards division, injustice, conflict and the marring of God’s precious and unique creation, but to raise a prophetic voice, drawing on our faith principles and unity in Christ.”

It urged member churches and ecumenical partners to engage in a Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity, as an active, urgent witness in our societies and towards our governments against the prevailing culture of division and for reconciliation.”

It reiterated its foundational assertion that rejects war as contrary to God’s will and called for an immediate global ceasefire.

It demands “respect for the principles of international humanitarian and human rights law.

It urged all states to sign and ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

“We pray that Christ’s will move this suffering, divided world to reconciliation and to unity, and perpetrators of violence and division will repent of their sins and act to restore justice and peace.”

REGIONAL ECUMENICAL & INTERFAITH NEWS

Spring Benefit Lunch will be March 14

The Fig Tree has just changed the date for its annual Spring Benefit Lunch to Saturday, March 14. It was previously set for March 6. The Breakfast-time Zoom Benefit will be March 18.

“Before that comes around, however, we will be completing our annual fundraising drive this fall with our fall fundraiser, which runs from Oct. 21 to Giv-

ing Tuesday, Dec. 2, and rounds out with year-end giving,” said Mary Stamp, editor.

“We met our goal for the 2025 Spring Benefit and now will raise \$16,000 more from sponsors,” she said.

The planning committee meets at noon on first Thursdays—Sept. 4 this month—and welcomes volunteers to help shape

the fall and spring campaigns. Volunteers are also needed to help with deliveries, mailings and displays.

“We will choose the theme at our meeting this month,” said Mary, “and will begin recruiting the speakers. We will use video from the 2025 benefits for the fall fundraiser.”

For information, call 535-4112.

PJALS celebrates its 50th anniversary

PJALS hosts its 50th Anniversary Benefit Luncheon, 12 to 1 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 15 in Spokane Valley with the location provided upon registration. The theme is “Still We Rise: 50 Years of Resistance and Resilience.” They will highlight the endur-

ing struggle and unyielding hope of everyday people who have sustained the work through to this moment.

The emphasis is on everyday people accomplishing extraordinary things together, and its 50 year history organizing for racial

equity, economic justice, peace and human rights, and building a multi-racial, intergenerational, all-gender, rural-urban, bottom-up movement centered on the leadership of impacted people.

To be a table host or sponsor, contact slichty@pjals.org

Thrive Center is hub of hope and healing

Thrive International celebrated the third anniversary of Thrive Center Spokane and its milestone of having housed more than 1,000 individuals with a block party in its Spokane parking lot on Aug. 22.

With support from BECU, the Spokane Police Department and First Presbyterian Church, Thrive

gave away new shoes and backpacks filled with school supplies, said Amelia Ingle, media and communications manager.

Since opening its doors in June of 2022, Thrive Center Spokane has grown into a hub of hope and healing for refugee and immigrant families, but its impact extends beyond Spokane.

Since December 2023, its Western Washington program has provided shelter for 870 people. When it opened the Thrive Center Tacoma in September 2024, it began to offer housing and support under one roof.

For information, call 688-4056 or email amelia@thriveinternational.org.

Family Promise holds UnGala on Oct. 2

Family Promise of Spokane gathers for UnGala, its fundraiser with a Dr. Seuss theme to gather to celebrate with games at 4:30 p.m., food at 5 p.m. and program at 6 p.m., Thursday, Oct 2, at Mirabeau Park Hotel, 1100

N. Sullivan Rd., Spokane Valley.

The event will focus on the community coming together to help families in Spokane overcome homelessness and build lasting stability with powerful stories, games, food and ideas

of how to impact the work of Family Promise, celebrating its good work and investing in a future where every child has a place to call home.

For information, visit familypromiseofspokane.org/ungala.

Habitat invites faiths to join Faith Build

Habitat for Humanity Spokane’s Faith in Action initiative provides a space where people of all religions and those guided by moral convictions come together to build not only homes but also hope and understanding.

Its first Faith Build fundraising event series is running on fourth Saturdays of August through October, as a way to create a day for faith communities to gather for fellowship and hands-on services to build

homes and hope.

“Faith belongs on the jobsite as a call to serve. While theological paths may differ, the desire to care for neighbors is universal,” said Gloria Penaflor, volunteer and faith outreach manager, summarizing principles that inspire people from different faiths.

- In Christianity, Jesus calls followers to love their neighbors and care for the poor.

- In Judaism, *tikkun olam* calls for acts of justice to repair the world.

- In Islam, *zakat* and *sadaqah* emphasize giving and caring for those in need.

- In Buddhism, compassion and right action guide moral living.

- In Hinduism, *seva* (selfless

service) uplifts the divine in every person.

- In Sikhism, serving humanity is a sacred duty.

“Over the years, faith groups have partnered with Habitat-Spokane to make lasting change possible,” said Gloria. “From sacred texts to shared values, many spiritual traditions uphold the belief that every person deserves dignity, stability and a safe place to call home.”

Habitat-Spokane invites faith communities to partner with them in living out these values through action.

While shifts on Sept. 27 are full, there are just a few morning and afternoon slots available on Saturday, Oct. 25.

For information, visit habitat-spokane.org/faith-in-action.

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Multifaith Peace Vigil offers solidarity

A Multifaith Peace Vigil in solidarity with Immigrants and Refugees, hosted by St. Ann parish’s Matthew 25 Ministry, will be held from 4 to 5 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 14, at the Spokane Federal Building Plaza.

Organizers hope for the community to come together in support and solidarity with refugees and immigrants living in fear and to stand up for the vulnerable and marginalized in the tradition of Matthew 25, “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you looked after me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me.”

For information, contact 535-3031 or sjm.stann@gmail.com.

VOA hosts Eye Contact Fundraiser with art

The Volunteers of America Annual Eye Contact Fundraiser, featuring art created by its clients and storytelling on resilience and strength, will be held from 5 to 8 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 18, at the Washington Cracker Building.

Its theme, “Sacred Shapes,” is a tribute to how people are shaped by connection, healing and hope, said Sherrece Scott, director of annual giving. The theme, which appears in the Crosswalk logo, reflects the sunflower as a sacred shape, turning toward the light, standing tall and growing each day.

The fundraiser features a silent and live auctions, and food prepared by Inland Pacific Kitchen.

For information, visit event.gives/eye2025.

Library event highlights Hanford legacies

Spokane Public Library will shine a light on the lasting impacts of environmental contamination in the Northwest at “Hanford Leaks, Legends and Legacies” from 3 to 4:30 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 20 at the Central Library, 906 W. Main.

A panel of writers and activists, Trisha Pritikin, Kay-Smith Blum, James Patrick Thomas and investigative journalist Karen Dorn Steele, will be moderated by Ann Le Bar, Eastern Washington University history professor.

Trisha, a Hanford “downwinder,” shares her new novel, *Then Came the Summer Snow*. Kay wrote an award-winning novel, *Tangles, Set in Hanford*. James wrote a new memoir *Atomic Pilgrim: How Walking Thousands of Miles for Peace Led to Uncovering Some of America’s Darkest Nuclear Secrets*. Karen is the Spokesman Review reporter who unearthed Hanford’s secrets in the 1980s. Hanford is the nations’ largest superfund site and nuclear waste repository.

“The result wasn’t just millions of gallons of toxic and nuclear waste. It was a toxic environment of public distrust in government, experts and science,” said Ann.

Auntie’s Bookstore and Latah Books have the books. A month-long exhibit of materials about Hanford is on display at Central Library.

For information, call 444-5300, visit spokanelibrary.org.

Organists Guild marks 80th season with concert

The American Guild of Organists Spokane Chapter celebrates its 80th season starting with its first offering, an organ recital featuring Lukas Hasler, an Austrian organist, with more than 100,000 followers on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

He will be presenting a performance from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Sept 23, on the newly renovated Aeolian-Skinner organ at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, 127 E. 12th Ave.

For information, call 402-319-1716, email ehurd1742@gmail.com or visit spokaneago.org.

Whitworth Forum features Francis Collins

Whitworth University is hosting Francis Collins, former director of the National Institutes of Health, to speak on “The Road to Wisdom: On Truth, Science, Faith and Trust,” at the President’s Leadership Forum, at 7 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 2, at the Martin Woldson Theater at The Fox.

Francis is one of the best-known scientists of the current era, having served with the NIH for 12 years through three presidents. He discovered disease genes, led the Human Genome Project and worked to connect science and faith.

For information, call 777-3732, email iaevents@whitworth.edu or visit foxtheaterspokane.org/event/whitworth-presidents-leadership-forum.

Synod welcomes Tanzanian church leaders

Since 1990, the Northwest Intermountain (NWIM) Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has had a Companion Synod Relationship with the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (UKD) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania to share ideas, lift one another in prayer and support each other as they walk Bega kwa Bega (Shoulder to Shoulder).

In September and October, the NWIM is welcoming two guests from the UKD.

Pastor Wilson Nyakachewa, assistant to the UKD bishop, is coming with Pastor Ezekiel Mwambungu, who serves on

the Diocese Leadership Team and is the director of the UKD’s Strobelt Pre and Primary School.

From Sept. 8 to Oct. 27, they will travel throughout the synod, visiting cluster events to share about the hospital and school the NWIM Synod supports and to learn about plans for 20 people from the synod to travel to Tanzania in June 2026 with two leaders, Janet Boyer and Cory English.

“I had the awesome experience of traveling there with my grandson in July 2025. The people there are so filled with joy and welcoming. We are now part of their family as they are part of our family,” said Janet.

“Spending time in the UKD is a life-changing, heart-warming, enlightening, and fulfilling experience,” added Heidi Cryer, chair of the Companion Synod Team. “The journey is not easy, but the joys received do outweigh the burdens.”

Participants will return home to be ambassadors of the NWIM-UKD relationship.

The Global Mission Committee plans synod trips to the UKD every two to three years.

Heidi said that the synod seeks assistance with transporting guests for the fall visit.

For information, call 539-0449 or email hacryer@gmail.com.

Whitworth explores evangelical-ecumenist

Whitworth is hosting a film screening and panel discussion about educator, evangelist and author Henrietta Mears from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Monday, Sept. 29, at Weyerhaeuser Hall.

The panel features the film’s producer Rob Loo, Whitworth alum Tim McCalmont and Whitworth emeritus history professor, Arlin Migliazzo.

Arlin, the author of *Mother of Modern Evangelicalism: The Life & Legacy of Henrietta Mears*, interviewed more than 60 people for the book.

Henrietta was born in 1890 in Fargo, N.D., to a banker and businessman with a mother and grandmother who greatly influenced her spiritual life and

shaped her understanding of faith. She moved frequently, settling in Minneapolis and attending First Baptist Church, led by the Rev. William Reilly, a leader of the World Christian Fundamental Association.

She studied chemistry in the 1910s, taught in rural schools in Minneapolis, then reengaged in Reilly’s church as a Sunday School leader and became a Bible teacher. In the 1920s, she began as the director of religious education at Hollywood Presbyterian Church and worked 35 years in that field.

Henrietta started a conference center in California and served on the National Association of Evangelicals Commission of In-

ternational Relations, launched a Hollywood Christian group and worked for the National Sunday School Association. More than 400 college students she mentored became lay leaders.

In her 70s, she founded an organization to train Indigenous groups in their own languages, believing they needed to carry on without the support of missionaries.

A passion for service and an ecumenical mindset were characteristics of her ministry. She moved American Christianity away from orthodoxy and fear to be more open, ecumenical and inclusive.

For information, email amandaclark@whitworth.edu.

The Resource Directory
Guide to Congregations and Community Resources

is a valuable, accurate, tangible, comprehensive resource for
community leaders, congregations, agencies, businesses and civic leaders,
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Gonzaga University - gonzaga.edu

The Native Project - nativeproject.org

Goodwill industries - discovergoodwill.org

Aging and Long Term Care of Eastern Washington - altcew.org

City of Spokane - spokanecity.org

NW Intermountain Synod ELCA - nwimsynod.org

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Liberty Park St Paul’s United Methodist Church - Facebook

YWCA Spokane - ywcaspokane.org

Northern Lights Disciples of Christ - northernlightsdisciples.org

Lifeline Insurance - lifelineprotection.com

Kiwanis Club of East Spokane - eskiwanis.com

Rotary 21 - Spokane - rotaryspokane.com



Laurel Fish believes combined efforts of groups has power to influence

Continued from page 1

lum and became involved with a student labor organizing group.

“When Stanford’s administration tried to lay off campus workers, we mobilized students to talk to the administration about solutions. I wanted to be part of getting a wealthy, prestigious institution to do the right thing,” Laurel said.

While working for the hospitality workers union in the Bay Area, she organized alongside immigrant workers advocating for the right to negotiate their working conditions.

“We organized them so they gained the support of the local community and churches, which made a difference and made them feel less alone,” she said.

During the pandemic, she and her husband, Ryan McWilliams, came home in 2020 with their six-month-old baby to be closer to their families.

Laurel began working with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, challenging working conditions at a food processing plant and then with SEIU 1199NW, before starting to work in 2022 with the Spokane Alliance, where she said she has found a group that “feels the issues in their bellies.”

In sharing stories, issues emerge that one person could not do anything about alone.

“I have seen the alliance bring people together in a broad-based

way across the community,” Laurel said.

One of the first issues she helped them address was childcare. It was an issue that affected her, because she dropped off her child at a center that did not have enough staff.

“We talked with health care workers who did not earn enough to pay for good childcare,” Laurel said. “Working with faith communities and unions, the Spokane Alliance won \$10 million for childcare stabilization. It changed the narrative about who needs childcare—not just parents and children but the whole community. It is a ‘public good’ for children to be in a safe, enriching place.”

Laurel could see broad-based community organizing had an impact by developing the Community Workforce Agreement, which the Spokane Alliance presented to the Spokane City Council. Many alliance members testified in favor of it and the council voted on it Aug. 25 as the Public Dollars for Public Benefit Ordinance.

More than 140 supporters signed in and many stayed more than four hours in the standing-room-only lobby to see the ordinance passed. Supporters came from more than 34 diverse local organizations, including Dignified Workday, St. David’s Episcopal Church, Health Equity Circle and Creole Resources.

The ordinance was designed to

ensure that when the city spends tax dollars on large construction projects, jobs created go first to Spokane residents—especially people who were once incarcerated, unhoused or veterans, and others often shut out of good jobs, she said.

Before the meeting, many met with elected representatives, city staff and stakeholders, including contractors and businesses, to craft a strong, workable ordinance. In the weeks before the vote, contractor lobbyists pushed back, claiming the ordinance was “too restrictive,” she said.

The alliance, however, asserted that the real cost to Spokane comes when public dollars leave the community instead of creating good, family-supporting, local public works jobs for underrepresented communities.

“Many lives are impacted by what happens to employees in construction: Who is recruited? How are they recruited? How do companies access jobs in Spokane? How are labor laws enforced? Is it just on a catch-me-if-you-can basis?” she asked.

“We found various forms of wage theft. Trade unions provided knowledge on the impact of policies on faith communities and neighborhoods,” she added.

In her work, Laurel sees people learning about each other’s worlds. She offered examples.

• Bob Feeney, pastor at Westminster United Church of Christ,

understands the need for equitable access in the workforce.

• In gathering college-age youth for a Bible study, Emily Kuenker, a Lutheran pastor, learned about their struggles to access food, meet immediate needs and find employment. She realized those issues relate to values that inspire faithful action for her as a pastor.

• West Central Abbey, a small congregation, started the Spokane Alliance work on a housing levy that brings \$7 million a year for housing. The abbey had persisted in examining systemic causes of housing insecurity that they learned about from people attending their meal program.

“They were not a megachurch, just a small institution who were deeply committed to values of compassion and who thought strategically about how to realize their values in the world,” Laurel pointed out.

The alliance held a series of table talks to ask people in institutions across Spokane what social or economic pressures impact them that would take the power of more people than themselves alone to address.

In many congregations, people shared experiences with housing crises, homelessness and housing insecurity, making the congregations realize that those struggles do not just happen to others, but impact their own members.

• One told about their child

being homeless.

• Others told of living in inter-generational households because young adults cannot afford their own place to live.

• Many are rent burdened.

“We tapped into people being curious about each other, and realized homelessness and housing insecurity were not about other people but affected people in the congregations,” Laurel said.

That led to the current Housing Equity Action Research Team (HEART), which is exploring publicly financed housing as a long-term solution.

“We find many good ideas that would not happen if people did not gather to develop well-reasoned solutions to bring to the table, so civic leaders are likely to listen,” she said.

The Spokane Alliance’s community organizing includes a broader analysis of who makes decisions on the impact of policies in the city or region.

“People want to have a say in the community,” she affirmed. “We need to create a negotiating table as a society and say this is our table and we have an idea for the city council or mayor.

The Spokane Alliance, which started in 2002 and now has 35 member institutions, continues to expand.

For information, call 532-1688, email laurel@spokanealliance.org or visit spokanealliance.org.

South India Cultural Assn. plans events

The South India Cultural Association is planning two fall performances in Spokane.

The Jayanthi Raman Dance Company, BhaRaTham: Bhava-Raga-Thalam, will explore nuances of classical music and dance from South India with a live orchestra led by Natyacharya Jayanthi Raman from 6:30 to 8 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 20, at the Lair Student Center Auditorium at Spokane Community College.

A workshop with performers will be held at 7 p.m., Friday, Sept. 19, at Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley Ave.

The second performance is Jugalbandi: A North Indian Classical Concert with Sarod, Santoor (string instruments) and Tabla (percussion) from 6:30 to 9 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 18, at the Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard St.

A workshop about that program will be held at 7 p.m., Friday, Oct. 17, at Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley Ave.

Sreedharana Nandagopal,

president of SACA, describes Jugalbandi as “a whimsical, mesmerizing string and percussion performance from India’s classical arts.”

Artists, dressed in traditional clothing sit on the concert platform floor with the instruments on their laps and play with their hands.

The sarod is an instrument known for its deep resonant notes. The santoor is an ancient instrument that originated in Iraq, Iran and India, and is depicted in Babylonian and Assyrian stone carvings from around

669 BCE. A tabla is a pair of hand drums.

“The goal of the project is for people in the vicinity to see how beautiful diverse art forms exist in other parts of the world,” said Sreedharani.

An Indian vegetarian dinner will precede each performance at 5 p.m. Early-bird tickets are available before Sept. 15 for the first event and by Oct 13 for the second.

For information and reservations, call 467-5558, email sacaspokane@gmail.com or visit jayanthiraman.com.

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Veterans For Peace urges ongoing opposition to nuclear weapons

Opening his talk to more than 100 gathered Aug. 9 in Spokane to commemorate the 80th year since the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, Michael McPhearson, national executive director of Veterans For Peace (VFP), admitted he was no expert on nukes and realized that most people there were well versed in the dangers of nuclear war.

Spokane Veterans For Peace, Pax Christi Spokane and the Dorothy Day Labor Forum organized the event at All Saints Lutheran Church.

Rusty Nelson of the local VFP suggested he see the August cover of The Atlantic magazine.

“It featured a stunning photograph of a 1954 nuclear test at Bikini Atoll,” Michael said, commenting that, “despite the grandeur of the explosion filling witnesses with awe, that bomb was one of the most grotesque weapons created by mankind.”

He said he used the word “mankind” rather than “humanity” intentionally because “the main instigators, visionaries, movers, shakers and creators of this weapon were men.”

While he does not believe a matriarchal society would necessarily end war, he thinks war, with its potential today for human destruction, is “primarily a patriarchal endeavor.”

He does not consider nuclear weapons as the main problem, but “the mindset that allows their existence, the self-centered system that permits their use. This male-dominated system facilitates several ongoing genocides, hesitates to confront climate change and seeks global control over women. As we work to transform that system, we can limit and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons.”

Michael, whose roots in the Black church frame his opposition to oppression, grew up in North Carolina near Fort Bragg in a military family with grandfathers and uncles who served in World War I and II and Vietnam. Michael served in the first Gulf War, and his son served in the second Gulf War.

“As a Christian, I believed everyone was a child of God, but war was a necessary evil. I did not see a path to peaceful co-existence,” he said.

Eventually, as he came to understand U.S. foreign policy, he realized people could choose not to go to war.

“As a veteran, I have some cachet to speak out against war without being dismissed



Michael McPhearson spoke about his opposition to all war.

as hating America,” he said. “I encourage other vets to speak out and I encourage Christians to speak out.”

Michael served from 2005 to 2010, from 2013 to 2019 and now as executive director of Veterans For Peace, which is devoted to peace education and advocacy. Since 2016, he and his wife have lived in Seattle.

Recognizing the Spokane gathering was 200 miles from Hanford’s B-Reactor that produced the plutonium used in the Trinity test—the first atomic explosion—and that produced the fuel used in the nuclear bomb, Fat Man, dropped on Nagasaki 80 years ago on Aug. 9, Michael pointed out that Indigenous communities globally are often devastated by U.S. militarism.

The state’s Indigenous communities have struggled with the impacts of Hanford contaminants in the air, soil and river, affecting fish, game and plants—staples of Indigenous cultural, spiritual and physical health. He applauds their resilience and efforts to demand their rights and challenge the government.

“The first full-scale nuclear reactor to create plutonium is at Hanford, where the bombs dropped 80 years ago at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were produced,” he said. “Indigenous communities now navigate the environmental impact on their water, air and land. They and we need resilience to stay in the struggle.”

He told of Deb Abrahamson, a

local leader who had worked for years to clean up the contamination from uranium mining on the Spokane Reservation. She spoke at the 2019 VFP National Convention in Spokane.

“Cancer caused by uranium poisoning took her from us,” he said.

Michael said Hanford produced many nuclear bombs, including those tested at the Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. There is a line from there back to Spokane as Marshallese people who survived seek to escape the ravages of radiation from those tests settle in Spokane, establishing one of the largest Marshallese communities in the U.S. He noted the “ugly irony” of them settling in the homeland of those poisoned by the same military venture and radiation.

“We can take pride in past victories that give us insight into what we should do today,” Michael said. “Thanks to an intense, persistent anti-nuclear weapons movement, we now face a smaller global arsenal of about 12,100 nuclear weapons, down from more than 70,000 in the mid-1980s before arms control agreements.

“We did it once before,” he encouraged. “We can do it again.”

Although fewer weapons are better, he pointed out that just 100 explosions could trigger nuclear winter, disrupting global climate and crop yields leading to famine and killing billions.

Michael said the Bulletin of

Atomic Scientists has set the Doomsday Clock at 89 seconds, warning the world we are closer to nuclear war than ever with Russia threatening the West, the U.S. repositioning two nuclear subs near Russia, Israel threatening to use nukes in Gaza, fighting between nuclear powers India and Pakistan, European nations increasing their stockpiles, the nine nuclear powers improving, upgrading or expanding their arsenals, and the 2011 New START treaty set to expire in February 2026.

Michael once thought the fear of nuclear war decreased since the end of the Cold War, but a 2022 survey said 69 percent of Americans were worried, more than in 2018 and more than 62 percent in 1987 and 61 percent in 1988.

“These numbers show the public is on our side. We don’t need to convince people that nuclear weapons are a threat. We need to activate them by showing a clear path to effective action,” he said.

For example, in 2022, the Spokane City Council declared the city a zone free of nuclear arms.

Michael offered suggestions for actions people can take, beginning with building community, seeking unity and shared vision, and defining and living into “the future we want to create.”

Michael cited former VFP executive director David Cline, who advised him and others to differentiate between people who are “truly against me and people I disagree with.” He suggests that if a person seeks to heal and respect others’ humanity and dignity, there is opportunity for dialogue.

“Those who seek to divide, deny people’s humanity and aim to harm rather than find solutions, or they believe there is just one right way, and pursue domination and control not peace and justice,” he said.

Understanding the difference helps identify who “we must unite with” to work for a free, multi-color, multi-ethnic, accepting society.

“This unity is essential, especially regarding opposing nuclear weapons and building a movement that allows for engagement,” Michael said.

While the right is unifying to

impose their way of life, he calls for responding with a vision of a just, peaceful world, free of nuclear weapons.

“We can use anger to fuel ourselves, but love of humanity must guide us. We don’t have to like everyone, but we cannot let hate lead us. It’s a poison that devours integrity and turns us into what we claim to oppose,” Michael said.

“Today I feel an urgent responsibility to identify as a Christian to speak out against the genocide in Gaza because many other people who call themselves Christians are enabling it,” he added.

He closed by quoting Deb Abrahamson in 2019:

“Today, as we sit here with each other, we are also putting our stakes in the ground. We’re putting our staff with our histories and prayers out to our ancestors because we all have them. They did the best that they could, so that we could all be here today for those who are still coming. That’s vital in terms of looking at how we effect change.

“Today, I ask the creator that we all take time for ourselves to heal, to do what we need to make sure that the kindness is in our hearts. Be bigger than the hatred and the fear that sometimes are carried far too long. I’ve carried so many of those burdens far too long.”

Her call in 2019—that Michael said applies today—is: “Please stand tall. Put your stakes in the ground. Put them in hard because we are here for another battle. We are here for the battle of humanity.”

For information, email mcphearson@veteransforpeace.org or visit veteransforpeace.org.

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Kootenai County Task Force honors Ray and Jeanne Givens posthumously

Continued from page 1
the Coeur d'Alene Chamber of Commerce Distinguished Citizen Award in 1998 and the YWCA Spokane Carl Maxey Racial Justice Award in 2000.

Norm was one of three Idahoans to whom the Idaho Secretary of State dedicated the 2014 Idaho Blue Book and was inducted into the Idaho Hall of Fame in 2016.

After Ken earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering at Kettering University in Flint, Mich., he worked in the Chrysler Corporation engineering department while attending law school at Wayne State University in Detroit, where he received his juris doctor. degree. In 1971, he began practicing law in Coeur d'Alene.

Ken retired recently from his career as one of Idaho's top tort lawyers. He has been recognized for more than 20 years as one of the "Best Lawyers in America in areas of Personal Injury and Products Liability" and he has been on the Super Lawyers magazine list since 2007. A member of the Idaho Trial Lawyers Association, he served as president from 1987 to 1988.

Along with working with Norm and the SPLC on the Aryan Nations case, he represented victims of the Sunshine Mine fire.

In 2000, KCTFHR presented him with their Civil Rights Award.

Throughout his career, the Martindale Hubbell national attorney rating organization rated Ken as AV, their highest rating. He has also served on the NIC Board of Trustees, including as its chair.

The 2025 Human Rights Banquet, in addition to hearing Norm and Ken speak, is honoring Ray and Jeanne Givens, who died in 2025, as this year's the human rights champions.



Norm Gissel

Tony summarized their contributions.

Ray won several major civil court cases that impacted many residents of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. From 1982 to 1984, he represented clients in a civil case claiming the 1982 Idaho State Legislative Reapportionment Act violated Idaho's Constitution. He prevailed in seven state and federal court decisions.

When NIC trustees brought a civil case against the Associated Students of North Idaho College (ASNIC) over a fee that students challenged, Norm, the ASNIC attorney, and Ray represented the students, and they won.

Ray also worked with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe in a 2001 U.S. Supreme Court case, in which the Tribe won a 5-4 decision, confirming their historical ownership of one-third of Coeur d'Alene Lake, Tony said.

Ray successfully represented Idaho families and children in Shoshone County who suffered lead poisoning from toxic emissions from mining operations of a major Texas corporation.

He also prevailed when he represented Native Alaskans who sued pipeline companies for running pipelines across their lands without paying appropriate fees.

Ray was emcee for the 1986 "Unity Rally" at NIC for Catholic Priest Bill Wassmuth after his home was bombed by Order II, a Neo-Nazi group."

He came from a family of



Ken Howard

lawyers. His father was a distinguished Boise attorney, and his grandfather was a justice on the Idaho State Supreme Court, said Tony.

Jeanne, a leader and model for women and the Native American community, served on the KCTFHR board, working to expand board seats for minority members, opposing the doctrine and threats from the Aryan Nations and successfully supporting KCTFHR anti-crime legislation as a member of the Idaho House of Representatives.

Serving on various local, state and national boards, Jeanne knew how to bring all groups to the table, Tony said.

"During her six years as a member of the NIC board of trustees, serving as chair part of the time, she worked to reach an agreement between the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and the college. She opposed the increase in student tuition and fees to keep costs down for low-income students," said Tony.

"She embraced human rights curricula, encouraged a collaborative governance policy among NIC's employees and students, brought prominent speakers to campus for the NIC Popcorn Forum and NIC-TV PBS Public Forum interviews and assisted with positive contacts between the college and state elected officials," he added.

In addition to the focus on the Keenans v. Aryan Nations trial at

the banquet, Tony reported that Gonzaga University (GU) has become a collecting point for documents about the trial.

In 2020, Kristine Hoover, professor and chair of Gonzaga's Department of Organizational Leadership and School of Leadership Studies, and former director of the GU Institute for Action Against Hate, published a book, *Countering Hate: Leadership Cases for Nonviolent Action*, with the Kendall Hunt Publishing Co. The book describes in detail the KCTFHR visits to U.S. cities and communities facing threats from hate groups.

In 2024, Norm donated his records and papers from the trial to Gonzaga for use by researchers, especially future law students.

During the week of Jan. 13, 2025, the Gonzaga Law School offered a pilot class on the Keenans v. Aryan Nations civil trial using Norm's materials.

Retired law professor George Critchlow and Kristine taught the course on "Strategies for Countering Hate: How Lawyers and Community Activists Successfully Resisted the Aryan Na-

tions in Northern Idaho," which included a day of lectures and discussions with Norm and Tony.

In their evaluation of the class, an overwhelming majority of the students supported making it a permanent course in the law school curricula.

At Kristine's suggestion, in June 2025, Gonzaga's Foley Library worked with their IT department to videotape Tony reading several speeches he has given around the U.S. Kristine also interviewed him on his life's work. The speeches and the interview are being prepared to post online at the Foley Library.

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Second Harvest of the Inland Northwest offers Mobile Market distributions of wholesome, healthy food at no cost in many neighborhoods and rural communities in Eastern Washington or North Idaho,

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Wenatchee; Sept 11 to Newport and Richland; Sept 16 to Granger and Basin City; Sept 17 to Warden and Rathdrum; Sept. 18 to Reardan and Ephrata; Sept. 23 to Spokane Valley and George; Sept. 24 to Bonners Ferry and Dayton; Sept 25 to Sandpoint and Richland and Sept. 30 to Goldendale and Clarkston.

In October the Mobile Markets reach those towns and more.

A list of Mobile Markets with times and locations each month is located at 2-harvest.org/food-near-me.

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Whitworth is the new home for two sculptures by Harold Balazs

By Caleb McGeever
Finding a new home for Harold Balazs’s concrete-cast, 24-foot-tall sculpture was a challenge, but Whitworth University has made a place for the piece with a hand from a local construction company.

The sculpture, called the Messiah Reredos, was created by Harold Balazs in 1961 and decorated the wall behind the altar of Messiah Evangelical Lutheran Church until February 2025, when they closed their church. They chose to gift the piece to Whitworth.

Stacey Moo, director of the permanent art collections at Whitworth, wanted to accept the piece, but transporting it from the church to the university seemed like a difficult task because of its size.

She worked with Whitworth to move the sculpture safely, find a place to display it publicly, preserve Harold’s legacy, use it to help people understand his liturgical art and expand their collection.

Stacey said that, after realizing that each of the sculpture’s four pieces weighed more than 400 pounds, she would need to find a creative solution.

“So, we brought in some artists to have a look at it. Those people had worked with Harold Balazs or had moved some of his work in the past. We concluded that indeed, we would probably need a construction company to do that,” she said.

Luckily, she was able to recruit the Bouten Construction Company, which does work across the Inland Northwest and was already working with Whitworth to build a new engineering building on the campus.

After their team visited the sculpture, they decided to move it pro bono.

“That was a huge gift. Their crew was wonderful. Jim Putnam led the crew. They built scaffolding, took it down and brought it here to Whitworth,” said Stacey.

Whitworth found a place to install the Messiah Reredos in its dining hall inside the Hixon Union Building (HUB). There, it decorates a wall near the stairs leading to an events space called the Crow’s Nest.

Students, staff and visitors can see and admire the sculpture from inside the dining hall or through a window from the outside.

Stacey said that the HUB was



Stacey Moo, director of permanent art collections at Whitworth University, stands on the stairs in front of the Messiah Reredos sculpture installed in the HUB.

the best option for the Messiah Reredos because it is a public space. She also said that the public display was important so that “we can get really close to it and really see it and spend time with it.”

She pointed out that the HUB was the only building on campus tall enough to fit the entire piece without breaking up its four parts, which hang together vertically.

The sculpture is also significant because it is part of the legacy of liturgical art pieces created by Harold Balazs.

Harold’s artistic impact is everywhere in Spokane. His public works include the Rotary Fountain at Riverfront Park, the floating Centennial sculpture in the Spokane River and the untitled 40-foot-tall tower in front of the First Interstate Center for the Arts.

“He was a force of nature, a special person who had a major effect in the culture of the Inland Empire,” said Tom Kundig, founder of Olsen Kundig Architects and a friend of Harold.

Several institutions, including Whitworth, Gonzaga and the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture (MAC), have played important roles in preserving Harold’s art.

“I think the university’s charge is to basically collect and preserve the culture of the surrounding area. Harold was clearly an important part of the Spokane culture,” said Tom.

Stacey explained that Bouten

Construction previously had helped transport art installations by Harold, and that they were also motivated by the opportunity to help preserve more.

“He is a beloved artist here in Spokane, and we all wanted to preserve his legacy,” she said. “They wanted to come alongside us and help us but also helped because of Harold.”

In addition to his public work, Harold also created other liturgical art pieces for churches and houses of worship around the Inland Northwest.

In Spokane, his work includes contributions to St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane.

He also contributed work to Richland Lutheran Church, St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in Colfax and Temple Beth El in

Tacoma.

In terms of liturgical pieces, “for him it was about making art. I honestly don’t know if there was a real reference to whether it was a Lutheran church or a Catholic church,” said Tom.

“He was liberal in borrowing imagery from various places, which is kind of cool. He kept being inspired by different things,” said Karen Mobley, a Spokane poet and artist who served as the arts director for the City of Spokane from 1997 to 2012 and who was also a friend of Harold.

Karen explained that the Messiah Reredos was an example of Harold’s interest in creating patterns and displaying “symbols of a narrative.”

The Messiah Reredos contains four panels, each with several different symbols. Stacey, in her remarks at the dedication

ceremony for the sculpture at Whitworth, explained that the Christian symbols used tell the story of the life of Christ.

“Whitworth has the culture where something like the Messiah Reredos fits in, and it might not fit in some other place, because it’s a Christian university,” said Karen.

“They have the kind of people who seem both interested in material culture, but also the history of the community and the history of the Christian church in Eastern Washington,” she continued.

In addition to the Messiah Reredos, Messiah Lutheran gifted Whitworth another cast concrete statue, also called the Messiah. This statue is about five feet tall.

Stacey added that Whitworth installed that piece this summer outdoors in the middle of the Eric Johnston rose garden.

She expressed joy and gratitude that other institutions like the MAC are preserving Harold’s legacy and artwork. Along with the MAC, she said Whitworth can play a special role in preserving the pieces related to Christianity.

“I think it is fitting for a Christian university to have been able to save this particular, or I should say, these particular artworks by him,” she said. “I think that, you know, we would have been happy to save any of his works, but these are particularly meaningful.”

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World Refugee Day in Spokane drew more than 600 for activities

As they began planning for this year’s World Refugee Day on June 21 in Spokane, Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS) was concerned about safety for participants.

Because its staff and clients wanted to come together to celebrate, RICS arranged security to help people feel safe when they gathered at the Pergola Event Center.

“Fortunately, there were no incidents,” said Renee Kenney, RICS marketing and development director. “We had a robust safety plan with security officers but did not need to implement it.”

More than 600 attended with a record number of 50 volunteers. Ten were naturalized as citizens. Performances were by Eritrean, El Salvadoran, Ukrainian, Venezuelan, Filipino and Vietnamese refugees and immigrants.

A highlight was the “Facing Immigration” project offered by Diane Sherman, an artist and English as a Second Language teacher at Spokane Community College.

“Combining art and activism, it raises awareness of our hu-



A child looks at the flag during World Refugee Day.

Photo courtesy of Renee Kenney

manity—that we are all people and human beings,” said Renee, noting that 45 participated in that activity.

The day’s theme, “One Heart, One World,” expressed that everyone belongs and is welcome.

RICS planned the day with ASAP Translations, Global Neighbors, International Rescue Committee Spokane, Lutheran Community Services Northwest,

Manzanita House, Spokane Colleges, Thrive International and World Relief.

Renee said that next year, they will celebrate on June 20, the official United Nations World Refugee Day.

RICS works with 1,000 refugees and immigrants in the Spokane area to offer programs they need based on their country of origin and status.

“Some feel free to come and go, and others do not. We are attentive to their comfort and make adjustments as needed,” said Renee.

“RICS’ focus is to help people navigate the systems to find what they need to build stable lives

through access to jobs, housing, clothing, fresh produce, community and mental wellness,” said Renee, whose job is to invite support, volunteers and donors by sharing information.

To do that, RICS offers the following programs, including Refugee Kids Connect, Refugee Elder Services, Refugee Integration, Mobility and Empowerment, the Refugee and Immigrant Wellness Program, Welcome to Spokane, Growing Connections, Patients Passports and Refugee and Immigrant Stories: Voices of Hope.

In addition, the Advocacy Team provides rapid response support, documents interactions with ICE, offers accompaniment to families accessing resources and navigating immigration processes, educates immigrants on using resources from the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network and prepares legislative actions with the city and state.

“We raise awareness of refugee and immigrant issues to protect people’s rights,” Renee said, aware that many of those they serve also interact with other refugee and immigrant organizations.

“Working in collaboration, we seek to meet their needs,” she affirmed.

Renee, who grew up in Spokane, earned degrees in English as a Second Language at Eastern

Washington University—bachelor’s 2016 and master’s 2019. She has worked 10 years teaching refugees and immigrant students at Spokane Community College and Eastern Washington University.

That work involved tests, grades and language, but she wanted to be more involved in the day-to-day support of refugees and immigrants as she learned how diverse Spokane was. She wanted to be part of welcoming them and helping them rebuild their lives.

Just over a year ago, she began working with RICS to gather and share stories and tell about their work to support refugees and families, using social media, raising funds and inviting donations.

“In this work, I keep learning about the people’s lives and cultures, like a flower that keeps unfolding as it blooms,” she said. “I learn how other cultures navigate challenges. For example, some cope with difficulty by laughing, finding joy and levity despite how difficult things may be.”

Refugees in the area include large groups from Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Congo, Sudan, Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Venezuela, she said.

For information, call 209-2384, email rics@ricspokane.org or visit ricspokane.org.

St. Margaret’s Shelter marks its 65th anniversary of serving Spokane

St. Margaret’s Shelter, operated by Catholic Charities of Eastern Washington (CCEW), celebrated its 65th anniversary on July 21, gathering current and former clients, staff, volunteers and community leaders to recognize its role in offering residents protection, love, help and support to get back on their feet, find their path and thrive.

Best practices for safety, security, respect, connections and trust have aided the shelter’s team.

The attendees visited a model guest room, the communal kitchen and lobby, playground and outdoor space, food and clothing pantries, offices and meeting space.

The shelter, named for St. Margaret of Cortona who devoted her life to caring for people who were poor and homeless in 13th-century Italy, first opened on McClellan St. in 1961 to serve women leaving Eastern State Hospital.

By the 1980s, it had become a residence for women with intellectual and developmental disabilities and by 1992, it offered emergency shelter to homeless women and children.

The 1996 CCEW strategic planning called for upgrading the facility and expanding services.

In May 2000, a new facility opened, doubling the capacity

for the programs.

In 2017 when the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requested that St. Margaret’s serve all families, including single fathers, it moved to meet that challenge.

“At the end of the day, when someone becomes homeless, they don’t have a support system that can help them get through a tough time. We become that family, with non-judgmental assistance and personalized support aimed at moving folks into a stable situation within 90 days,” said Heather Eddy, St. Margaret’s Shelter director.

“St Margaret’s is all about families and all about helping people be stabilized and safe. We’re more than a shelter,” said Heather.

St. Margaret’s Shelter, at 101 E. Hartson Ave., accepts donations of clothing, household goods, food, toys and supplies for its residents and has a space designated “The Pearl Boutique,” with second-hand specialty items.

The Spokane Community Warehouse, Vinegar Flats Garden and The Pearl offer job training opportunities for clients who need to develop marketable skills and resumes for industry jobs.

For information, email heather.eddy@cceasternwa.org or visit cceasternwa.org.




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Art/English teacher facilitates ‘Facing Immigration’ workshops

The idea for her workshop on “Facing Immigration” came to Diane Sherman, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, artist and yoga teacher, as a way to use blind contour drawing with reflection questions to draw people into conversation about what it means to be an immigrant, who immigrants are and the reality that most people in the U.S. are descendants of immigrants.

She first facilitated it online with Church World Service’s 2024 World Refugee Day event and then again at Spokane’s 2025 World Refugee Day. Since then, she has facilitated it with Refugee and Immigrant Connections Spokane (RICS) and plans to present it with other local refugee groups.

In teaching refugees and immigrants ESL at Spokane Community College, Diane was inspired to connect with Spokane’s international community. “I see refugees every day, people from Ukraine, Palestine, Sudan, Congo and other places,” she said.

“They are people trying to make a life. They did not leave their countries because they wanted to but because war, oppression of women and girls—excluding them from education and work—or economic dissolution—as in Venezuela—forced them to flee here to be alive,” she commented.

“They did not come to take jobs,” asserted Diane.

She seeks to counter such stereotypes, because she is disturbed by how immigrants and refugees are used as scapegoats for political purposes, as they have been in other eras.

For the blind contour drawing at World Refugee Day, she had people sit before 10 mirrors and, without looking at the page for two minutes, draw contours of their head and facial features. Then they look at what they drew and add colors.

Diane likens that blind drawing to the trust immigrants and refugees must have as they begin their journeys and leave all they have known without knowing where they will be living as they move along the road of immigrating to a new country and starting a new life.

“This art process is a somatic experience of stepping into the unknown and having to embody trust, just like immigrants do as they begin their journeys,” she clarified.

Diane hopes the project grows as a way to awaken people to who refugees are, as good citizens who need to make a



Diane Sherman teaches several World Refugee Day attendees blind contour drawing as a discussion starter.

Photo courtesy of Diane Sherman

life after they left all they cared about to come here to rebuild themselves.

“I’m hoping to expand on “Facing Immigration” by offering stories of immigrants and their descendants to build a rich picture of immigration in our community and culture,” she said, “and to have dialogue to connect people.”

Diane, who earned a bachelor’s degree in art history in 1985 from the University of California in Los Angeles and a master’s degree in arts and consciousness in 1996 from JFK University in Berkeley, has taught workshops on creative process, writing and yoga.

In 2010, she and her then-husband moved from the San Francisco Bay area to Spokane, looking for a quieter place where they could have more contact with nature.

Diane attended Catholic schools for 12 years and accepted the faith but did not accept its patriarchal practices or its rules about morality.

“I had danced all my life until 1999, when a car hit me as a pedestrian,” she said. “It led me into using yoga as a way to heal my body, mind and heart.

“I began teaching yoga, creative process and mindfulness based on care of self and on loving and doing no harm to others, the land, plants or the planet,”

said Diane, who taught yoga for 10 years in Oakland and Berkeley, and then for seven years at Harmony Yoga in Spokane.



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She led retreats to India and the San Francisco Bay Area until the pandemic when she moved to teaching online.

After she and her husband divorced, she needed a job and began teaching ESL at Spokane Community College.

Diane said she is raffling some of her artwork to raise funds so she can facilitate more “Facing Immigration” workshops to bet-

ter inform people about what is happening in the world and the issues immigrants face.

For information, email diane@ibelove.com or visit dianesherman.net.



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Newby-Ginnings opens new warehouse

By Bon Wakabayashi
At a new 10,000-square-foot warehouse in Post Falls called Newby-Ginnings, everything is free for veterans, active military personnel and their families, and Gold Star families.

Items that are donated and given include clothing, shoes, household necessities, baby supplies, medical equipment, furniture, appliances, a food pantry and a library with books, music, movies and video games.

Newby-Ginnings also provides information and referrals for those who show proof of military service.

Some years ago, the founder of Newby-Ginnings, Theresa

Hart, lost her son, SPC Nicholas Newby, in Iraq. She said she spent months on the couch in her pajamas unable to deal with her grief.

Then some of her sons' buddies who deployed with him returned to the area and began setting up households. Many of them needed essential personal and household items.

Seeking to help, Theresa started collecting donations for these veterans and began storing them in her garage to give to them. Soon, she was overwhelmed with donations and had to rent a storage unit.

As response expanded, she formed a nonprofit in 2013.

Today, Theresa's "dream building" is filled with everything imaginable—furniture, clothing, household items and books. Everything is free. There are no price tags or cash registers. Clients show their military ID and can take anything they need.

It has been such a success that they are now running out of space and looking for a larger facility.

Those with items to donate may bring them to 570 S. Clearwater Loop Unit A in Post Falls from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays.

For information, call 208-610-6996 or visit newbyginnings.org.

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American Indian Community Center seeks forever home to serve everyone

By Mary Stamp

The American Indian Community Center (AICC) has found a permanent location at Riverside Ave. and A St., near People’s Park, after moving 12 times since it started in 1967 as a social gathering place for urban Indians.

At its new location, it will continue to offer social and economic services, family assistance and cultural programs.

The AICC programs serve about 10,000 urban Indians from 300 tribes who live in Spokane and in off-reservation communities in 21 counties of Eastern Washington and North Idaho.

While the figures add up to 2.4 percent of the population, Linda Lauch, executive director, said many more urban Indians have lost ties with their tribes because of boarding school trauma, relocations and intermarriage.

Linda, for example, describes herself as “a descendant of the Spokane Tribe.” She was born in Wellpinit but grew up in Spokane, graduated from Rogers High School in 1980 and studied accounting at Spokane Community College.

She began as a receptionist at the AICC in 1985 and learned the center’s scope by working with its programs, personnel and records. In 2019, she became executive director.

AICC, which is currently housed at 1025 W. Indiana in the Spokane Tribe Building, has been looking for years for a home of its own with space it will not outgrow. With the assistance of the AICC’s campaign chair, Karen Stratton, a former Spokane City Council member, it has raised just more than \$2 million of the \$16 million needed to build the new center.

In 2022, Garrett Jones, then director of the Spokane City Parks Department, told the Parks Board the AICC story, and the board voted unanimously to lease the land to them, said Linda.

That year, the state of Washington granted funds for the AICC’s Forever Home Project, a 25,000-square-foot facility designed by a Native American company in Portland.

Now that they have that design, they have been telling their story to raise funds and pledges from foundations, businesses, service clubs, churches and retirement centers.

The Spokane Alliance Truth and Reconciliation Team is also helping them raise funds.

Linda gave an overview of the programs AICC offers to everyone under its mission to provide social and economic development for all racial groups. Its programs encourage individual and family self-sufficiency and aim to protect and preserve the culture and traditions of Indian people.

About 54 percent of the 3,200



Photo beside Linda Lauch shows site near People’s Park for the new center’s home.

clients it assists each year are American Indian/Alaska Native, 20 percent are white, 16 percent are Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 8 percent are African American and 3 percent are Hispanic.

AICC’s 19 staff members manage its programs that provide employment and training services, Indian Child Welfare, Working Families Tax Credit, rental assistance and a food bank. Cultural programs include healthcare access, drug and alcohol assessments, Goodheart Behavioral Health and crisis intervention through the Family Services program.

Linda described the programs.

- **To eliminate artificial barriers** to success for employment and training, one program uses Tribal Set-Aside Funds from the Department of Labor Work Force Innovation Opportunity Act. Through it, they may provide glasses for a truck driver in training, steel-toed boots and safety apparel for a construction worker or funds for books for a first-year college student.

- **Through Indian Child Welfare**, which AICC became involved with in the 1990s, four staff members work with families who have a child in the Child Protective Services (CPS) system, to provide parenting classes or one-to-one instruction to understand the state processes. They assisted 175 in 2024.

“We may buy a bed for a family preparing to receive back a child who was taken as a baby,” said Linda. “We determine immediate needs and anticipate the next needs.”

The AICC works with the local Tribal ICW programs to recruit and license Indian foster

homes and kinship homes—like homes of grandparents—so if CPS takes a child, the child can be placed with family or in an Indian foster home.

“We also find Indian grandparents who are raising their grandchildren without help and offer help,” she said.

- **AICC has done outreach** in Eastern Washington for the Working Families Tax Credits. At rural food banks, AICC hired tax professionals to help people fill out their tax returns and apply for the tax credit.

“In Omak, one woman found that after she filed a tax return, she received \$11,000 in tax refunds at no cost to her,” said Linda. “Tax credits are for low-income families with young children. If the state continues the program, we will continue to do outreach. We did 14 tax events at food banks this year.”

- **During the pandemic**, AICC began helping the State Department of Commerce distribute funds from the American Residential Placement Act (ARPA) for rental assistance.

“Through those programs, eight of our staff helped 1,800 families stay in housing and arranged for other agencies to provide ARPA rental assistance,” said Linda, noting that, unfortunately, when the rental support and moratorium on evictions ended after the pandemic, many were evicted.

“During the pandemic, we had funds for rental assistance along with other agencies, including SNAP and The NATIVE Project. We negotiated with landlords not to raise rents and helped families find resources,” said Linda.

- **AICC’s food bank**, an out-

let of Second Harvest, is open Tuesdays to Fridays and serves anyone.

Because people can come to the food bank only once a month, AICC staff also pick up grocery rescue items at Rosauer’s in Browne’s Addition, Fred Meyer on Freya and the Chef’s Store—bread and produce—and set items along the walkway outside the food bank on Monday, Wednesday and Friday for anyone to take any time.

Linda sees more need as pandemic food stamp funds have been cut.

“If we could stock the shelves every day, we could give out food every day,” she said. “We serve 7,000 a year.”

Linda is impressed that people care. Farmers donate food, like frozen ground bison or ground beef. In the summer, people plant extra produce as part of the food bank’s Plant-a-Row-for-the-Needy program.

- **Family Services** is a catch-all for many other needs—helping with energy bills to prevent shut-offs, funds for auto repairs or requests that do not fit in other programs.

“Our care coordinators try to locate funding. We use contacts in Spokane and on neighboring reservations to do miracles that

help with unusual needs, like buying a tank of gas and a card for the return trip for a family needing to go to a funeral on the Blackfeet Reservation,” Linda said.

The AICC has other pots of money for rent assistance and other needs. Its Concrete Goods Fund helped a third grader go to summer basketball camp.

- **Partner agencies** see their clients at the AICC, helping people apply for cash or food assistance, or receive referrals.

“No one has enough resources, so we share our resources,” Linda explained.

For example, while working at a booth at an event, AICC directed a woman needing \$700 in energy assistance to SNAP. The SNAP representative offered to do an energy inspection of her home, resulting in replacing four windows and installing insulation and a new furnace.

- **Another AICC program** funds training for community health workers to help people do Medicaid applications and to do case management to help adults at risk of evictions access housing resources, rental assistance and medical care to ensure continuity of treatment for those with conditions like diabetes and depression.

- **AICC’s Goodheart Behavioral Health Program** offers outpatient and intensive patient care for substance use disorder and mental health treatment.

“We are looking for a new co-occurring disorder counselor/supervisor and seeking grants for care coordinators and community health workers,” she said.

“After 40 years of working at the American Indian Community Center, I have practiced what my dad did when he ran a paint and body shop for many years in Spokane. He taught me to help people and treat them with respect. If we help people, they will never forget it,” Linda asserted.

So, Linda encourages AICC staff to work selflessly with compassion and to “go the extra mile.”

“We are here to help people. That’s the way Indian people are raised. We’re a village,” she said.

For information, call 535-0886 or email info@aiccinc.org.

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Gonzaga Climate Institute presents series of programs

Karin Stevens Dance and Gonzaga University Dance will perform “Sea Change Within Us” as part of the For Our Common Home Lecture Series at 7:30 p.m., Friday, Sept. 19, at Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center at Gonzaga University.

“Sea Change Within Us” is a 60-minute performance on water concerns and climate change in the state of Washington through people’s voices and images of water formed by dancers.

Ten dancers move panels to express concerns about rivers and dams, endangered species, ice, ocean and sea-level rise, flooding, migration, Indigenous fishing rights, and injustice, divisive politics and human dis/re/connection.

Karen conceived, directed and choreographed the project.

ArtsWA, National Endowment for the Arts, Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, Earth Creative and 4Culture funded this recreation of a 2019 project.

Karin, a Seattle-based choreographer, performer, writer and facilitator in somatic and spiritual healing, formed Karin Stevens Dance in 2009 to connect movement, art, ecology, spirit and humanity.

Since 1999, she has created more than 90 professional concert-dance, theater and education-based movement-art works.

She has a master’s in choreography and performance from Mills College and a bachelor’s in dance from the University of Washington.

There are several other programs in the series.

- The Spokane Candidate’s Forum is at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 1, in Cataldo Hall at Gonzaga and livestream. Gonzaga’s Institute for Climate, Water and the Environment has hosted the forum annually since 2019 as a non-partisan space where candidates for local office can share their ideas.

- Gonzaga’s Theatre performers will join theatre artists from around the world to present

several short Climate Change Action Plays from Friday to Sunday, Oct. 3 to 5, in the Magnuson Theatre and livestream. The plays will explore Gonzaga’s relationship to its place, Spokane and the river.

- Colville National Forest supervisor Joshua White will speak on “Forest Health, Diversity and Productivity in the face of the Forest Health and Wildfire Crisis” at 6 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 22, at Hemmingson Auditorium.

- Kyle Shimabuku, associate professor of engineering at Gonzaga, will discuss “Safeguarding Our Drinking Water in the Pacific Northwest in an Era of Megafires” at 6 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 4, at Hemmingson.

- Shamyra Lavigne-Davey, executive assistant of RISE St. James, La., will speak on Zoom about “There Is No Justice without Environmental Justice” at 4 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 2.

For information, visit gonzaga.edu/climate-institute/events.

New Crosswalk Youth Shelter is now open

For 40 years, Crosswalk has served as a refuge for Spokane’s youth experiencing homelessness. In August, the long-awaited dream of a new shelter became reality.

Volunteers of America Eastern Washington (VOA) celebrated the grand opening of the new Crosswalk Youth Shelter on Thursday, Aug. 28, at 1440 N. Haven St., dedicating the shelter and Cannon Hall.

The bright, modern facility uses natural light. It was designed with the youth it serves to offer safety, dignity and belonging.

“Since 1985, Crosswalk has been a lifeline,” said Sherrece Scott, annual giving manager. “Within its walls, young people find not only a safe place to sleep, but also the support of case managers, educators and behavioral health counselors who help them navigate trauma and begin a new path toward stability.”

As Spokane has grown and changed, so have the challenges for youth. The downtown shelter at 525 W. 2nd Ave. no longer met the needs of the youth and

could not support the full range of services youth need to thrive, Sherrece said.

As they helped design their future shelter, youth described it as a fresh start—“a home in a neighborhood away from the stress of downtown, surrounded by green spaces and close to schools.”

The new Crosswalk is near Spokane Community College, Chief Garry Park, CHAS Health and the VOA Young Adult Shelter (YAS).

The first floor features a welcoming shelter space to encourage connection and comfort. The second floor, named Cannon

Hall to honor Bridget Cannon, hosts private dorm-style rooms for youth enrolled in an education or employment program. The third floor houses its administration team.

“Crosswalk’s mission has always been more than providing a place to stay. It’s about breaking the cycle of homelessness,” said Sherrece. “This shelter is a testament to what is possible when a community listens, collaborates and acts. It’s a promise kept, a sanctuary built not just for youth, but with them.”

For information, call 862-4877 or email sscott@voaspo-kane.org.



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When Elyseé arrived in Spokane, he enrolled in Spokane Community College’s ESL program. Now he’s wrapping up his Master’s degree at Whitworth University and works for the community college helping students stay engaged and finish their programs.

“I’ve always wanted to be in the medical field or in general, just help people,” says Elyseé Kazadi. “Then I said, ‘wait a minute’. I’ve been a refugee for a while and I know refugees don’t always know about policies made for them.”

Elyseé’s dream to use his education to help others has taken unexpected turns, but he got his start and put his dream to work at Spokane Community College.



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Child of a refugee writes book to give insights on lives of refugees

By Catherine Ferguson SNJM

“I am the child of a refugee,” Anna Ungar Goodwin begins, introducing both herself and her just-published book, *By Force and Fear: A Stolen Homeland*.

The story is based on accounts her father shared with her family when she was a child, recalling his traumatic experiences as a 12-year-old fleeing his homeland during the upheaval of the Russian Revolution, the devastating famine of 1921 to 1922 and the Communist takeover.

“I wrote the book now so that others can understand what so many refugees from countless countries have endured—fleeing their homeland under murderous and cruel regimes—and to encourage reaching out to help them in compassion and solidarity.”

Because Anna was not present and is not a historian, she identifies the book as creative fiction. Still, she carefully reconstructs true events as best she can, alternating between her own voice as a young girl in Manitoba listening to her father’s stories, and her father’s voice as a child fleeing the attacking Tatars, the Black Army, the Red Army and the White Army during the chaos of revolution and war.

This refugee story is not a secret, but it has been largely absent from the history studied in U.S. schools.

The book, which is available at Aunties Bookstore, traces the roots of these events back to the mid-18th century, when Catherine the Great, a German noblewoman, married Russian Czar Peter III to forge a political alliance.

Some 20 years after the marriage, Catherine orchestrated a coup d’état and became the first Czarina of Russia. She then invited German farmers to settle in southern Russia near the Ukrainian border, offering them land and resources. Many accepted, prospered and became a dominant force in the local economy—while native Russians, unable to thrive on the land, fell into desperate poverty.

Resentment grew. When the czars were overthrown in the early 20th century, long memories and deep grievances fueled violence. Russian Tatars and other groups attacked the prosperous German communities, forcing families to abandon their homes and flee for their lives.

One such family was that of Anna’s father, Chnals (Cornelius) Ungar. Drawing from his memories, Anna reconstructs their harrowing thousand-mile flight from the Tereker Villages in Russia to Bakhmut in Ukraine, and ultimately to the Steinbach region southeast of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Anna grew up with her parents and sister on a farm in rural Manitoba. Though she loved



Anna Ungar Goodwin signs books at recent event.
Photo courtesy of Anna Ungar Goodwin

her father, she remembers their relationship as difficult.

“I never knew what was going to happen with him. Sometimes he was gentle and patient, and other times explosive in his reactions,” she said.

Later, through her psychotherapy studies, she came to believe her father suffered from untreated PTSD caused by his refugee trauma.

“In those days, no one had a name for it. Mental health care was nonexistent in rural Manitoba. We just knew his responses were unpredictable. As much as we wanted to hear his story, he could only share fragments before becoming overwhelmed.”

Despite that pain, the more she heard, the more she realized her family’s—and particularly her father’s—experiences profoundly shaped her life.

“I was raised,” she explained, “to believe that we must live the teachings of Christ: ‘Love your neighbor. Care for the stranger. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’”

Her career path reflected this conviction. Beginning as a nurse in Canada, she carried her father’s words as a guiding force: “Always be strong. Be strong.” “Be afraid but do it anyway.” “Help others in need. It might be you next time. We NEVER thought it would be us.”

These words resonated particularly as she recounted her father’s memory of the treatment

the refugees received when they sought shelter for a time in a village called Kasi Jurt, where most of the people were Muslims who spoke no German—only Turkish and very little Russian.

Chnals remembered that, when they arrived in the village, his father told them they must first wait to see if they would be welcome. Several women dressed in Muslim garb gathered in the village crying. Then, after about 20 minutes of waiting in their wagon, his father came back with the invitation to come to the lunch that had been prepared for them with flatbread and lamb.

Later that same day, her father remembered his mother following some of the Muslim women into one of the homes. When she came back, she was in tears and told her husband, “They are so kind. They’re giving our family their best bedroom.” They had noticed that Chnals’ mother was pregnant.

Anna’s professional life continued this legacy of care. After earning her bachelor’s degree in nursing from the University of Manitoba, she worked as a nurse in Canada for two years.

As a young woman with an adventurous spirit, she then accepted an invitation from a friend who had received a scholarship to the University of California, Berkeley. She had asked Anna to come and live with her and be a nurse in the United States.

Employed as a nurse at Alta Bates Medical Center, she became disillusioned with the U.S. healthcare system, which treated patients according to their insurance status.

She recalled one moment vividly: “A man about 50 came in an ambulance with a severe heart attack. I rushed him to a room and began treatment, as I would have in Canada. My supervisor ran to the room and stopped me—because he had no insurance. He had to be transferred to a hospital in San Francisco that accepted uninsured patients, an hour away. I could not continue in such a system.”

In Berkeley, however, she also met her future husband, Ronald Goodwin, a research scientist in invertebrate pathology, a field which led them to visit and move to several areas of the world.

After marrying, Anna pursued a master’s degree in child, adolescent and family psychology at the University of Maryland. Ron pursued research first in Australia, then in Europe and returned to Maryland, where he worked with the USDA (Department of Agriculture).

After several years there, Anna’s life took another turn when Ron was transferred to the USDA labs in Bozeman, Mont.

Anna soon became aware of the lack of mental health services and established a private practice, quickly earning a reputation in the field. Her work also expanded into doing workshops and writing. She also taught classes at Montana State University

Her first book, co-written

with Barbara Labovitz Boik on sand-play therapy and published by W.W. Norton, became a well-known textbook in the field. It was later translated into Chinese.

When Anna and Ron retired, they moved to Coeur d’Alene, where she continued doing workshops for psychotherapists and taught some extension classes for the University of Idaho. She authored several accessible works on PTSD, designed to help both sufferers and their families.

Now, with *By Force and Fear*, she returns to the story that shaped her life.

“It has taken me a lifetime to live this story and a long time to write it, but now is the right time to bring my father’s experience and wisdom to today’s world,” she commented.

Her father’s counsel feels especially urgent to her in the current climate:

- “Keep your faith and live it every day.”
- “Never, never let your past divide you. We must connect and collaborate in love for everyone, instead of dividing in fear and anger.”
- “Never, never let your freedoms go.”

His story continues to give her hope.

“It is sometimes difficult to remember, but now—as before—we must stand up together for our values, morals and beliefs, and act on them, she said. “History shows us this has happened before, and it will happen again when we are ready.”

For information, email jar-goodwin@msn.com.

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Frustration, energy of millions of isolated people can be turned into action

What does it look like to take the frustration and energy of millions of isolated individuals and turn it into real, collective action?

In 2018, the citizens of Idaho—one of the nation’s most conservative states—voted overwhelmingly to adopt Obamacare’s controversial Medicaid Expansion.

The group behind the effort, Reclaim Idaho, built a network of more than 2,000 volunteers across 25 counties. Instead of focusing on partisan messaging, they asked neighbors a simple question: How has the lack of affordable healthcare affected you and your family?

The responses cut across ideological lines—stories of skipped medications, delayed surgeries and mounting debt were common everywhere from Wallace to Dubois. These conversations set Medicaid expansion apart from abstract partisan positions and made it personal. Two years after Idaho elected Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton by a 2-1 margin, it

expanded Medicaid by the same ratio, a victory that allowed more than 100,000 Idahoans to gain access to health care.

Early in their campaign, a political consultant advised them to take a more conventional path: raise millions of dollars for a poll, use the results to court major donors and rely on paid advertising to persuade voters. Instead, Reclaim Idaho stuck to organizing—and won.

Their success serves as a reminder: it is not polls, ads or consultants that drive real democratic change. It is ordinary people, organizing their neighbors, building power from the ground up—the same way movements for women’s suffrage, labor rights and civil rights were built before them.

So if there is an appetite, how do we get started? Several ways are to join a union, organize in our congregations or take an active role in public schools. Unions, congregations and schools are the institutions that ward against tyranny.

American historian Timothy Snyder

warns: “Do not speak of ‘our institutions’ unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall one after the other unless each is defended from the beginning. So, choose an institution you care about—a court, a newspaper, a law, [a congregation], a labor union—and take its side.”

We face the undeniable challenge, however, that many of us no longer have easy access to these spaces. So how do we, like Reclaim Idaho, rebuild or build new local democratic institutions?

We start by realizing the scope of how many people already have an appetite to do something. In 2016, more than 350,000 people donated to the ACLU in just one weekend. Imagine if those people had formed 1,000 new local groups with an average startup budget of \$24,000 and set about raising enough additional funds and recruiting enough additional members to put 1,000 paid organizers at the service of half a million active volunteers in 1,000

American neighborhoods and towns. Imagine if, like Reclaim Idaho, they went out and began to address the issues affecting families who lived right down the street, dedicating themselves to building more affordable housing, improving environmental protections and demanding fair wages or basic government accountability. There is a never-ending list of things we can do to make a difference in our own backyard. They impact all of us and give us vehicles to come together and take on the larger issues. Imagine if, like the first women who brought together the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention to launch the women’s suffrage and women’s rights movements, these groups in turn began to seek one another out and build strategic relationships along lines of common interests. Then they can help set new precedents in state legislatures that can serve as a model for national action.

Cameron Conner – Columnist

Lord’s prayer is about everyone having daily bread, and forgiving

The lines from the Lord’s prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” draw on the concept of God as a provider for the basic needs of human beings and emphasize the reciprocal nature of forgiveness.

This expression acknowledges that divine providence is the provider of both spiritual and physical needs for humanity. Those needs go hand in hand.

As in the time of the New Testament, people in our times are struggling to have food to meet their daily needs. Some have food on their table, but not healthy food.

In addition to the concept of providing food, we can also talk about the basic things that humans need to survive—air, water and food. In our world today, we can include other essentials like housing, health care and electricity.

In addition, when we talk about air,

water and food, we are talking about clean air, clean water and healthy food. Everyone is entitled to have these basics to live a good life.

Our calling as Christians is to help each other and provide food, resources and assistance for our fellow human beings. To provide healthy resources we have to protect our environment so everyone, including our children can access them now and in the future.

Daily bread is not only about daily food. It’s also about survival, continuity and endurance for us as individuals, communities and the world.

The Christianity that Jesus brings is described in Matt. 25 as caring for the poor, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming foreigners and refugees, healing the sick and visiting prisoners.

It is about showing our love for God and living in harmony with our neighbors. It is never about controlling people or about one supreme race dominating another.

Christ’s body symbolizes the bread of life. The bread of life goes hand in hand with forgiveness—as the body and blood of Christ are used to offer forgiveness. Asking for God’s forgiveness starts with our ability to forgive each other, because we all fall short. That is the reciprocal nature of forgiveness.

God’s forgiveness is linked to our willingness to forgive one another. Paul shares in Eph. 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

There is a saving/healing power in forgiveness. Forgiveness has a double effect. When we forgive someone, our healing can begin, and it also gives the

opportunity for those we forgive to heal. Everyone needs forgiveness at some point, because we all make mistakes. It takes courage to forgive. It is an act of true love. Our courage shows when we put forgiveness and love into action. When we fail to forgive, it hurts us first. When we fail to forgive, we continue to fill our hearts with anger, hatred and bitterness. It can destroy our lives, relationships, families, communities and country, too. In opening our lives and hearts for forgiveness, we are giving ourselves an opportunity to let go of the hard feelings and the burdens that we carry around with us. Sometimes the best thing we can do for ourselves and others is to forgive. As we are able to forgive, God will forgive us, too. Ikani Fakasiieiki - Pastor Liberty Park and St. Paul’s United Methodist

Everyone’s one little thing can add up to a lot of momentum for justice

Are we learning every day to be silenced, hopeless and overwhelmed?

Every day it’s worse. The gaunt faces, thin arms, listless children, empty bowls, and shooting of those scrambling for food in another part of the world.

Every day in this part of the world, someone else fired from a needed government role—be it the forest service, national parks, weather stations or emergency management.

Every day, there’s a new illegal action undermining the Constitution, the historical records in museums, the integrity of universities, the freedom of speech.

Every day, someone else is nabbed off the streets right here to disappear, another lawsuit raises a challenge, another injunction is denied, another lawsuit is filed.

Everyday, we see an onslaught of the

made-for-reality-TV assaults of decency, diverting our heads this direction and that.

Every day, I feel helpless, but . . .

Every day, I can donate to trusted faith and nonprofit agencies to provide food, shelter, health care, hope to people.

Every day, I can donate to trusted faith and nonprofit groups that challenge illegal activities of our government.

Many days, I can join a protest.

Every day, I can write a letter, join an organization.

Every day, I can keep informed by journalists who thwart the threats to tell the truth.

Every day, I can care for someone, do self care and take time to pray.

As I keep connected to my family and faith community locally, regionally, nationally and globally, I am reminded that

every little bit counts.

Daily, I read of the World Council of Churches—as one group—and the myriad of issues on which they are speaking out and making a difference. Their actions remind me that my little actions today will add up with the actions of my congregation, my community, my colleagues and my global connections to have an impact.

We can rant and rail. We can feel hopeless. We can give in to being overwhelmed. We may want to run away but, remembering we are not alone, we need to ask: What is one thing I can do today?

Watching a recent PBS program on Berlin, I was reminded of conditions when I visited East and West Berlin in 1985. I remember seeing the white side of the wall, where speaking out was ostensibly denied where family and friends ratted on

each other to receive a perk.

I remember seeing the colorful, creative graffiti on the other side express the people’s will for peace, justice and freedom.

I remember that despite the blank East side of the wall, people met in churches and spoke honestly with each other. I remember their commitment to peace, justice and freedom.

They did not want a dictator. They kept up the momentum until they—not the Russian leader, Gorbachev—were able to tear down the wall because the repressive dictators could not withstand the momentum of their movement.

We need to keep the faith, and with God’s help to keep on working, to know we are not alone and to act on our call to love our neighbors.

Mary Stamp - editor

ELCA Churchwide Assembly elects first Black presiding bishop

At its 2025 Churchwide Assembly July 28 to Aug. 2 in Phoenix, Ariz., the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) elected Chicago native Bishop Yehiel Curry as its first Black presiding bishop.

What an exhilarating moment for the Lutheran community as we step into a new era of leadership, marked by a historic milestone! The recent election of Bishop Curry as the first Black presiding bishop is cause for great celebration and unity among us all.

As he prepares to transition from his impactful leadership in the Metropolitan

Chicago Synod to his new role in October, we are filled with excitement and hope for the inclusive and compassionate journey ahead.

Bishop Meggan Manlove - Northwest Intermountain Synod, ELCA

Speaking to the assembly after his election, Bishop Curry reflected on his membership at Shekinah Chapel in Riverdale, Ill., where he became a lay mission developer while participating in the ELCA’s Theological Education for Emerging Ministries program, which prepares individuals for ordained ministry,

with a focus on emerging ministry contexts like ethnic-specific, multicultural, rural and inner-city settings. He spoke to the assembly about his initial hesitation in accepting that first ministry role.

“I never saw myself as good enough, so for two years, I said no. I finally said yes. When I said yes, this church’s support, of that ministry meant everything,” he said, indicating he was an example of what that church investment meant.

He has served as bishop of the ELCA Metropolitan Chicago Synod since 2019, was a mission developer from 2009 to 2012 and pastor from 2012 to 2019 of

Shekinah.

He received a bachelor of arts from Lewis University in Romeoville, Ill., in 1995 and a master of divinity from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) in 2013.

The churchwide assembly, the chief legislative authority of the ELCA, which met under the theme, “For the Life of the World.”

It made decisions about the church’s work, engaged in theological reflection and worshiped.

Live video of the plenary sessions is at elca.org/CWA.

Calendar of Events

Area codes are (509) unless otherwise listed
Submit events to development@thefigtree.org by the third Fridays

- Sept 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 23 • Second Harvest Mobile Market**, locations & times: 2-harvest.org/food-near-me/
- Sept 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 • Heartistry: Artistic Wellbeing**, Spark Central, 1214 W Summit Pkwy, 3 to 5 p.m., 279-0299
- Sept 2, 16 • Native Cultural Craft Nights**, American Indian Community Center, 1025 W. Indiana, 5 p.m., aicc.org
- Sept 3 • Protesting101: A People's Training**, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., location shared with registrants, pjals@action.pjals.org
- **"Conservation Confidential,"** Mitch Friedman, Auntie's Bookstore, 402 W. Main Ave., 6 p.m., 838-0206, events@auntiesbooks.com, auntiesbooks.com
- Sept 4 • Community Conversation on Immigration**, Matt Soerens, World Relief Spokane, The Hive, 2904 E. Sprague, Room A, 12 to 1:30 p.m., 484-9829
- Sept 4, 11, 18, 25 • Taize Prayer**, Zoom, 4:15 p.m., bartletts@gonzaga.edu
- Sept 4-Oct 30 • Executive Director Confab**, Idaho Nonprofit Center & 501 Commons, online, 12 to 2 p.m., bit.ly/EdConfab
- Sept 5 • Latina Health Symposium**, Granger, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., lhs2025.fillout.com/register
- **Freedom Friday Rally**, Crosswalk sidewalk rally for youth, 1440 N Haven St, 4 to 5:30 p.m.
- Sept 6 • First Friday, Spokane**, 5 to 8 p.m., downtownspokane.org/first-friday
- **First Fridays with Pend Oreille Arts Council**, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., artinsandpoint.org
- Sept 6, 7 • SCAR Organizing 101 Training**, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., ctwo.org/organizing-101
- Sept 7 • Zonky Jazz Band**, Hamilton Studio, 1427 W Dean, Dance 5:30 p.m., Concert 6 p.m., hamiltonstudio.com
- Sept 9 • Risk and Resilience: A Practical Guide for Nonprofit Leaders**, online, 12 to 1:30 p.m., innovia.org
- Sept 10, 17 • Year-End Fundraising: Making the Most of the Final Stretch**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, 12 to 1 p.m., online, nonprofitwa.org
- Sept 11, 25 • Dances of Universal Peace**, Unity Spiritual Center, 2900 S. Bernard, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., 818-6733
- **Elemental: Reimagine Wildfire Film Screening**, 350 Spokane, The Magic Lantern Theatre, 6:30 to 9 p.m., info@350spokane.org, 350spokane.org
- Sept 11-14 • Grassroots Radio Conference**, KYRS, 906 E Main, 747-3102, grc2025.com, kyrs.org
- Sept 12-14 • Basic Mediation Training**, Northwest Mediation Center, Fri 1 to 5 p.m., Sat/Sun 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., northwestmediation.org
- Sept 12, 19 • Eagle Aviary Tour**, Coeur d'Alene Casino, 37914 S Nikwalqw, Worley, 8:45 p.m., cdcasino.com
- Sept 13 • Tour De Farms**, Growing Neighbors, 9 to 11 a.m., growingneighbors509@gmail.com
- **Spokane AIDS Walk**, Spokane AIDS Network, Riverfront Park, Red Dress Party nYne Bar & Bistro, 10 a.m., 844-1758, sannw.org
- **Palouse Regional Butterfly Release**, Rural Resources and Friends of Hospice, Schmuck Park, 1301 N Morton, 11 a.m., 332-0365
- **Homeownership Education Resource Fair**, Habitat for Humanity, Liberty Park, 1300 E 5th, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., habitat-spokane.org
- **Live Local INW Market**, Spokane Independent Metro Business Alliance, 1403 N Washington, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., spokaneindependent.org/events/live-local-inw-market
- **Pine Creek Community Restoration** Long Term Recovery, 5th Annual Fall Festival, Malden Community Park, 12 to 4 p.m., facebook.com/PineCreekCommunityRestoration
- **Wandermere Block Party**, Wandermere Mall Hwy 395 & Hasting, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m., 467-2365, sheila@fairwoodretirement.com
- **Catharsis & Connection**, grief retreat, Harmony Woods Retreat Center, 3 to 8 p.m., harmonywoods.org
- **Welcome Back Dinner**, German-American Society, 25 W 3rd, 6 p.m., 954-6964
- **Spokane Arts Awards Gala**, Myrtle Woldson Center, Gonzaga, 6:30 p.m., gonzagaperformingarts.venue.net/events/GTR0913
- Sept 13-14 • Spokane Symphony Masterworks 1: The Mahlers**, The Fox Theater, 1001 W Sprague, Sat 6:30 p.m., Sun 2 p.m.
- **Nuestras Raices Fall Yard Sale**, 1214 E. Sprague, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., hbpasspokane.org
- Sept 13-Nov 1 • Fall Teen Intensive: "I Don't Want to Talk About It,"** Craig Hirt, Sats 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., performances Nov 8, 9, spokanechildrenstheatre.org
- Sept 14 • Sharing the Dharma Day**, Sravasti Abbey, 692 Country Ln, Newport, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 447-5549, sravastiabbey.org
- **Multi-Faith Prayer Vigil**, St. Ann Matthew 25 Ministry, Spokane Federal Building Plaza, 4 p.m., 535-3031, sjann@gmail.com
- Sept 15 • Housing Alliance Priorities 2026**, CHAS Health Administration Office, 611 N Iron Bridge, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., wliha.org
- **New Way of the Cross Dedication**, Immaculate Heart Retreat Center (IHRC), 6910 S Ben Burr, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., ihrc.net
- **"The Abolition of Man Is C.S. Lewis' Most Philosophical Work, but Is It Christian?"** Michael Ward, Gonzaga Faith and Reason Institute, Cataldo Hall, Gonzaga, 7 to 8:30 p.m., faithandreason@gonzaga.edu
- Sept 17 • Silent Day of Prayer**, Sister Mary of the Humble Heart of Jesus, IHRC, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., ihrc.net

- Sept 18 • "Sacred Shapes"**, Eye Contact fundraiser for Volunteers of America, Washington Cracker Building, 5 to 8 p.m., event.gives/eye2025
- **Side by Side Fundraiser Feast**, Big Barn Brewing, 16004 N. Applewood, Mead 5:30 to 8 p.m., sidebysidespokane.org
- **NAACP Spokane Branch**, General Membership Meeting, Spokane Community College, Bldg 6, Student Lair, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 209-2425, naacpspokane.com
- Sept 19 • Muse Party: A Celebration for the Earth Tending Community**, Harmony Woods, 1 to 4 p.m., earthtending.com
- **Constitutional Change for a Livable Future: Greening Amendment Tour**, 350 Spokane, Hamilton Studio, 1427 W Dean, 6 to 8 p.m., bit.ly/WashingtonGAtour
- **Come Hungry, Leave Inspired**, Libraries for Ethiopia Fundraiser, Unitarian Universalist Church, 4340 W Whistalks, 6 to 9 p.m., 541-808-8595, libraryaysendafa.com
- **Sea Change within Us**, Karin Stevens, Gonzaga Dance & Climate Institute, Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts, 7:30 p.m., gonzaga.edu/climate-institute/events
- Sept 19-21 • Valleyfest**, Mirabeau Point Park, Spokane Valley, **Sept 20 • Walk.Run.Read.**, Literacy Project of North Idaho, City Park/Fort Sherman Park, Coeur d'Alene, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., (208) 450-2669, theliteracyprojectni.org
- **Coeur d'Alene Housing Resource Fair**, McEuen Park, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- **Festa Italiana**, American Italian Club, Spokane-Cagli Sister City, Downtown Spokane, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Americanitalianclubspokane@gmail.com, glnw.org
- **Hanford Leaks**, Legends and Legacies, Spokane Central Library, 906 W. Main, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 444-5300, spokanelibrary.org
- **Jayanthi Rama Dance Co.**, South India Cultural Assn, 7 p.m., Lair, Spokane Community College, 1810 N Greene, 6:30 to 8 p.m., 467-5558, sacaspokane@gmail.com
- Sept 21 • Giselle, Grand Kyiv Ballet**, First Interstate Center for the Arts, 334 W Spokane Falls Blvd., 4 to 12 p.m., 279-7000, events@spokanepfd.org
- Sept 23 • Lukas Hasler, Austrian organist recital**, American Guild of Organists, St. John's Cathedral, 127 E 12th, 402-319-1716, spokaneago.org
- Sept 23, 24 • The Powerful Process of Building Budgets**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, 285 Technology Center Way, Wenatchee, nonprofitwa.org
- Sept 25-27 • Spokane Greek Festival**, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, 1703 N. Washington, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., 328-9310, SpokaneGreekFest.org
- Sept 26 • Champions of Justice Breakfast**, Mark Peterson, KXLY, Inland Empire Legal Aid, Ruby River Hotel, 7 a.m., 477-6122, inlandempirelegalaid.org
- **Inauguration of Katia Passerini**, Gonzaga's 27th President, McCarthy Center, Gonzaga, gonzaga.edu
- **Spokane Latina Health Symposium**, Spokane, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., lhs2025.fillout.com/register
- **Dinner on Blossom Hill**, benefits Women & Children's Free Restaurant, Barn and Blossom, 6 to 9 p.m., dinneronblossomhill.org
- **YWCA Spokane Women of Achievement Award** nominations due, YWCA Spokane, ywcaspokane.org/woa-nominations, woanominations@ywcaspokane.org
- Sept 26-27 • "Faithful Foundations: Empowering Catholic Parents,"** 24-Hour Retreat for Catholic Parents, Mary Hackett, IHRC, 4:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., ihrc.net
- Sept 27 • Step Up! For Seniors**, Greater Spokane County Meals on Wheels 5 K Run/1-mile Walk, Greenwood Memorial Terrace, 9:30 a.m., mowgsc.org
- **South Perry Street Fair**, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., southperry.org/south-perry-street-fair
- **Bing Crosby 100th Anniversary**, Crosby House Museum, Gonzaga, 11 a.m. to 12 p.m., gonzaga.edu/news-events
- **El Mercadito and Central American Independence Celebration**, Latinos En Spokane, Liberty Park, 402 S. Pittsburg, 11 to 3 p.m., 558-9359
- **Grand Opening, Raze Early Learning & Development Center**, 6519 N. Lidgerwood, 2 to 5 p.m., 294-9494, razethenarrative.com
- **"Wild at Heart,"** Dishman Hills Conservancy Fundraiser Dinner, Center Place Event Center, 2426 N Discovery, 5:30 p.m. to 8:15 p.m., 598-0003
- **Human Rights Banquet**, Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations, Best Western, 506 W Appleway, Coeur d'Alene, 6 p.m., idahohumanrights.org
- **Spokane Symphony**, James Lowe, Pops 1: The Divas from Broadway, Theatre at The Fox, 7:30 p.m., foxtheaterspokane.org
- Sept 29 • Henrietta Mears**, How One Woman Changed American Christianity, Weyerhaeuser Hall, Whitworth, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., amandaclark@whitworth.edu
- Oct 1 • Advocacy Building Blocks**, Nonprofit Association of Washington, 10 to 11:30 a.m., nonprofitwa.org
- Oct 2 • The Fig Tree Benefit & Development and Board meetings**, Benefit & Development, noon; Board 1 to 3 p.m., mary@thefigtree.org
- **UnGala**, Family Promise of Spokane, Mirabeau Park Hotel, 1100 N Sullivan, 4:30 p.m., familypromiseofspokane.org
- **Into Africa Auction, Partnering for Progress** dinner fundraiser, Ogutu She Okumu, Hemmingson, Gonzaga, 5:30 to 8 p.m., 999-7320, partneringforprogress.org
- **Whitworth President's Leadership Forum**, Frank Collins, former director of the National Institute of Health, The Fox, 7 p.m., whitworth.edu/plf, 777-3732
- Oct 3 • EnVISION – Gala, Safe Passage Idaho**, Coeur d'Alene Resort, 115 S 2nd, 5 to 8 p.m., safepassageid.org

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Kerra Bower fulfills dream as she opens Raze Early Learning Center

Kerra Bower, owner of Little Scholars Development Center, is continuing her dream of dismantling the preschool-to-prison pipeline as she prepares to open Raze Early Learning and Development Center in the fall of 2025 in Spokane.

Her journey began in 2009 when she opened Pitter Pat Family Home, which later became Little Scholars Development Center. What started in her house with her mother, sister and a relative has since grown into a thriving program with two locations, nearly 30 staff and more than 150 children from ages four weeks to 12 years old, representing cultures from around the world.

“Raze Early Learning and Development Center will be a space where early learning celebrates the shared American experience through the lens of Black American ingenuity, excellence and joy,” Kerra said. “Designed as both a culturally affirming preschool and a community hub, the center will offer children an educational foundation rooted in identity, equity and belonging.

“My grandfather instilled in me a love for learning, exploring and discovering at an early age,” Kerra reflected. “He was my preschool teacher and my fiercest supporter. Later, when I wanted to be home with my own child, moving into childcare felt natural. Over time, I saw the disparities and wanted to understand how I could better address them.

“Raze will be a safe place for students to explore the beauty of our shared experiences as Americans through the Black American lens,” she explained. “We seek to eradicate stereotypes that perpetuate the preschool-to-prison pipeline by centering our program on student identity and uplifting Black history contributions, both locally and nationally.”

Kerra believes everything begins in early childhood education.

“Without a strong foundation, children are more likely to struggle academically, face disciplinary referrals and fall behind their peers,” she described. “For Black children, the stakes are particularly high: disproportionate discipline practices often push them out of classrooms and onto a harmful trajectory known as the preschool-to-prison pipeline.”

This “pipeline” is not a single moment but a series of systemic inequities. Black children—especially boys—are suspended or expelled at four to six times the rate of their peers.

Instead of receiving needed



Kerra Bower discusses preschool-to-prison pipeline.

Photo courtesy of Kerra Bower

support, they are too often mislabeled, diagnosed or tracked into remedial programs, losing access to core academics. These gaps compound over time, leaving children disengaged and disconnected from school.

“The preschool-to-prison pipeline, while it disproportionately affects Black males, is an educational and social crisis that impacts us all,” Kerra said. “It’s important that we as Americans know our full and complete history, which grounds us in who we are and honors those who paved the way for us to live full and thriving lives. Raze will be a place that teaches that Black history is American history.”

By embedding trauma-informed supports, affirming curriculum and equitable practices, Raze aims to interrupt this cycle—not just for Black children, but for the wellbeing of the entire community.

“I believe that it takes a village to raise a child,” Kerra said. “As a Christian, I believe that regardless of your belief system, you are part of my village. Through Little Scholars I’ve had the privilege of working with families from across the world

and systems of belief, and I’ve found that my ability to love, nurture and educate students is made stronger when honoring the diversity of my village.”

Beyond its classrooms, Raze will offer culturally based wrap-around services designed to support children, families, and educators alike.

Programs will include before- and after-school care with transportation in District 81, as well as integrated mental and behavioral health supports for both teachers and students through the Childcare Mental Health Program.

Raze will also house The Village Project, a community-facing program that brings resources directly into childcare centers. Families will have access to services such as doulas, physical therapy, art, and behavioral health supports, creating a holistic network of care.

In addition, Raze will be Spokane’s only extended-hours early learning facility, open from 5:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. This extended-hours program will

be community-driven and is expected to launch by spring 2026.

For Kerra’s vision for change, dismantling the preschool-to-prison pipeline means more than keeping children in classrooms.

It means reimagining what early education can look like. Raze is committed not only to preparing children for kindergarten but also to instilling confidence in who they are and cultivating an appreciation for the cultural contributions that shape their world.

“It’s about creating an environment where children are affirmed, where their families feel seen, and where excellence and joy are the standard,” she said. “If we can change the beginning of the story, we can change the outcome for generations to come.”

The Raze Early Learning & Development Center grand opening is from 2 to 5 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 27, at 6529 N. Lidgerwood. It will include food, face painting and music with Max Daniels, Nu Jack City and choirs.

For information, call 294-9494 or email kbower@razethenarrative.com.



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