

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Urbani de la Paz, filling in for Casey Dolan, with local news and commentary for Wednesday, November 23, 2022.

The word from the state health department is that flu cases are rising fast. Influenza patients are being hospitalized at the highest rates seen in 10 years for this point in the year. Getting the flu can have serious health consequences, especially for people who are under five years old, age 65 or older, pregnant, immunocompromised, or have chronic health conditions. In addition to the flu, other respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19 and RSV, are combining to push our hospitals to emergency capacity. The state health department urges us to keep ourselves and our communities healthy – by getting a flu shot and taking other measures. The state also reports that our pediatric healthcare system is overloaded with extremely high numbers of children with respiratory infections.

You've heard this song before, but it bears repeating for everyone's sake. Getting immunized against the flu and against COVID-19 not only protects you, but also the vulnerable folks among us. So does washing your hands well and often, and putting on a close-fitting mask in crowded settings. If you are sneezing or coughing, wearing a mask or using the crook of your arm or a tissue helps stop germs from getting onto your hands or spreading virus in the air. Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and if you're not feeling well, stay home and take care of yourself.

And then there's the ongoing saga of the Raccoon Lodge, a work of art created by Kevin Mason of uptown Port Townsend. The thing made it onto Seattle's KING 5 TV last night. Mason, a well-known musician and carpenter, built it into a cypress tree stump in front of his house on Clay Street. The City of Port Townsend received a complaint about other structures in his yard, and when the inspector came to look, they noticed the Raccoon Lodge. The city, saying the Raccoon Lodge is a possible safety hazard, asked Mason to "voluntarily" remove it. Then came an uprising of people supporting him and his public artwork. A petition was begun – and now there are more than 2,600 signatures on it, calling for the city to let the treehouse be. A gathering was held on November 12 of at least a hundred supporters who posed for a group photo in front of Mason's place.

The KING 5 reporter came out to see the 24-foot-tall Raccoon Lodge on Tuesday and got ahold of Port Townsend City Manager John Mauro. "Heaven forbid something happens and the structure falls and hurts somebody or damages property," Mauro said. Hence the city's notice to tear the Raccoon Lodge down by November 30, one week from today. But now, Mauro says there's another option. According to the KING 5 report, Mason could give the structure to the city as a piece of public art, and the city would assume liability for it. Maybe there's a creative solution, Mauro said, in which the community says this structure is important to us as art in an artistic town. But that's just an idea at this point. On the city of Port Townsend website, there's a lengthy question and answer page discussing the issue (<https://cityofpt.us/engagept/page/art-structure-clay-street-right-way>). As for public comment, that will be held until the Monday, December 5 City Council meeting, due to the holidays. So the Raccoon Lodge is still standing. The coming days may well decide its fate.

The JUMP Playground, an inclusive, all-access play park for Jefferson County, is wide open now, after a grand opening celebration last Friday. The invitation stands: come play at HJ Carroll County Park in Chimacum, where the JUMP Playground is next to the basketball court. It has a sea creature sculpture by local artist Rebecca Welti, and it has all manner of accessible play structures for youngsters of all abilities and needs. Also, there's a fence around it so parents and guardians can relax and not worry about their kids running out into the

big county park. There's information at <https://www.jumpplayground.org/>. The acronym JUMP, by the way, stands for Jefferson Universal Movement Playground.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and five Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Diane Urbani de la Paz. Thanks for listening!