

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Friday March 3, 2023.

Jefferson County Public Health is seeking people and organizations to honor as part of National Public Health Week. Health-care organizations across the country will celebrate National Public Health Week, April 3-9, and this year's theme is centering and celebrating cultures in health. Each year during National Public Health Week, the Jefferson County Board of Health and Jefferson County Health recognize the people and organizations who make a significant contribution to maintaining and improving health in Jefferson County, by naming local public health heroes. The awards highlight each person's unique place in the community and recognize how making cultural connections can support individual health and quality of life.

Nominations for local public health heroes are open to the public and will be accepted through Monday, March 6 – this Monday. Nominations can be submitted for an individual, agency, business, or group. For more information, please visit <https://www.co.jefferson.wa.us/formcenter/public-health-7/public-health-heroes-2023-92>.

There are few structures as important to Olympic Peninsula residents as the Hood Canal Bridge. As reported in the *PT Leader* this week, the crucial overpass will close down for four weekends this summer. The Washington State Department of Transportation recently announced that the Hood Canal Bridge will be closed from 11pm Friday to 4am Monday in the last weekend of July as well as the first three weekends of August as transportation crews provide vital repairs to the bridge's center lock system. While the bridge repairs are warranted to maintain the overpass for future safety, many local business owners believe the multi-day shutdowns could cripple their ability to remain profitable, especially when tourism is at its peak.

One local whose business model centers on getting around is Chimacum farmer John Bellow of SpringRain Farm & Orchards. Bellow said: "The sort of business we run and what we do is already difficult and hard work, and this adds another level of something we didn't need to deal with. That's very problematic to me because I go across the Hood Canal Bridge twice every weekend." The farm's prime money-making time is in the summer, and Bellow visits multiple farmers markets across the region to sell his produce and make wholesale deliveries, including the Ballard Farmers Market. Bellow also said weekend shutdowns will keep out-of-town visitors from coming to local farmers markets, as well. Bellow added, "For us and local businesses, when people don't come to the Peninsula during the weekends, there's no way to make up those sales at a later time. It's just one more thing that we don't need to weather."

Jefferson Healthcare is also looking at the closures and how to handle their impending impacts. Amy Yaley, hospital spokesperson, said "We are convening the different internal departments that will be impacted the most with these anticipated closures. Through these discussions we will get to a concrete understanding of the impact it will have on our medical and support staff. Once we identify the scope, we will begin our internal plans to mitigate. There is an opportunity for all of us on the Peninsula to practice and think about how we handle unforeseen emergencies that reduce our access to the other side."

Local events and festivals on the summer weekends won't be safe from the consequences of the closure. Centrum executive director Robert Birman said, "The bridge closure plans really impact our ticket-buyers." With the Port Townsend Acoustic Blues Festival and weekend jazz workshop events occurring during the bridge shutdowns, Centrum staff are looking to shift check-in and check-out dates to make travel easier for potential attendees. The closures will have major economic impacts on the county, and the dates and time frame

seem like a strange choice to make when peak tourism on the Olympic Peninsula is in July and August, Birman said.

Taxi services will be impacted by the bridge closure as well. The owner of A Taxi Cab Company, Jake Ramsey said, "It will definitely affect our business. The bridge is a lifeline for Port Townsend; without the bridge, you're putting hours on travel times. In every aspect of the business we will have to adapt. It is going to affect us in a negative way. That's not a question now." Considering the closures' impacts on shipping, even locals looking to send Amazon packages, food supplies, or other goods are likely to be affected, Ramsey said. Ramsey added, "It's going to hurt us. But if we don't do it and the bridge breaks, there could be a catastrophic accident. It's going to be tough and it's not an ideal situation, but Port Townsend has a way of dealing with stuff no matter what. We'll figure it out." I hope he's right.

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 Jim Burke. Thanks for listening.