

Hello again! This is not Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, July 13, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

Yesterday one of our previous residents began moving back into the neighborhood. Installation of a 42-foot gray whale skeleton on Union Wharf, a new exhibit from the Port Townsend Marine Science Center, began on Wednesday, July 12. The project is slated to take three weeks to complete. The gray whale, known around these parts as Gunther, was a full-grown male when he died and washed ashore near Port Ludlow in May of 2019. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Mammal Stranding Network was then notified. Nearby residents and Marine Science Center volunteers, Dr. Stefanie Worwag and Mario Rivera, offered to let the whale decompose on their beachfront property, where scientists and volunteers conducted a necropsy.

Worwag and Rivera gained permission to prepare the bones and display the skeleton, beginning a multi-year process rebuilding this remarkable creature. They were joined by industrial designer Les Schnick and shipwright Ric Brenden, who volunteered to create a mount for the massive skeleton. Through the pandemic of 2020, hundreds of volunteer hours were put in cleaning, painting, drafting, drilling, welding, and more.

Though originally they had thought to display Gunther on their own property, they later reached out for more public display ideas, which lead to a collaboration with the City of Port Townsend and the Port of Port Townsend. \$80,000 in donations were secured as well as the permits needed to complete the installation so that this wondrous creature and his story in the Salish Sea could be shared with all who visit downtown Port Townsend. There are also plans to install lighting around Gunther so that boats and ferries will be able to see this grandiose display as they enter into Port Townsend Bay.

Gunther isn't the only sea creature getting a new home nearby. Using somewhere around 1,500 tons of rock from Point Hudson's old north jetty that was demolished last year for replacement, the Port of Port Townsend has created a new underwater habitat destined to house the creatures living in the old south jetty which is set to be replaced this year. Multiple dives to the new habitat have already shown it to be hospitable with a myriad of fish species calling it home and even a recent discovery of a giant octopus den. Volunteer divers were given training last Sunday at the Marine Science Center to prepare them for more upcoming dives, this time to retrieve and relocate the animals living in the south jetty. The dives will take place over two months with a series of four dives – two this month and two in August.

Sea stars and anemone are just a couple of the critters that could be rehomed. I spoke with the Port's Executive Director Eron Berg and ask what other neighbors might need a hand. One species stood out in particular with Berg saying, "If they spot a pinto abalone that's a big deal, and particularly if they happen to locate a small colony, we're going to have WDFW very interested in insuring that colony is retained and saved."

The Port also hopes to work with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to also designate the area as a marine sanctuary, a place where fishing would not be authorized. Berg said it didn't seem very fair to move them there and study them so closely only to have people come in and harvest, adding, "This has been a magical dive site since the days of Jacques Cousteau and our intention is that we're trying to add to or replace the habitat that's lost through our project and really retain some of not only the habitat feature but the value of the site as a dive location."

That's not the only waterfront location getting a rescue. After a long closure, Waterfront Pizza has announced on their website that they hope to reopen tomorrow, July 14. The restaurant's ovens gave out about a month ago depriving the local populace of the needed heat to melt their patently thick cheese. Luckily, local hero and reigning Rosehips Kween Anami Cloud stepped in to save the day. Anami recently launched her new business Quimper Fixit Services and quickly found herself slated as the savior of slices. It's taken a lot of sweat, smarts, and back ordering of parts as well as hand machining too many bits and pieces to count, but thankfully we don't have much longer to wait. Let's all raise a slice to Anami when Waterfront opens the doors tomorrow!

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.