

This is KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nigel O'Shea bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, December 3, 2025.

Port Townsend's downtown seaside Winter Welcoming Center for the unhoused can trace its roots to its founder and current director's childhood experiences on the gritty streets of New York City, a world away from the Center's stunning Cascades backdrop. "But I used to buy the time of fourteen year old people who sold their bodies on the streets for sex. I would buy an hour of their time and sort of set them free," said Julia Cochrane, who founded the Winter Welcoming Center eight years ago in a storefront on Sims Way, and serves as its volunteer executive director.

The seed for Cochrane to create a safe, comfortable space for local homeless people to spend daylight hours during the cold winter months began during those teen years growing up on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The response of people in her financially comfortable world showed more concern for Cochrane's exposure to the streets than for the harsh and dangerous circumstances that the homeless experienced. This further motivated Cochrane to make a life mission in helping the unhoused and less privileged.

"The first kid I took in, I was nineteen years old, it was in Canada, she was a fourteen-year-old sex worker. And then after that it was just pretty constant that I'd take in kids, and I did that. I've raised thirty nine teenagers here." The Center provides a place for the unsheltered, offering single-serve microwave food, hygiene supplies, first aid kits, feminine care, harm reduction supplies and, clothing.

After the pandemic forced the shutdown of Cochrane's first cold weather shelter in a storefront on Sims Way, the City started providing the Pope Marine Building every winter, along with paying for utilities and Wi-Fi. The location is ideal for its proximity to the American Legion Emergency Shelter. The Shelter's homeless clients, as well as any other housing-challenged people, may spend time at the Welcoming Center between 8:30am and 4pm seven days a week. The Center is typically open from November 15 to April 15 each year, although it opened 11 days early this year to accommodate people forced out of the Evans Vista homeless encampment.

In past years, the Center had been open from 8:30am until 12pm. This year, it was financially able to pay for an additional four hours of staff time and now remains open until 4pm every day. One of the responsibilities of Center manager Ben Casserd is to receive and manage volunteers. Local organizations that provide volunteers to the Center include OlyCAP, Jefferson Fire Care Team, Bayside Housing, and Jefferson Healthcare.

A high volume of clothing has been donated this season, but the need remains high with months of cold weather ahead, according to Casserd. Current funding sources for the Center include the Housing Fund Board, the Food Co-ops Bags for Beans program, and it is currently one of the participating organizations in the Jefferson Gives fundraising drive. The Center's fiscal sponsor is the First Presbyterian Church. A 40-year resident of Jefferson County, Cochrane and her husband helped start the Boiler Room, which was an actual boiler room in a downtown apartment building that they repurposed to provide a safe place for youth to hang out.

Cochrane and the Welcoming Center see a transition ahead, including their coming search for an executive director to replace Cochrane. Cochrane's primary occupations during her time in Port Townsend have been in architecture and as a paraeducator. Cochrane does not plan to fully step away from her passion and mission. "One of the things I want to do in my private work plan for the coming year is a homeless Bill of Rights. I have no experience in writing policy but I'm doing it. I would love any help that's possible."

If you're interested in learning more, you may email jeffersoninterfaithaction@gmail.com. Donations to the Center may be made online at <https://fpcpt.org/giving>.

It's time to check out the Beacon's Event of the Week. This week be sure and sign up for the 31st annual Uptown Gingerbread Contest. Submit your gingerbread creations to the Port Townsend Library at 1220 Lawrence. Submissions will be accepted December first through the eighth with judging taking place the 9th through 16th. While people down at the city hall concern themselves with building codes that will yield practical, energy-efficient, and affordable homes, at the Uptown gingerbread contest there are no such limits. Want to build a spun sugar cupola? Go for it! How about an earth ship, complete with a ground chocolate sandwich cookie composting toilet? Literally no one is stopping you. Get your entries in to the Port Townsend Library by the eighth!

Sign up for the Jefferson County Beacon newsletter at the bottom of the page at <https://www.jeffcobeacon.com/>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from the Jefferson County *Beacon*. This is Nigel O'Shea. Thanks for listening.