

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Nhatt Nichols, bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, January 14, 2025.

The *Beacon*'s Scott France reports that the annual nationwide point-in-time count (PIT) of people experiencing homelessness will be conducted on January 29. This year's survey takes on heightened importance and poignancy amidst a backdrop of widespread cancellation of federal data collection programs and reports and the removal of public datasets and webpages, as well as the dismantling of material support for more vulnerable people.

At a local level, the wounds of the City of Port Townsend's November closure of the Evans Vista homeless encampment are fresh. The city announced the closure with only two months' notice and virtually no transition planning or coordination with the encampment residents or homeless advocacy organizations. At the federal level, the PIT count results are reported to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has introduced rules shifting funds away from the "Housing First" model, which prioritizes getting people into stable, permanent housing with voluntary services. The new "Treatment First" approach caps permanent housing grants at 30% of federal funds and moves the majority of resources toward transitional housing that includes mandatory work and addiction treatment requirements.

The PIT count is imperfect and can best be described as a census-style estimate rather than a headcount that captures everyone experiencing homelessness, according to homelessness advocates. The counts can show whether homelessness is generally rising or falling. They are required by the federal government to qualify for major housing and homelessness grants and are used to inform policy and advance homeless advocacy efforts.

Local organizations participating in the count besides OlyCAP include Dove House, the Washington Department of Social and Health Services, and area community centers. The Winter Welcoming Center, the Quilcene Community Center, and the VFW in Port Hadlock welcome homeless folks to visit their sites that day, be counted, and enjoy a warm meal and place to rest.

PIT counts are one tool in the toolbox to help communities across the country understand the landscape of homelessness in their counties, and to integrate that data with that of other information-gathering methodologies to inform important policy and program decisions. For more information on this year's Point In Time count, or to volunteer, visit <https://olycap.org/>.

Now we turn to reporting from Angela Downs as she helps us welcome Port Townsend's new Poet Laureate, Rufina Garay, who was inaugurated as the 2026 Poet Laureate on January 5. She is Port Townsend's second Poet Laureate and will serve in the civic position for two years. Garay considers herself "a homegrown poet," studying locally at Imprint Bookstore workshops with teaching writers like Gary Copland-Lilley, participating in the Centrum Writers Conferences, and serving as an artist-in-residence at Centrum.

As a member of Shattering Glass, a collective of emergent and established poets, Garay has hosted and participated in many poetry events locally. Amplifying underrepresented voices of emergent artists is an important part of Garay's work, and reports that the response of people who've participated as poets in these events has felt their experiences to be healing.

Poetry isn't Garay's only art form. A graduate of New England Culinary Institute in Vermont, Garay serves as a Demo Chef at the Farmers Market, cooking and conducting discussions on health and equity. She most recently

created Homeland, a public event featuring fresh foods from local farms and indigenous dishes, setting the scene for guided discussions on the theme of home. People gathered, shared, and listened to poems about missing indigenous women. Teaching culinary arts, poetry, and social justice, Garay led projects focused on Japanese and Filipino food through a special grant-funded program during the pandemic called “Tracing Cultural Identity through Cuisine and Spoken Word”. She believes youth deserve every opportunity to come together and make poetry.

Garay’s held after school workshops on Japanese maki and handroll sushi making and created a shared meal of Chicken Adobo with rice and lumpia. Using rice as a metaphor, discussing microaggressions, and studying social history alongside Japanese poetry forms such as haiku and satori, Garay provided students with a dense foundation for self-expression. Check the city event page for upcoming poet gatherings, join the free Poetry Walks to Memory’s Vault at Fort Worden, and keep an eye out for games and poetry stations around town.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5 Tuesday through Thursday, partnering on Wednesday to bring you stories from jeffcobeacon.com. You can submit ideas to the *Beacon* through info@jeffcobeacon.com. This is Nhatt Nichols. Thanks for listening.