

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, July 1, 2026.

After a five-year journey marked by pandemic closures, grant setbacks and persistent advocacy, Gatheringplace has poured the foundation for its permanent home – a milestone the organization celebrated last Friday with the legislators who helped secure critical state funding. The foundation slab at 710 Aurora Loop in the Port Townsend Business Park was completed by Van Ness Construction, with contractor Neil Nelson overseeing the project and architect Jim Rozanski designing the sustainable, energy-efficient 3,800-square-foot facility.

On June 26, Representative Steve Tharinger and Senator Mike Chapman from the 24th District toured the site, meeting participants and staff at the location just past Goodwill and east of the duck pond. The crowd was in high spirits, with participants singing Margaritaville as they celebrated the long-awaited progress. The event marked the culmination of a legislative push that began when a direct appropriation application, authored by board member Steve Kemper resulted in a \$475,000 award in March, funding roughly half the construction costs.

Gatheringplace has served adults with developmental and other disabilities in Port Townsend since July 11, 1994. They have operated from several locations over the years, including the Jefferson County Rec Center, Point Hudson Duplex, the Fairgrounds Art Building and the Fred Lewis Scout Cabin. The organization was founded by Linda and Bob Ferris in memory of their daughter Megan, whose life with disabilities inspired a vision for a place where adults could learn, create and belong. What began as a small gathering of friends has grown into a beloved community cornerstone offering weekly programs in art, culinary skills, music and movement, and the popular “Yummy” Dog Biscuit Bakery job training program. The new building will also serve as a lasting memorial to Megan.

The need for a permanent space became apparent more than five years ago, as the organization outgrew its temporary quarters. In 2021, Gatheringplace applied for a grant from the Dan Thompson Memorial Developmental Disabilities Community Service Account, named for a Microsoft employee with Down Syndrome. After searching for a permanent location for nearly three years, the organization finally completed the extensive paperwork in May 2025; just before the Dan Thompson grant expired in June. The Department of Social and Health Services terminated the grant, believing Gatheringplace could not meet the completion timeline. Pushing forward, Kemper authored the direct appropriation request, a provision that allows specific non-profits to apply directly to state representatives, that ultimately succeeded.

Through an earlier Community Capital Campaign, which had already raised \$175,000, there were enough funds to begin construction in May 2026. The organization is currently waiting for the state appropriation to become available. Participants are especially excited about the expanded area for new activities, a dedicated art space, a great new layout for making dog biscuits and the return of organic gardens. During Friday's visit, Linda Ferris presented the legislators with “Magic Garden Fairy Wands” crafted by participants, which cast rainbows when sunlight shines through them – a sparkling reminder of all the happy faces and joyful days ahead when the building is finished.

Ferris said “It's a dream coming true.” Structural insulated panels, walls used to build the structure, are scheduled to arrive July 2. Gatheringplace still needs \$350,000 to complete the building. The organization is grateful for any support from the community for its adult friends with developmental disabilities. For more information visit <https://www.gppt.org/>.

Thanks to everyone who came out to visit the *Beacon* and KPTZ at this year's preparedness day! Community, safety and democracy are only possible when people turn out to meet their neighbors.

Thanks to the Production Alliance and everyone who turned out to take part in community preparedness!! If you like what you're seeing in the Jefferson County *Beacon*, become a newsletter subscriber! Our newsletter arrives in your inbox for FREE every Wednesday morning and all you have to do is go to <https://www.jeffcobeacon.com/> and sign up with your email address at the bottom of the page.

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