

# Rhody

85<sup>TH</sup> FESTIVAL KEEPSAKE

## Remembering 85 years of Rhody



Washington State Attorney General John J. O'Connell gives a congratulatory kiss to 1961 Rhody Queen Connie Okert, who was crowned moments before by 1960 Queen Donna Bowman. Historically, the Rhododendron Festival was attended by state officials like the attorney general. Gov. Clarence Martin attended the first Rhododendron Festival in 1936. *Leader file photos*



**Above:** "Flowers" dance down the parade route in 2012. **Middle:** Children await the 1955 fest. *Courtesy David Marriott Jr.* **Bottom:** Katalena Perka dresses up for the 2017 kiddie parade.

## Rhody Fest traditions weather the decades

JANE STEBBINS  
SPECIAL TO THE LEADER

Tom Camfield remembers the first Rhododendron Festival from when he was about 6 years old—85 years ago.

For this Port Townsend resident, it was also the inaugural festival of what was to grow into a multi-event gala with parades, a court of princesses and a reigning queen, races of all sorts and a cake picnic to top it all off.

"Bed races, whisker-growing contests, demolition derbies—I just can't remember what all events we had down through the years," Camfield recalled.

"I do remember the festival's Grand Parade coming north-south down Taylor Street when it ran that route one year in about 1941," he said. "Mike Castellano was playing lead trumpet with the Coast Artillery band from Fort Worden and Bill Delaney was playing a flamboyant bass drum with some student-age music unit."

This year, the beloved festival was canceled on April 4 as the coronavirus pandemic prompted city leaders and festival organizers to err on the side of caution in the face of the highly contagious and deadly disease. The only other time the event has been sidelined was during World War II.

Camfield remembers much of it as if it were just a few scant years ago. He dated—and later married—Jean Westall, who ran for Rhody queen and was one of two princesses in 1950.

After a stint in the Korean War, he returned to Port Townsend as a reporter and photographer for *The Leader*.

"In 1955, I was shooting the festival parade from the metal awning of Baker Drug," he recalled. "Proprietor T. H. Baker and *Leader* publisher Dick McCurdy watched the parade with me from there. I used an old-style press

"A rhododendron carnival would be unique and stand alone far and above all other flower exhibitions and would be remembered during life by those who were so fortunate as to witness it."

**M.F. Saterlee**  
1900

camera that held two sheets of 4 x 5-inch film."

### RHODY HISTORY

According to Marge Samuelson, a longtime Port Townsend resident and Jefferson County Historical Society volunteer, a seed of an idea for some kind of civic event originated much earlier than most people believe.

In 1900, M.F. Saterlee, who was associated with a number of Port Townsend newspapers, declared that every city on the Pacific Coast should have a celebration of the things it has to offer.

"These annual gatherings bring closer in touch the residents of trading centers and tributary country and tend to a closer and more intimate acquaintance, at the same time affording a season of recreation," he wrote in a letter to *The Leader*.

He proposed a Grand Rhododendron Street Carnival to attract thousands.

"The city contains thousands of acres of the most beautiful evergreen flowering trees ... ideal for a grand display," he wrote. "I would bring trainloads of the shrubs to the city,



**Above:** The *Leader* published photographs of the candidates for Rhododendron Festival Queen on the front page for many years, starting with the first festival in 1936. *Leader files*

**Right:** The first Rhododendron Festival queen, Myrtle Olsen accompanied by Washington Governor Clarence Martin at the 1936 festival. *Photo courtesy Tom Camfield*

place them along the streets. I would make certain streets, the terrace and the hill a veritable forest and embankment of flowers, which could be seen by passengers on every daylight steamer coming into or passing the harbor.

"A rhododendron carnival would be unique and stand alone far and above all other flower exhibitions and would be remembered during life by those who were so fortunate as to witness it."

### RHODY ASPIRATIONS

His dream wouldn't come to fruition for another 35 years.

It was Clive Buttemere, a rascalion of a fellow who haunted downtown always in search of a scheme to make a buck, who in 1935 pushed the idea of a local festival to feature the state flower — and give Port Townsend an event to rival Seattle's Potlatch Parade.

He succeeded there. The Seattle event was celebrated for three years from 1911, but fizzled out when World War I started in 1914. Community activists tried to revitalize the event in 1934, but it, too, ended in 1941 with the beginning of WWII.

According to Camfield's second book, "Port Townsend: The City that Whiskey Built," Buttemere arranged for Hearst Metro-Tone to feature the blooming native flowers on their newsreels that were shown before movies.

"It is 1935. The worst of the Depression years are over," a *Leader* article reads. "Three pounds of coffee sells for 75 cents and the nation's spirit is as low as are the prices. Something has to be done to elevate the belief that once again America is the land of plenty."

see **HISTORY**, page B8



# Rhody Royalty

## Queen Jenessah will reign in 2021



Jenessah Seebergoss plays flute in Port Townsend High School's pep band. Courtesy photo

### PT junior reflects on life during a pandemic

LILY HAIGHT  
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Jenessah Seebergoss had dreamt of becoming Rhody Queen since she was in the seventh grade.

Now a junior at Port Townsend High School, her dream finally came true. In February, she was crowned Rhody Queen. But her time in the spotlight was soon stolen by the global coronavirus pandemic. One by one, all the parades and festivals she was looking forward to attending throughout the summer were canceled.

"We first lost our opportunity to go to our first parade of the season, the Daffodil Parade," she said. "When I received the news that the Rhody Festival was canceled I was extremely shocked, although it was what I expected."

As the pandemic reached Washington, life for Seebergoss, as for many, was quickly turned upside-down. Crowns and dresses were traded for face masks and hand sanitizer as she began to make her way through life during a pandemic.

"I never thought I would live through something like this — something that will go down in history," she said.

As a social person, Seebergoss is usually involved in many different social, athletic and academic groups at school. She plays the flute in the school band and enjoys going on a yearly trip with the pep band. She tried her hand at cheerleading, and this past year traded that in for joining the basketball team. She loves playing on the volleyball team, and was hoping to try out for the spring play at Port Townsend High School, before all the students were sent home for the rest of their year.

School life is much different now.

"Most of my fear about the coronavirus is directed to my school activities," she said. "I'm going to be a senior, and it will be my last volleyball season. It's always been a part of me, and I'm worried volleyball practice won't start at the end of the summer like it normally does."

At-home learning is more challenging than being in a classroom, she added.

"I miss the face-to-face instruction," she said. "I feel more productive and motivated at school."

And most of all, she misses her friends. "A lot of the time in band class I would feel bored and just want it to be over," she said. "But I didn't realize how much I do enjoy it until it was taken away from me. I would give anything to be around my bandmates playing music right now."

Her jazz concert was canceled, the pep band's yearly trip was canceled, and she's hoping school will be back to normal by the time tryouts for the 2021 spring play come around so she can audition.

Having her junior year turned upside down isn't easy, but Seebergoss understands the necessity of all these life changes.

"People my age, a portion of them aren't



A junior in high school, Jenessah is looking forward to her senior year and participating in the 2021 Rhody Festival.

"I would give anything to be around my bandmates playing music right now."

**Jenessah Seebergoss**  
2020-2021 RHODY QUEEN

paying attention to the stay-home order, but a good portion of them actually are," she said.

She's not worried about getting sick herself, but she does worry about others.

"Technically we could be carriers of the virus and not know it," she said. "We could pass it on to someone who could die from it."

Staying home all the time can be stressful, she said.

"It's honestly depressing sometimes," she said. "But I spend a lot of time with my family."

She's been learning how to cook and spending time in the garden, as well as occasionally hanging out with her little brother.

Springtime without the Rhody Festival will be hard, since Seebergoss has never missed a Rhody Festival or the Rhody Run.

"I love the festival because it's a way that our little community can express ourselves," she said. "A lot of people travel here to see our festival. I especially love the carnival."

But Seebergoss didn't lose her moment to shine as Rhody Queen — it was just put on hold. She and the other members of the Queen's Court will get to carry on as royalty in 2021.

"I'm thankful I have been given another chance to represent the county," she said. "It was amazing when I learned the Rhody Royalty would get to continue on next year. It shows that life's misfortunes can bring new opportunities."



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The Rhody Royalty were crowned in a ceremony Feb. 8 at Chimacum High School. Photo courtesy the Rhododendron Festival Association

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# Rhody Royalty

## Rhody princess looks toward the future

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Hailey Hirschel has loved to cook since she was 7 years old. Her mom, Belynda Hirschel, was the one who taught her the basics when she was little.

"I remember her teaching me little tricks, like when you make jello with fruit, you split the amount of water in half and use the fruit juice instead," she said.

Now a senior at Chimacum High School, Hirschel's passion for cooking and baking has only grown, and she plans to attend culinary school after graduating.

She's entering adulthood at an interesting time in history. A global pandemic means Hirschel must finish her last high school moments at home, on a computer.

For her, learning away from the distractions of a high school classroom is somewhat easier. But being away from friends and missing the senior year activities is disappointing.

"It's terrible," she said. "Our senior year has basically been canceled."

Hirschel was most looking forward to attending the prom and her graduation ceremony. While there is talk about a socially distant graduation at the Wheel-In Motor Movie Drive In, nothing can replace the many memories students are missing.

"Everybody else got to experience their senior year," she said. "Why don't we get to?"

Not only is Hirschel missing out on some senior year activities, but her summer was supposed to be filled with Rhody Royalty events — touring different towns in the state representing Jefferson County with the other royalty: her friend since grade school, Brigitte Palmer, and Rhody Queen Jennessah Seebergoss.



Hailey Hirschel was crowned princess at the Feb. 8 coronation ceremony. Photo courtesy Rhododendron Festival Association

Most of all, Hirschel was looking forward to the hometown Rhody Festival. She's attended the festival nearly every year of her life.

Luckily, the Rhody Festival Association allowed the Rhody Royalty another chance on the court in 2021.

"Sometimes things don't happen the way we want them to," Hirschel said.

By the time next summer rolls around, Hirschel will have finished a year studying culinary arts at West Sound Technical School in Bremerton.

While she plans to stick around in Jefferson County where her family lives, Hirschel sees herself five years from now working in a restaurant. She hopes by the time fall comes, classes will be in-person again, instead of online.

And down the road, she has a clear picture of restaurants full of people, with her behind the scenes wearing a chef's toque blanche.

## Being royal is about much more than a crown

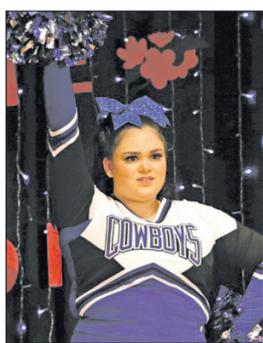
LILY HAIGHT  
LHAIGHT@PTLEADER.COM

Life as a Rhody Princess is not just about the crown for Princess Brigitte Palmer.

That doesn't mean she doesn't love the pomp of Rhody Royalty; Palmer, a junior at Chimacum High School, grew up watching the Rhody queen and princesses wave to the crowds as they floated down Lawrence Street in their frouny dresses.

"I watched the parades when I was little," she said. "I loved seeing the floats come by, and I always wanted to be on one."

Those childhood moments spent admiring the royalty from the sidewalk where she watched the Grand Parade go by were what pushed Palmer



Brigitte Palmer performs a cheer at the Feb. 8 coronation ceremony.

to run for Rhody Royalty last fall. But by the time she was crowned a princess, Palmer realized she was going to gain something much bigger during her time as royalty.

"I'm most excited about the memories I'm going to make

with my friends," she said. "These are moments I will never forget and can look back on for years."

The Queen's Court comprises three high-school-aged girls. This year, the crowns were placed on the heads of Queen Jennessah Seebergoss, Princess Brigitte Palmer and Princess Hailey Hirschel.

The queens get to travel across the state to represent Jefferson County in other towns' parades. This means long car trips together, hours spent lining up for parades and even two overnights in other towns. This is what Palmer is looking forward to the most.

"Hailey and I have been friends since third grade," Palmer said. "She's like a sister to me. I'm so happy this was something we could do

together."

And Seebergoss, though she hasn't been friends with Palmer and Hirschel for as many years, is a great addition to their friendship, Palmer added.

"She's so down to earth," she said. "Me and Hailey get a little crazy together. Jennessah's the one who keeps us calm."

All three girls are highly involved in school activities, such as drama and sports. But the thing they most have in common is a love for the Rhody Festival. Palmer's family has lived in Jefferson County for four generations. Representing the community as Rhody Royalty is in her blood.

"It's in my family," she said. "I love it."

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LEFT: Homer Smith Jr., Quilcene 1950  
RIGHT: Eleanor and Homer Smith Jr., founders

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# Looking back at 85 years of Rhody Festival history

## 1946



This was one of the only photos of the Rhododendron Festival 1946, which was the first one after the festival was put on hold for WWII. Original Leader caption: One of the hits in Saturday's Kiddie Parade was this mechanical man in the person of Jimmie Harwell, 5, winner of the prize in the distinctive costume division. Here he is shown being helped along by his mother, Mrs. Audrey Harwell, right, and Sue Weymouth.

### ROYALTY



LEXIE RICHMOND



DONNA BUTLER



ALICE SANDERS

Left: Rhody royalty 1946 Lexie Richmond, Donna Butler and Alice Sanders

### Royalty

- A Rhododendron Queen and her royal court of princesses is the oldest festival tradition dating back to the first official Rhody Queen Myrtle, Olsen in 1936
- Olsen won her crown by garnering nearly 500,000 votes
- It is a Leader tradition to print the Rhody Queen on the front page when she is crowned
- Today Rhody royalty are selected based on their participation in a question-and-answer session with a panel of judges and their performance at the Rhody Coronation Ceremony
- The 2020 Rhody royalty will be the first court to reign for two years, since festival was canceled this year.

## 1975



1975 Junior Royalty at the Grand Parade. Leader file photo

## 1969



Baton-twirler winner at Rhody 1969. Original Leader caption: Tearful champion Renae Ellis was congratulated and consoled after being presented her trophy Saturday at Memorial Field, following the completion of the Rhododendron Festival baton twirling competition. Renae won in the elementary school age division.



Original Leader caption: Port Townsend hosted a lot of people last weekend including some cycling "dead end" kids. Here, a group covers a portion of Water Street, guzzling suds and enjoying the sun.



Mike and Troy Thacker dressed up for the 1969 Pet Parade covered in newspaper. Sign reads: For sale 2 boys 1 dog. Leader file photo

### Pet Parade

- The Pet Parade lines Lawrence Street in Uptown Port Townsend with a wide enough variety of animals to feel like the loading line for a domestic ark.
- In addition to recognizing the "Best Decorated," the Pet Parade has separate categories for "unusual pets," rabbits, large animals, cats and kittens, and small, medium and large dogs, escorted by all ages of owners.
- Chickens came home to roost in record numbers in the 2015 Pet Parade, which led to the creation of a separate category for chickens and birds in 2016.
- While horses, ponies and goats have placed in the large animals category, the "unusual pets" category has drawn entrants as diverse as turtles and tortoises, insects, snakes, pythons, boas and reptiles as obscure as blue-tongued skinks.
- The local chapter of 4-H has had no shortage of representatives in the Pet Parade, especially with its reptile and poultry clubs.

### Bed Race

- While exact dates are unknown, Rhody Fest organizers believe the Bed Races began in the 1970s.
- Often drawing three teams of four runners and one rider each, whom judges require to weigh at least 100 pounds, the Bed Races have seen frequent wins from East Jefferson Fire-Rescue, which managed a three-year winning streak from 2013 through 2015.
- Groups such as Kiwanis and QFC have also entered multiple races within the past decade.
- Besides race performance, teams have received awards for "Most Spirited," "Best Decorated" and "Best Bribe," and the races themselves have included obstacles such as mid-lap charade games.

## 1985



Above: One participant in the 1985 bed race competition. Original Leader caption: The bed race entry from the Seagalley didn't last long, losing a wheel early in the competition. Leader file photo

Right: The 1985 Rhody Queen is crowned. Original Leader caption: Shawn Goss, the 1984 Rhododendron Festival Queen places the 1985 crown on Wendy Ridgway, who mirrors the emotions that swept her onto the throne for the 50th anniversary festival event. Leader file photo



### Kiddie Parade

- Kids and students at local schools each have the opportunity to stand out during the annual Kiddies Parade, during which creative costumery is the order of the day.
- Kiddies Parade categories have included preschool, public school composed of grades K-4 and miscellaneous youth groups; sports; "original and unique," and yearly themed categories such as "Disney and Storybook" for 2018, when the Rhody Fest theme was "Off to Neverland."
- Church groups, youth gymnastic academies and alternative schools go all-out in constructing multiple floats and dressing up large groups of adults and children in appropriately themed costumes.

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# Celebrating Rhody in a pandemic



Michael Morrow and Helen Gunn cheer with the firefighter leading an impromptu parade that celebrated Rhody Fest. Gunn made the 3-foot-tall styrofoam cake atop the Cake Picnic float that rolled by afterwards. Photo courtesy of Brooke Warren

## The parade must go on

JANE STEBBINS  
SPECIAL TO THE LEADER

About 30 people lined up along Lawrence Street in Port Townsend to watch a parade of 33 vehicles wend their way down the road for the canceled 85th annual Rhododendron Festival Grand Parade Saturday.

A fire engine, its siren screaming and horn honking, led the parade, followed by cars, some of them decorated with the iconic flower — and one vehicle with a mask over its grille in a show of solidarity for its human compatriots who have had to wear masks while in public.

The coronavirus pandemic has shuttered stores, restaurants and schools for more than two months, and while some cities, including

Port Townsend, are starting to loosen restrictions, few people are out on the streets. Empty chairs also lined

“Nothing gets in the way of our Rhody.”

the street, spaced 6 feet apart for social distancing requirements, a poignant and sharp contrast to past parades where thousands cheered on costumed children and adults, pets and decorated floats before the Cake Picnic at Pope Marine Park.

The cake parade was not forgotten this year, either, although people were advised to come out to nearby streets, hold up their baked goods and enjoy them at home.

“Nothing gets in the way of our Rhody,” one woman exclaimed, waving a scorecard of “10” at a passing car. “Not even a pandemic.”



Above: Danny Millholland directs traffic while a drummer accompanies the DJ on the roving Cake Picnic float. Photo courtesy of Brooke Warren

Below: Cyclists wave to passersby. Photo courtesy of James Holb



Bikers in costume joined the roving Cake Picnic float blasting tunes and spreading joy around Port Townsend neighborhoods. Photo courtesy of Brooke Warren



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# 85 years of carnival memories

## Some legends never die: "Zipper" ride lives on

Some people would consider me a newcomer, but I moved to Jefferson County when I was 4 years old and my father Ed Jaramillo was stationed at Naval Magazine Indian Island. We lived in a house in Port Ludlow, and I attended Chimacum Creek Primary and Elementary School.

My first memory of Rhody Fest was watching my older brother, Teddy, march in the parade with Chimacum Schools playing the baritone. I remember getting pretty tired of hearing "Louie Louie" after listening to him practice for weeks. Two years later I followed suit and marched to "Louie Louie" on the clarinet.

But my favorite thing about Rhody Fest was always the carnival, and the toast of the carnival was undeniable. It was the talk of every elementary school classroom and playground in the county: The Zipper.

This was by far the most violent and daring ride to ever grace the Rhody Festival, and only the bravest of the brave, those over 4 feet tall, were allowed to ride. Two riders are locked together inside a cage and g-forces fling the car up in the air and around and around in circles as the arm of the ride spun as well.

I remember my excitement and fear waiting in line, looking up at it towering over me, hearing the screams of those already in motion. Slowly the long line would move, inching me closer and closer to the front. Alarm bells were sounding; my brain was screaming that this was it.

I would climb inside and the cage door would close. It felt like my heart — and the entire world — had stopped. And the two minutes of exhilaration that followed never disappointed.

This was my personal mountain peak in elementary school, and I took pride



**Carmen Jaramillo**  
**RHODY**  
**MEMORY**

in riding it at least once every year.

Then one year it was just gone.

Playground conspiracy theories ran rampant with stories about accidents and deaths or demonically possessed rides that flew out of control. And each story, more ridiculous than the last, added to the mystique and wonder of the ride.

It then became a point of pride to be able to say you had ridden The Zipper before it disappeared.

I eventually did get one last chance to ride The Zipper several years later at the Puyallup Fair before it was renamed the Washington State Fair. Less than 10 minutes after I was off the ride, someone puked while in motion, spraying the crowd beneath and closing the ride for the rest of the day.

And so even then, the legend grew.

### A CULT CLASSIC

The Zipper was designed and built in 1968 by Joseph Brown for Chance Manufacturing in Wichita, Kansas. According to the Toronto Star, engineers described the ride as creating "an unusual sensation of being driven in a plurality of directions, though in a single plane, at the same time."

Two riders are locked into one of 12 cages attached to

"An unusual sensation of being driven in a plurality of directions, though in a single plane, at the same time."

an oval shape that rotates at a high speed.

By 1977, the ride had become the terror of amusement parks across the U.S., and a coordinated effort to outlaw the ride began after four deaths and two serious injuries occurred that summer. In each incident the cage door had opened while the ride was in motion, throwing riders out. But ridership and enthusiasm from the public never faltered.

The American Consumer Product Safety Commission found the deaths had been tied to the design of the door, which was held closed by a cotter pin. If the pin were to fail or not be placed properly, there was nothing to keep riders in place.

By 1978, extra latches were added to ensure the security of the doors and The Zipper continued operation.

That year there were almost 100 Zippers operating around the country. Today, according to the Toronto Star, there are almost 50 still spinning, some having been refurbished and updated.

From my research, I found I am not the only one fascinated with the history of this ride as a cultural landmark. The ride enjoys a cult following. It was the partial focus of a 2012 documentary about New York City's Coney Island called "Zipper: Coney Island's Last Wild Ride," and was reportedly singer Michael Jackson's favorite ride at his Neverland Ranch.

Despite rumors that circulated on the playground about the fate of the ride, the



The Zipper ride, which was designed and first manufactured in 1968, recently celebrated its 50th birthday. Photos courtesy of Ed Jaramillo

truth is much more boring.

Past and current Rhododendron Festival organizers all said they do not remember there being any specific reason the ride left. Same as my memory, one year it was just not brought by Funtastic, the carnival operator.

Melanie Bozak, long-time Rhody organizer, said Funtastic collects scores of data during every carnival. They record how many people go on each ride, the average age of attendees, which are popular and which aren't. She said it might have just become that the demographics of the fair were changing to a younger audience and so Funtastic adjusted its showings.

I couldn't obtain comment from Funtastic about how they choose which rides to bring, and when and why The Zipper left Port Townsend.

Christy Spencer, who served as president of the Rhododendron Festival Association in the mid-2000s, said she remembers there being growing concerns that



A 12-year-old Carmen Jaramillo waits in line for The Zipper with her older brother, Theodore, in 2009. Jaramillo was required to take off her thick-rimmed glasses, lest they be flung from her head while The Zipper spun.

large and heavy rides were damaging the integrity of the field and that might have contributed.

Those concerns eventually forced the carnival out to the Jefferson County Fairgrounds, where it would have been held for the first time this year.

Bozak and Spencer both said they could not remember any discussion of safety concerns surrounding the ride despite repeated assertions from my fifth-grade

friends that the ride had been outlawed nationally.

Maybe its absence was a sign of the changing times.

And maybe the ride will return one day just as mysteriously as it left.

Fingers crossed for 2021. I hope another generation of Jefferson County youth can take part in the all-American urban legend that was and is The Zipper.

## Running of the Balls rolls on, in modified form this year

LEADER NEWS STAFF  
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The Port Townsend Sunrise Rotary started its annual "Running of the Balls" in 2012, and while social distancing has forced the Rotary to scale down the event, to the point that no actual golf balls will be rolled down the city's streets, it's still carrying on as a fundraiser this year.

"It was scheduled to run May 16, so instead of rolling balls down Monroe Street, we set up a big barrel in front of the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce in the middle of the day that same Saturday, and dumped all the ticket stubs into the barrel to draw from."



Port Townsend Sunrise Rotarians maintained safe distancing and wore masks as they were joined by "The Bull" in drawing ticket stubs from barrels for this year's simulated "Running of the Balls" at the Visitors' Center Plaza. Courtesy photo

Hubbard credited Bill Brown with bringing the "Running of the Balls" concept to Port Townsend from his former Rotary branch in

Utah. "It was similar to other Rotaries' duck derbies, only with 4,000 golf balls down a street instead of rubber ducks

down a river," Hubbard said. "The event is in the black, and over the years, we've allowed the Noon Rotary and the Kiwanis to buy 400 balls for \$100. If they win, the prizes go to those groups' charities of choice."

The Port Townsend Sunrise Rotary sold 1,442 tickets this year, which Hubbard estimated was at least 2,500 less than previous years, but ticket sales and sponsorships remained steady enough for the event to remain in the black.

"This year's money will probably go toward paying for our dictionary project, supplying a new full-color dictionary to each third-grade student in Jefferson County," Hubbard said.

This year's winners are as follows:

- The Moraco family with the first prize of \$2,000.
- Kate Nesse with second prize of \$500.
- The Kiwanis Club of Port Townsend with third prize of \$250.

"We sold tickets through

Facebook this year and are thinking about doing it again next year," Hubbard said. "The drawback is we haven't received any money from Facebook yet, since it takes six to eight weeks to get paid, so we're still waiting for our payment."

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**Thank You!**

# 85 years of Rhody

**History: Festival has been canceled twice in 85 years**

*continued from page 1*

Enter Randolph Hearst, an eccentric newspaperman of the day, who selected Port Townsend as a venue to show the beauty still out there. He wanted four girls to accompany the flowers in the shorts he would show before movies in the theaters; plans were quickly underway for a Merchant's Exposition and Rhododendron Day.

The queen in 1935 was Dorothy Woodbury who danced with the state governor, Clarence Martin, at the Odd Fellows Hall.

The following year, Buttemere approached the local American Legion post to ask if they'd be interested in promoting the festival and parade to honor the flower the following year. The first official Rhododendron Queen was Myrtle Olsen, who tallied almost a half-million votes.

It was unsure among the townsfolk how Buttemere made any money off the endeavor, but the die was cast.

The queen and her court — obviously a big deal if the number of front-page Leader articles about it are any indication — were selected by customers who cast ballots they earned by making purchases in local stores. Ten ballots were given for every dollar spent, or people could buy 10 for a 50-cent donation. Ironically, "buying votes" was strictly prohibited.

Later, pins were sold, and the princess who sold the most won the coveted regal crown. At one point, a \$5 prize was offered as an incentive to whomever sold the most pins. The ultimate prize was a "fine gold watch" awarded to the queen and a gold ring with the setting of their choice for her two attendants.

The contest was open to all unmarried girls, aged 16 to 30. Employment was irrelevant, an article noted. They followed up with the Queen's Ball and a parade, and then a trip via motorcar to Seattle, Tacoma — with a state patrol escort — and Olympia, where they were greeted by elected officials and motion-picture cameras and bargained with questions from numerous metro-area newsmen about the festival.

**THROUGH THE YEARS**

Each year the festival grew, and more people entered in costume contests, adult, kid, doll and pet parades. There were drawings for prizes, a Fort Worden drum and bugle corps presentation, foot races, a softball game, banquets, concerts, fat man's and spoon-and-egg races, pajama dancing, talent shows and a Victorian home tour, among other events.

Floats, "modern-day" fire trucks and throngs of people came from all over to participate. The area's beauty and the work put in to extol the virtues of Port Townsend were lauded numerous times over



Little Bo Peep and her sheep at the 1947 festival. Photo courtesy David Marriott Jr.

"Why the festival is so important to the community? It's family, pure and simple. Everyone has a Rhody story to tell."

**Marge Samuelson**  
 LONGTIME RESIDENT  
 HISTORICAL RESEARCHER



Children ride in a float in the 1955 parade. Photo courtesy David Marriott Jr.

the years. In 1940, a soap box derby and fly-casting competitions were added.

By 1946, more than 10,000 people were believed to be in attendance; by the 1990s, that would triple.

The parades decades ago were lengthy, with marching bands, horsemen, military vehicles, drill teams and motorcycles complementing the floats.

One year, Walter Swanson, a world champion log-roller, came to town and with his team jumped rope, roller-skated and played leap-frog on the log and challenged townsfolk to stay on a log for five minutes as they joust to toss the other in the Sound.

By the 1970s, boat and motorcycle races were incorporated, as well as arts and crafts shows, sky divers and boxing matches. Twenty years later, there was a golf tournament, window-display contests, a rhododendron show and helicopter rides.

Nowadays, the parade can last almost two hours — and locals know to get the best placement of their lawn chairs, sofas, bar stools and recliners along the parade route the night before.

It's still a time when generations of families gather, friends meet up, old high school classmates relive festivals of days past and create new traditions for the future.

"It must have been 1936 down at what is now Jefferson County Memorial Field, and my parents talked me into competing in a footrace for

little guys," Camfield recalled. "I finished second to Billy Cooper. It's my only recollection of that day, and it clings to my memory because it was smack in the middle of the Great Depression — and the 50-cent piece I won was more money than I'd ever had at one time. Billy won a silver dollar."

He marched in the parade in eighth grade in 1943.

The war years, with gasoline and rubber rationing — and far fewer men in town — made for smaller parades; the event was put on hiatus in 1941 due to World War II.

"I marched in it in the early 1950s with my brother and two sisters," Samuelson recalled. "My brother's costume was made of crepe paper, and unfortunately he had to go to the bathroom ... but there was no way to get out of it. Well, you can imagine the rest."

Her children and grandkids, too, participated in the Kiddies' parade over the years, winning ribbons and the coveted carnival tickets. She attended all the parades for another 25 years.

**TODAY'S FESTIVITIES**

Today, the festival features many of the same elements, with the Grand Parade the most popular event, with outrageous floats and costumed people riding dubious methods of transportation, classic and antique automobiles, clowns, musicians — and the ubiquitous Unexpected Brass Band — and costumed kids and dogs. There's the Running of the Balls, the Funtastic

Carnival, the Rhody Run foot races, a hair and beard contest, the crowning of the Queen and her princesses and the bed and trike races.

The Pet Parade, too, has lured not just dogs and horses, but pigs, goats, chickens and the occasional cat or goldfish.

The Grand Parade is followed by a cake picnic, where thousands are served a slab of cake and listen to music at Pope Marine Park.

"It's almost like alumni weekend," Jeinell Harper was quoted as saying when she and her husband were co-chairs of the 1982 festival. "A lot of kids both Keith and I went to high school with will come home. You can walk up and down Lawrence Street and you know where different families have their spots. You get to see a lot of people."

"It's the enjoyment of the whole community getting together for the same purpose on the same day," said Brent Shirley, who chaired the event in 1978. "I still love the parade and the carnival."

"Sure, a lot of things have changed," said Ken Carter, who had been in town two months before he ended up being the chairman in 1954. "But it's still something wonderful. It's a chance for people to get together and celebrate being in Port Townsend, in Jefferson County, and to have fun. I hope it's always with us."

"Why the festival is so important to the community?" Samuelson said. "It's family, pure and simple. Everyone has a Rhody story to tell."

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