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special thanks to Elsi Vassdal-Ellis for her assistance on our silver expedition.
Andrea Abney is a junior majoring in public relations. Having recently kicked a Mountain Dew addiction, she’s looking for a new bad habit. After graduation she hopes to find a job that doesn’t require selling hamburgers or giving tours.

Jen True is a sophomore majoring in journalism with a minor in Internet resource creation. Jen is involved in Western’s dance program. She often catches herself standing on tip-toes while in conversation and has trouble explaining ideas without the use of her hands.

Shane Powell is editor of the renowned environmental magazine, Planet. Interested in social justice and environmental issues, he is pursuing a career in investigative journalism. He will graduate from Huxley College this spring.

Justin Hall is a senior majoring in journalism. After graduating this spring, he plans to travel to Alaska where he will enjoy fishing and write a book. This is his first contribution to Klipsun, and he has previously been published in The Western Front.

Christi Croft is a public relations major. Known to many as Red Snappah because of her red hair and feisty attitude, Christi wants to go to Ireland one day and learn how to river dance. This is her second contribution to Klipsun, and she has previously been published in The Western Front.

Cory Chagami, from Hilo, Hawaii, is a public relations major with a concentration in management. He is a huge Chipper Jones fan and is growing impatient waiting for the Braves to win another World Series.

Daniel J. Peters, a senior journalism major; has had photographs published in Klipsun and in The Western Front. Spring quarter he will work as photo editor for the Front. A triple-bogey golfer on a good day, Dan hopes to one day win the green jacket at the Masters Golf Tournament.

Sara Buckwitz, a senior majoring in journalism and Spanish and minoring in chemistry, hopes to find God someday. The cattle-slaughtering industry didn’t give her any faith. When she’s not watching cows die, she likes to dance to Latin music and explore Bellingham on her bicycle.
Who wants to be a millionaire? Some people would rather win the $3,000 orange triple-chance special. Join Andrea Abney as she looks into the lives of those who gather at one of Whatcom County’s bingo halls. Photos by Chris Fuller.

The 305 occupants at Ferndale’s Bingo 262 move systematically, almost robotic. Up and down, up and down their hands go, marking tiny bingo cards with four-inch ink daubers. Up and down, up and down they scan their cards, hoping for a B12 or an O64. Up and down, up and down they pray for the stamp or hardway six-block they need to win.

Players look up only to check the next number on television monitors propped on the walls throughout the hall. Few notice the banners covering the walls, advertising the orange triple-chance special and the super “n” spin. Even fewer hear the constant background hum from the mini-restaurant behind the non-smoking section, unless they’re tempted to buy a bingo burger or a caramel sundae.

Floor workers wearing blue or burgundy polo shirts, unseen by players, swoop down to grab used cards from tables when they’re not selling specials or dumping ashtrays. Letters and numbers flow from the speakers, creating a sense of monotonous calm.

Looks of frustration and anxiety replace the calm on players’ faces as the game progresses; they sense when someone will bingo. They gasp and groan at each number because they think it might be the last before a bingo. Every person in the room moves the same, including Mary Vadasz. After 60 numbers come on a blackout game, Vadasz only needs one. She loses the game and mutters under her breath.

“Bad, bad, bad, bad, bad,” she says, releasing her air like a deflating balloon. “Son of a gun. On again.”

At 5-feet 2-inches tall with short, gray hair, and wearing glasses and gold-hoop earrings, Vadasz looks like a kindly grandmother. When she enters the non-smoking section of
Bingo 262, one of Whatcom County’s five bingo halls, things change. Upon entering the world of pink “split the pot” specials and blackouts, Vadasz becomes a fiercely competitive bingo player, cursing and groaning when her numbers don’t appear.

Vadasz traveled from Chilliwack, British Columbia, 30 miles from the Canadian border, to Bingo 262 tonight, a routine for the past 18 years. Obviously not a newcomer, she takes bingo very seriously. Her daubers surround the nine cards she’s playing; each perfectly lined to match the one beside it and ready for use when its time comes. Her black coffee remains untouched until halftime so she won’t miss the number to complete her large frame, a game where all outside numbers are covered. During a game her eyes remain glued to the cards, not even looking up when a passing floor worker cracks a joke or says hello.

“Tell him don’t bug me,” she says when a floor worker passes, despite the fact they’ve talked each weekend for more than five years. Her left hand grasps the edge of the wooden table as she quickly scans her cards and daubs with her right hand. When her numbers don’t come, she insults the caller under her breath.

“When she comes down. I’m going to kill her,” she says. “She’s not calling my numbers.”

When the caller, Hollie Quimby, arrives later to say hello, Vadasz’s eyes remain fixed on the cards. She does, however, let Quimby know exactly what she thinks of Quimby’s calling, joking about how she’s a terrible caller.

One-hundred feet away, Doris Fontaine mirrors the same emotions as Vadasz and everyone else in the room, angrily tearing away losing cards and quietly cursing the callers. Fontaine has played at Bingo 262 for more than 25 years. Patting her thinning hair and adjusting her gold-rimmed glasses, she assures herself that though she hasn’t won much lately, she’s simply in a slump.

“I played well the last two weekends, but I guess it’s gone now,” she says, her raspy voice muffled somewhat by the Craven A cigarette hanging from her mouth. “When you don’t win, you lose an awful lot of money.”

Tonight, Fontaine spent $30 American on regular game cards, not counting extra games played during the session; bonanzas, pick-8s and extra specials. Each session can easily run between $35 and $40. With a possible nine sessions per weekend, playing Bingo can become an expensive habit. However, all that money pays off when players win big. The nightly $2 orange triple-chance special pays $3,000 if players get one of three patterns in a certain amount of numbers. Three-on grand strips, costing $15, pay $1,000 for regular games.

Even though players can win big money, Whatcom Crisis Services wins in the end. WCS began using bingo as a fundraiser in 1983 to pay for its crisis line and programs for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Kathleen Marshall, executive director for WCS, estimates bingo brings WCS approximately 40 percent of its revenue, or $25,000 per month. The amount of money it makes doesn’t mean that bingo never pays out.

Fontaine smiles fondly as she remembers one night when she won $3,000. With her slump of late, she just hopes to break even.

“Tell him don’t bug me,” Fontaine says. “I’m not fussy.”

Like Vadasz, Fontaine travels from Canada every weekend to play bingo because she doesn’t like the low payouts and no smoking rule in Canadian bingo halls. She remembers floor workers from years past and shares stories about workers there tonight. She recalls, between sips of coffee, how a former pull-tab worker is expecting a child with a former floor worker. She then answers someone’s question about a former caller, saying he now calls at Big Brothers and Sisters, another local bingo hall.

Once the games resume, Fontaine gets serious. She talks to herself while scanning her cards, too loud to be covered by the whirring ball machine on the caller stand.

“Won’t be long now. I need four. I need three. Thanks for nothing.”

She finds herself on for the small frame, where called numbers surround the free space, needing N35. She prays for her number, daring it to appear on the TV screen. Suddenly, a woman two tables away yells “Bingo!” Floor workers run to check and find the woman.

Besides being a floor worker at Bingo 262, Hollie Quimby also calls games from time to time.
marked a number not called, so the game continues.

"Oh shut up," Fontaine mutters. "Somebody always has to open
their big mouth."

Vadasz and Fontaine represent the majority of players at Bingo 262.
Most players attend regularly; few need an explanatory program
because they’ve memorized the games. Players know when they’re
looking for the hardway six-block — a 2x3 block made without using
the free space, or the letter "C" — covering three of the four outside
edges. Many players buy the same number and type of cards every
session, so some cashiers recognize the players and have their cards
waiting when they arrive. Other players seriously consider seating
arrangements, believing one seat holds more luck than another.

Fontaine fumes because two people who know where she always
sits took her table.

"If some people see you winning, they’ll sit at your table," she says.
"It’s weird."

While Fontaine sees this behavior as odd, bingo player and
Western student Marci Eelkema has seen odder. Sitting at a table in
the non-smoking section beside her mother Sue, Eelkema recalls when
a man working in the mini-restaurant suggested she walk around her
table because it would end her losing streak.

Eelkema finds that many Bingo players are superstitious. She
removes a small stuffed dog resembling the Taco Bell Chihuahua from
her cloth bingo bag, which holds all her daubers and bingo necessities.
She swears, however, that she’s not superstitious herself.

"It’s become just a joke between my mom and I," she says, adding
with a small chuckle. "We don’t pray to the bingo gods or anything."

Eelkema plays one or two sessions at Bingo 262 per weekend. She
says she regularly spends $60 per session on cards. Of that, $40 goes
toward the 15 regular cards she plays per session.

"I’m a wimp," she says, laughing, because she doesn’t play nearly
as many cards as more experienced regulars.

Eelkema, 30, plays bingo for fun, not to “make millions.” She says
she also plays to spend time with her mom and because she considers
herself “at that in-between age” where she’s too old to go out and
too young to act old. When she first started playing, she won some
money and kept coming back for more. She admits, however, that
she acts as competitive as the serious players do.

"I get pissy about it when you get close, but I’m not addicted
where I can’t go without playing," she says. "I’m not that hardcore."

Whether players play hardcore or simply for fun, they each have
a special relationship with Bingo 262’s floor workers. Floor workers see
the same patrons every weekend, they stay updated on the lives of
their customers and love to chat with the regulars. Quimby, Bingo 262’s floor lead, best displays the friendly relationship between floor
workers and players.

Co-workers call Quimby "Jolly Hollie" because of her willingness to
talk to players and the smile permanently present on her face. Since
she began working at Bingo 262, she has seen every type of player
imaginable.

"Old people and 8-year-olds, everyone plays," she says, taking
a quick break from the fast-paced session.

Quimby notices the attitudes of the bingo players. She freely
admits that Bingo 262 doesn’t resemble the stereotypical bingo of
“bluehairs and wooden boards” and is instead more modern with
hand-held computers, where players enter the number and the
computer plays for them, and satellite bingo, which connects halls
throughout Washington. She also acknowledges that many players
take the game very seriously.

"When she comes down,
I’m going to kill her ...
She’s not calling my numbers."

"It’s a profession," she says. "The time, money and concentration
they put in ... it’s like a second job."

The time some players spend at Bingo 262 almost equals a full-time
job. Afternoon sessions begin at noon Friday through Sunday.
Moonlight sessions, the final session of the day, end at 2:30 a.m.
Saturday and Sunday and 12 a.m. Monday.

By the end of the three-and-a-half hour session, players’ fingers
become ink-covered. They hold hope until the last bonanza blackout.
Someone yells “Bingo,” raising a triumphant hand in the air because
they just won $500. Neither Vadasz nor Fontaine leave as winners.
They each dejectedly throw their cards in the nearest garbage cans,
pack up their cloth bingo bags, finish their coffees and rise to leave.
They walk out disappointed, but enjoy talking to fellow unlucky
players. Fontaine complains about players in the non-smoking section
and how they win every week. Vadasz jokes with a floor worker. Both
women walk out of Bingo 262, frustrated about their loss, but eagerly
anticipating the next session, where they hope to win the big money.

Avid bingo player Doris Fontaine has different daubers for different
occasions and enjoys a quick smoke between individual games.
Between dance rehearsals, student Kathy Pottratz reflects on her ups and downs with choreography and how it shapes her life. Jen True goes behind the curtain and takes a glimpse at modern dance in the works. Photos by Daniel J. Peters.

A viewer's eyes play tug-of-war in order to follow six dancers as they scurry around Carver Studio during a rehearsal for "Air for the System," a modern dance choreographed by Western student Kathy Pottratz. The dancers under Pottratz's direction say their emotional responses while dancing compare to flying, laughing, flirting, running a race and joyfully screaming.

A dark, spaghetti-strapped top and midnight-colored shorts cling to Pottratz's toned body. Her blond hair is partly tied back in a nest of tangles, reflecting a long day of rehearsals. Watching the dancers while resting her hands on her hips, she shifts her weight toward the stereo, which is blaring "Let Down" by Radiohead. The music stops and the dancers halt.

Walking into the center of the studio, Pottratz begins to work on a dramatic lift with two dancers. She demonstrates an arched back and extends her leg toward the front of the room. While experimenting with other possible lifts, she almost loses her balance, laughs and lets out a silly scream.

Pottratz, a fifth-year senior at Western, is majoring in English and minoring in dance. Although she intended to dance while in college, it did not become a career emphasis until she was introduced to choreography during her third year.

Western's choreography series consists of two classes taught by Nolan Dennett, director of the dance program. A third class gives students an opportunity to produce their own pieces using the tools they learn in the first two classes. The Dance Works performance showcases these student pieces.

Dennett explains that students are taught to analyze music in terms of form, theorize about how musical form relates to choreographic form, make up movement vocabulary and sculpt movement with time.

"I fell in love with it and knew that I had to dance. And I had to choreograph and that's what I wanted to do," Pottratz says as she runs her fingers through her hair.

"For me (choreography) is a self-expression," Pottratz says, smiling as she rests her head in the palm of her hand.
"It is really important to be able to create something that is your own."

Pottratz rarely escapes this non-verbal expression. She constantly talks with her hands and body, dancing unconsiously. Her gestures resemble sign language.

"What I've always done is just turn on the music and jam out in my room," Pottratz says in between laughs. "I'm sure everybody else does that too. But that's what I do."

The movement in "Air for the System," one of her recent Dance Works pieces, reflects the same uninhibited personal expression that many experience while jamming behind closed bedroom doors.

Today, Pottratz and the dancers are working to clean up the last sections of "Air for the System," making technical and musicality improvements.

"Five, six, seven, eight. Up! Two, three, four..." Pottratz says, emphasizing beats where the dancers should be in unison. "This is faster, faster, faster."

Exhausted, everyone thrusts their arms above their heads and cut the air as they slice their hands down the sides of their bodies. Dramatic lifts contrast with bouncing movement behind them.

Several dancers jump like fish out of water with arched backs and one leg bent behind their torsos. Two dancers dive toward the floor. Male and female couples crash their shoulders into one another, and then rebound into different moves.

The choreography in "Air for the System" manages to kinesthetically transport the audience into a party world of energy and intimacy.

A similar theme can be seen in a duet Pottratz and Gabrielle Lukeris co-choreographed, called "Hanging Upside-Down." The duet is fun and flirtatious.

"I must choreograph in themes," Pottratz says conclusively. "Because this piece has a very similar feeling to the Radiohead piece."

Although the theme may be similar, "Hanging Upside-Down" is more romantic. She wears a raspberry-colored, velvet dress with long slits up the sides and he wears black slacks and a dress shirt. Pottratz and Lukeris taunt each other with playful gestures. She covers her eyes with her hand, and he pulls it away.

"Gab is six-five, so it takes a lot of energy to get up on his shoulder," Pottratz says while gently shaking a loose fist in front of her shoulder to emphasized Lukeris' height.
The height of both dancers adds power to their duet.

Lukeris pushes Pottratz’s center up toward the ceiling. Pottratz circles her legs around in the air, lands on the ground with one leg still bent behind her and flips back up to perch on Lukeris’ shoulder.

Lukeris and Pottratz “play” during rehearsals by experimenting with a myriad of lifts and dancing in ways that feel natural, Lukeris says, adding that their relaxed choreographic process makes the movement satisfying to watch.

When they dance and choreograph simultaneously, Pottratz and Lukeris rely heavily on a mirror in order to make judgements about the choreography. Dennett and other dance faculty occasionally offer suggestions.

“T’ve worked with a lot of university programs, and I don’t know if it is just because I have finally learned how to teach choreography or because she just happens to be a very unique dancer/choreographer, but her ability to invent movement, her understanding of phrasing — it is all there,” Dennett says, adding that “Hanging Upside-Down” may be one the best pieces of choreography he has seen by a student.

“That is not to say that everything she does is fabulous. There are still holes in some of her work, but the potential for doing great stuff is definitely there,” he says.

“She and Pottratz choreographed four Dance Works pieces and performing in multiple faculty and student choreographed dances, Pottratz choreographed dance sections in “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,” the Guild Theater last fall. Also, she and Jim Lortz, assistant theater arts professor, co-choreographed “Cabaret,” which was performed by drama students at Western last spring.

Pottratz says she enjoys both musical theater and modern dance for separate reasons, and she thinks both help her grow toward the next step.

“I like musical theater because it is very extravagant,” she says, noding her head. “You can be really loud with your body, as loud as you can be with your voice. The movement is huge.

“I like the brightness and the fullness of the music in musical theater,” she continues. “And that you are clearly connecting singing and acting, with script and movement.”

On the other hand, modern dance is not limited by a script or what has been done in the past, like in musical theater. And although modern dance uses some ballet techniques, it is not as structured as ballet.

These differences give modern dancers and choreographers the freedom to develop their own movement vocabulary and innovative style. Pottratz moves one of her hands toward her stomach and the other away from her body, as if to accentuate the difference.

While she encourages the dancers to mold movement with their own bodies, Pottratz allows issues that are more appealing and prevalent in her life to be reflected in the way that she directs.

“I have had criticism about the music,” she says. “But the music is really important in this piece, to me, because I found the music first and that is where the dance came from.”

Thom York, Radiohead’s lead vocalist, sings with a sad, low-key voice, which contrasts with the happy-sounding instrumentals and dance movement. This contrast reflects Pottratz’s emotions toward graduation and her move to New York.

“I think the dance fills you with so much life that it kind of makes (the audience) feel like getting up and dancing with them,” Pottratz says. “It is about living life to the fullest.”

The dance paints a picture that resembles a...
very extroverted. You can be really loud with your body, as loud as you can be with your voice."
— Kathy Pottratz

"I like musical theater because it's very extroverted. You can be really loud with your body, as loud as you can be with your voice."
— Kathy Pottratz
Pigs Peace Sanctuary welcomes all, shelters all and loves all. Shane Powell gets the low-down on a nonprofit pot-bellied pig refuge. Photos by Shane Powell.

Her childhood is a tragic story of neglect and abandon. At less than a year old, Ginger was abducted from her parents, wrestled into a gunny sack and flung into the back of an old pick-up truck. Deprived of food and water, she spent two days in darkness as the truck careened down rugged dirt roads. When it eventually stopped, Ginger’s captor attempted to sell her to the locals in a grimy countryside bar. But remarkably, no one attempted to rescue her, much less buy her.

Unwanted, Ginger was dumped in a roadside ditch — her fate abandoned to thorn bushes and trigger-happy locals. However, neither the ditch nor a bullet was Ginger’s final demise. But she may as well have died and gone to hog heaven. Ginger is a pot-bellied pig and her rescuers placed her in the tantamount of an animal estate at Pigs Peace Sanctuary in Arlington, Wash., a refuge for abused and unwanted pigs.

Here, high-powered snouts tunnel paths through soggy soil, pig pellets are imported...
by the ton and 70 pigs have the reign of three barns, a farmhouse and 6-1/2 acres of roaming ground — the perfect pig paradise.

“You can see it in their eyes; they feel the love the moment they get here,” says Judy Woods, the sanctuary’s director. “There’s a visible transformation the longer they’re here.”

Woods is emboldened with the light of a permanent smile and blazing blue eyes. She is a woman aglow in the duties of parenting more than 200 farm animals.

She maneuvers through packs of pigs and crowds of chickens with obvious delight, like a grade school teacher among students, greeting each animal by its own name, delivering praise to one and a quick admonition to another. She asserts that each creature has its own personality, and her ceaseless animal chatter intermixed with recalling the sanctuary’s history, reveals her pride in knowing each one.

“I’ve always loved pigs,” she says, scratching a thick-skinned, chubby-faced creature named Oscar. “I read ‘Charlotte’s Web’ a million times when I was little.”

Woods explains that her first piglet arrived as a gift, and after falling in love, she called an animal shelter to see if there were more waiting for homes. In what was a rare occurrence, the shelter had captured a wild, roaming pig that very day. But since the shelter didn’t accept pigs, it was scheduled to be killed. Woods promptly brought it home, performing the first of many pig rescues.

The first rescue piqued her interest. Woods began researching the pot-bellied pig fad that began in the mid-80s and discovered the quandary it created. Six years later she has amassed more than 70 such pigs, most of which have come from abused and troubled pasts.

Most pigs land at the sanctuary after owners realize they can no longer deal with the mischievous manners. Others, Woods says, came from livestock auctions, where she bid for their lives in an effort to divert them from slaughter to safety.

“I can’t take them all, but someone has to take responsibility for them,” she says, her motivation illustrated by the button pinned to her coat that reads: “Pigs are friends, not food.” And Woods’ farm is evidence enough that caring for these creatures is far less a responsibility than a passion.

“They don’t belong in our country,” she says, referring to the fact that pot-bellied pigs are native to Vietnam and ended up in the United States only because of their misconstrued pet semblance.

But despite pigs’ poor indoor manners, people such as Sherri Whitsett and her 10-year-old daughter, Whitney, are adamant that pot-bellied pigs are the best and brightest pets to be had.

“They’re way smarter than dogs,” Whitney explains with confidence.

But that’s just the problem — they’re so smart. Whitney and her mother owned a pig named Excellie for three years before designating it to the sanctuary for lack of space. Excellie was often a little too clever for her owners.

“At first, we couldn’t figure out why things were always missing,” Sherri says. “Excellie would find everything. She would pull Popsicles out of the refrigerator and unwrap them before eating them.”

Excellie mastered the ability of opening everything from doors and drawers to cupboards and closets. She would often remove and then display all the contents just to show off. Sherri says they put childproof locks on everything, only to discover that Excellie’s intelligence was higher than the
children the locks were designed for. And in line with pig stereotypes, Exceltie hated baths.

"She would scream and go running around the garage covered in bubbles," Whitney demonstrates with dancing arms.

After taking Exceltie to the sanctuary, the Whitsells came to visit every weekend. This, they say, is where their pig was most happy. But unfortunately, Exceltie died of a heart attack within a year of her arrival. Nevertheless, the Whitsells return on select weekends to volunteer their time helping with chores around the sanctuary.

Exceltie's early death was a rarity; most pot-bellied pigs are said to live about 20 years. But not even Woods knows the true pig life span. Her oldest pig is 14. It's possibly the oldest one in Washington state, she says. But she has yet to see one die from old age.

Many of the pigs already weigh 150 to 200 pounds before they reach their third birthday — the result of considerable consumption. Seventy pigs will eat a mammoth two tons of food per month, not including the steady supply of snacks they receive daily.

But Woods plainly enjoys ministering to these boundless appetites. With a face painted in the amused excitement of a mother handing treats to her children, she rings a bell at the corner of her house. A grunting throng of 70 snouts respond by barreling out of nearby barns and bushes.

She slings carrots and vegetarian dog biscuits at their feet, resulting in a cacophony of chomping mouths amidst wagging tails and sporadic squeals. The pigs' favorite snacks include cherries, cucumbers, peaches and popcorn. Peanut butter seems to rank number one. Most of the snacks arrive at the sanctuary with the compliments of visitors and volunteers.

Recognized as a nonprofit organization, the sanctuary's survival depends almost entirely on the people who make monthly donations of money, food or time spent performing chores around the farm.

A chalkboard nailed to the side of a barn awaits the attention of those coop-scooping. "Scooping poop is the only thing that never gets erased," Woods says. "There's always plenty of it."

She says a handful to 20 people show up weekly to volunteer. Most often, they arrive in the form of service or school groups. However, the most regular volunteer is Woods' 17-year-old son, Nathan.

Nathan does everything from performing routine labor around the sanctuary to heading the foray of a daring pig rescue.

"The rescues can be pretty wild," he says. "Usually (the pigs) are not very tame, and they're freaked out about people."

Nathan says the hardest part of living and working at the sanctuary is being awakened by 70 screaming, hungry pigs before the break of dawn every morning.

"They're like an alarm clock," he says, rolling his eyes.

For Woods, the hardest part of caring for the family of animals involves far more than manual labor or morning wake-up calls.

"It's the humans," Woods asserts. "It's all the people looking for homes for their animals."

She says the pigs hate to be moved around, and the trees to place unwanted pigs...
The pigs’ favorite snacks include cherries, cucumbers, peaches and popcorn. Peanut butter seems to rank number one.

in other homes before bringing them to the sanctuary.

“They’ll cry endlessly — a mournful, soulful cry — and go into a depression when they first get here,” Woods says.

To avoid forcing this readjustment and despair, she networks with people looking for pigs and inspects each new dwelling before letting the pig take residence there. She requires new owners to fill out a “pig adoption application” — an intensive review of what the home and potential owners are like. The application interrogates the forethought of want-to-be pig owners, demanding responses to questions like whether having the siding torn off the house or having an entire yard rooted up in one day is acceptable behavior for a new pet.

Aside from dealing with the people and the toils of physical labor, the sanctuary demands a high level of emotional commitment. Most pigs come carrying the baggage of a life of confinement or physical abuse.

Allyssa arrived a year ago scalded with torch, marks running the length of her back. The blisters are healing into scars, but she still cowers from people and sleeps most of the day in recovery.

“The first time I saw her, she kept up this awful scream,” Woods says, cringing at the memory. “There’s so much abuse; some (of the pigs) are clobbered with 2 x 4s or sticks; most are starved or neglected. Some days I’m so disgusted with humans.”

Despite troubled backgrounds, the pigs at Pigs Peace Sanctuary are a solid indication of the healing power of this refuge. Most of the animals are friendly, gentle and content having discovered the pig bliss the sanctuary creates. A few strokes of their thick, armored bellies send them plopping to their sides with their feet outstretched, in anticipation of an expected massage at the feet of the humans they have come to venerate.

A few pigs like Ginger remain at a distance from people. The harrowing truck ride and her near-death experience has taught her to be calculating and cautious of the world. But the world she now inhabits will slowly teach her that humans are not all alike, that some have decided her troubles are worth a lifetime in a place of peace. And like the other pigs here, she’ll come to reflect the words of the sign on the outside gate of Pigs Peace Sanctuary: “Peace be to this farm and all who dwell in it. Peace be to them that enter and to them that depart.”

Pot-bellied pigs love Jim Schantz, who brings them leftover popcorn he collects from a movie theater in Seattle.
Major's face is dark and his hair is brown. Piercing hazel eyes sit deep under a thick brow; they are alert and judicious. Demanding honesty from criminals, his presence is intimidating. His stance wide, and shoulders strong. Major is quick, mobile and willing to use force. Criminals fear him, but the Bellingham Police Department loves him.

Major does not wear a uniform or carry a gun, and he does not write tickets. He wears a reflective gray and yellow harness that has "POLICE" printed in large black letters along each side. A strobe light is affixed to his harness just above his shoulders. His bite is the only weapon he needs and his nose is an inestimable tool. Major is 85 pounds of pure intimidation.

With his nose raised skyward, Major stands in a powerful position aside his handler. He is one of three gigantic German shepherds that make up the canine half of the Bellingham Police Department's Canine Unit. Police Dog Nitro, who is Major's son, and Police Dog Thor round out the trio. These three dogs track and chase down criminals for the Bellingham Police. Strong-jawed and quick off the mark, these animals would not be competent tracking dogs if it weren't for their handlers.

Four officers add the human element to the unit. Officer Beth Gaede is the master trainer and has been a canine officer for nine years. Officer Jason Morson is the senior handler and trains Major. Officer Shan Hanon is an assistant trainer and handles Thor. Officer Craig Johnson, who has been with the unit less than two years, handles 4-year-old Nitro. Together, these officers and their dogs make an effective crimefighting team.

"The dog's main job is to apprehend suspects that have fled the scene of a crime and to locate evidence and be of assistance to patrol," Gaede explains, running her leash-ridden hands through her shaded gray hair.

The unit is a sophisticated tool that enhances the capabilities of the entire police department. Since its inception in 1968, the Bellingham Canine Unit has established itself as the longest-running canine program in Washington. Most medium to large departments have a canine unit. When the dogs are used properly, they help promote safety and limit risk to human officers.

"When you're talking about safety to citizens, handlers and other officers, the police dog is going to be the first to engage the enemy," says Gaede. "Safety is just tremendous and the
Police dogs risk their lives and are often called upon when the situation is too dangerous for a human officer. Retired Police Dog Rok was stabbed with a knife while tracking a car prowler at Western Washington University in 1986. He was seriously injured and retired. Because of the inherent dangers present when pursuing a suspect, it’s imperative that the dog, as well as the handler, be properly trained.

When choosing a police dog from a litter, trainers perform a number of preliminary tests to distinguish which dogs are best suited for police work. The puppy must be intuitive and curious. Smacking his hands together, Monson explains that one such aggression test involves slamming together two hubcaps to see if the puppy gets scared. A puppy that is not scared is more inclined to be aggressive, therefore increasing his selection potential. Pain-threshold tests are also performed, but in a very mild form, such as the pinching of a paw.

“Trainers look for a dog to have three characteristics. He has to be a social dog, he has to be friendly, and he has to be big enough to take down a grown man,” Gaede says.

Police departments generally avoid using female dogs because they go into heat twice per year. “Females, on a track, tend to pursue the suspect and then double back to make sure the handler is OK. It often causes them to lose the scent trail, so male dogs are used more,” Johnson says.

The handler and his dog attend a 10 to 12-week (approximately 400 hours) training course. The dog is taught basic obedience and agility. It’s taught how to locate and track human scent, how to search areas and buildings for suspects or evidence and how to protect the handler.

“Anytime there is physical contact between me and another individual, that’s a threat to (Thor), regardless of whether it’s playful or not,” Hanon says.

During these trainings, the handler learns to read and interpret the dog’s body language and the noises the dog makes when it has discovered something during a track.

The bond between handler and dog begins to blossom during these training sessions. “When I first got Thor, he didn’t want to have anything to do with me,” Hanon says, chuckling. “He’d stay about 20 feet away from me, kind of
in circles, and the only time I could pet him was when he was eating. It wasn’t until the three-month training course that he really began to trust me.”

Unlike Hanon, Johnson had an immediate rapport with Nitro. “Ever since the first day I got Nitro, he’s lived at home with me. He’s around me 24 hours a day. I spend more time with him than I do my wife,” Johnson says sarcastically.

The relationship a handler has with a dog is based on dominance and more importantly trust. Police dogs are trained to be aggressive, assertive and confident.

“Each dog is trained like it’s the top dog, like it’s better than anyone else except its handler,” Gaede says.

She says that the dogs psyche must be razor sharp. Nitro, compassion. Fortunately, the handlers are short of neither. They constantly praise their dogs. Pats on the head and rubs on the belly express handlers’ love toward their dogs. With occasional barks and woots, the dogs often seek attention; the handlers usually concede it. The officers understand that their dogs are first and foremost tools in fighting crime, but they’re tools they love. They don’t want to see their dogs injured, but they all understand that violence comes with the job.

“It’s tough when you get your dog, you don’t want to personalize him, but it’s hard not to because you live with him,” says Hanon. “You always have to remind yourself that the dog is a tool and the tool may have to be sacrificed to save human life.”

The reality of the situation is that at the end of a long 10-hour shift, these pooches go home and walk through the same door as their handlers. They sleep, eat and relax under the same roof; a strong bond is inevitable.

“They are sort of pets but not really pets,” Gaede says with a smile. “Most of the dogs are inside the house and beg food just like other house dogs. My dog sleeps on the bed half the time.”

Because of the amount of time the handlers invest in their dogs, and the inseparable lifestyle they lead, handlers worry about sending their dogs into dangerous situations. Police dogs are used to their potential when they respond to a tracking call.

“Tracking is our bread and butter,” Gaede says.

When a criminal commits a crime and flees the scene, the police dog is often the only tool the department has to find the suspect. The animal is introduced to the scent at the crime scene. With a 30-foot lead attached to the dog’s harness, the handler follows as the dog tracks the scent. This often involves crossing highways, navigating thick...
brush and slopping through mud. Extreme weather conditions can affect the suspect’s scent, causing the dog to be unsuccessful.

The dogs are also used to retrieve suspects who are not willing to turn themselves over to law enforcement officers. Retired Police Dog Robo was instructed to apprehend an armed suspect hiding in sticker bushes. Catching the criminal by surprise, the dog, within minutes, pulled the man from the bush by his leg. Neither the dog nor the suspect was injured.

“In any situation I have the final word as to whether my dog Major will be sent after a suspect,” Monson says, if a situation is extremely dangerous and the handler feels the dog will be of no value in fighting the crime, he or she can abstain from action.

Gaede’s throat seizes and she fights back tears as she describes the admiration she feels toward her retired dog, Robo. Their bond is so great that she feels tears roll down her face. Thinking about her dog being hurt by either a beating, gunshot or knife wound is visibly difficult for her. Canine officers see their dog as members of their family. When the dog gets hurt, parental instincts surface. Some handlers become more emotional than others and each bond between officer and his or her dog varies. But all the officers have something in common — they love their dogs.

Gaede says she constantly thinks about all the dogs and becomes worried when they’re sent into dangerous situations. She says it’s hard to not become attached to an animal you spend every day with, an animal you rely on in life-threatening situations.

“That’s like having a child, except he’s more obedient and never talks back,” Hanon says with an ear-to-ear smile and a slight chortle.

When the handlers interact with their dogs, the mutual love is obvious. When they’re not working the dog, they speak to the animal like a child — with an enthusiastic high-pitched voice. “Good boy,” is declared at every opportunity. Although society has the misconception that police dogs are killers, no one has ever been killed by an on-duty police dog in Washington.

“The dogs are actually very intuitive,” says Hanon. “The perception is that when they find a person they are just going to bite them, but that’s just not true. If the person is not a threat, they won’t bite him and I don’t know how, but they can sense that.”

Films such as “K9” and “Turner and Hooch” show police dogs biting and attacking suspects.

“We don’t have dogs like you see in the film or downtown in California,” says Gaede. “The crime is so much worse in California that when a dog does encounter a criminal, he is usually assaulted. These dogs are beaten, hit with pipes and shot at, so they learn to attack first.”

A basic characteristic that’s evident with all police dogs is exceptional ability. They can track a scent, maneuver over obstacles and detain criminals. Once the dog is retired, he’s still more than an average pet — he’s a family member.

Major, in his seventh year of service, has reached a point in his career when he’ll soon retire to Monson’s home. No longer will he live the exciting lifestyle of a police dog. Successful tracks and difficult apprehensions will become glory-day stories told by his handler. His days of pursuing hardened criminals will be over. Instead, he will chase away neighboring cats and beg for dog biscuits.
It's never just another bus ride when Larry Bovenkamp takes the wheel. Christi Croft reveals the character behind the voice many WTA passengers have come to know and love.
Waking up for an early Friday class might be the hardest thing some students have to endure during the week. However, it never seems to bother that one cheery, yet annoying, morning person. You know, the person who must hop out of bed two hours early just so he or she won't miss the bus. For others, some hung over or extremely tired from unhealthily choking down Busch beer like it happened to be a tasty Slurpee the night before at The World Famous Up & Up Tavern, it takes longer to make their way to the wretched bus stop.

After the students wait for what seems an eternity, the bus arrives. Just when these unknowing students think they will step into a vast atmosphere of silence, the door flies open and a Herculean voice shouts: "Hello! How are we doing today? Nice to see you!" All of a sudden the students are magically snapped out of their morning trances like being awakened from hypnosis.

Frequent bus riders know whom the voice belongs to. He stands at a whopping 6-feet 3-inches tall; a light brown mustache camouflages his upper lip. He sports large, square-shaped glasses and walks with a slight limp. His name is Larry Bovenkamp and he's a WTA bus driver just trying to make everyone's day a little brighter.

"Maybe (students) are having a bad day, have a test or whatever. If I can help put a smile on their face, it might help to break the tension," Bovenkamp says.

While turning onto Bellingham's Girard Street on bus 41, Bovenkamp says young people, especially Western students, keep him energetic.

"I love them. Being around young people makes you feel young. Students are usually upbeat 99.44-percent of the time and that is what helps me treat everyone with respect. You have to give respect to get it," Bovenkamp says.

Western student and regular WTA passenger Christy Raybon-Wise, says she likes the way Bovenkamp cracks jokes about different stops around Bellingham.

Photo by Craig Yantis
Larry Bovenkamp advises Western freshman Megan Anderson about which bus to take to reach her final destination. Photo by Chris Fuller.

"One time he passed the jail and yelled, 'Now taking reservations!'" Raybon-Wise says. "I thought that was pretty funny. My friends always ask about the different things he says everyday."

Fairhaven student, Libby Chenault, says "jovial" best describes Bovenkamp.

"He jokes a lot with people sitting in the front seat. He's always in good spirits," Chenault says.

Although Chenault is fond of Bovenkamp, she also recognizes the merit of other drivers.

"A lot of the WTA bus drivers are overwhelmingly friendly, helpful and supportive," Chenault says.

Bovenkamp says although his charismatic demeanor is present on most days, he, too, has his ups and downs in life.

"I make mistakes, too. Sometimes people want to push your buttons. Most are decent, but some just want to get you mad. My emotions used to get the best of me in those situations, but I learned you gotta be cool," he says.

One of the downs 46-year-old Bovenkamp experienced was the loss of his left leg in a truck accident in 1982. Because of his unfortunate condition, Bovenkamp pursued a job that didn't require much manual labor.

Chuck Boyle, Bovenkamp's supervisor, says most people are surprised to see a man with a prosthetic leg driving a bus.

"After working with him awhile, it's not considered a handicap. He can do more things with one leg than other people can with two," Boyle says.

Boyle says Bovenkamp, despite his handicap, still gets up out of the driver's seat to assist people onto the bus or helps carry some of their items while they find a place to sit.

"He hasn't let his leg become a disability," Boyle says.

Working in the payroll office while in the Marine Corps for eight years helped spark Bovenkamp's interest in customer service. He also worked with many customers in Seattle at AT&T for four years before becoming a bus driver.

Bovenkamp, born and raised in Lynden, says he decided to become a bus driver because, most importantly, he likes to drive and second, he likes to work with people.

"I like getting people from point A to point B and answering any questions along the way," he says.

On occasion, Bovenkamp likes to buy bus passes for low-income or handicapped persons. His reason? He says he feels he should give back because he has a good job.

It's that passion for getting people where they need to go, no matter what the circumstance, which catches the attention of passengers.

An example of Bovenkamp literally going the extra mile happened at 9 p.m. on a Saturday near Bells Fair.

A man stood at the bus stop hoping to get a ride home to Canada not knowing the busses didn't run that late.

Bovenkamp told the man he could give him a ride home if he stayed on the bus until the end of his shift. Later that evening, off duty, Bovenkamp took the man to his Surrey home without any additional charge.

"He was just so happy when I got him to his house. I didn't do it for money. I just did it to help the guy out. My philosophy is we kinda got to help each other out in life," Bovenkamp says.

Bovenkamp says any other bus driver would have done the same thing.

"I don't think I am better than anyone else. I just do the best I can," Bovenkamp says while happily assisting a young mother and her child onto the bus.

"That's just vintage Larry. You won't find many drivers who will do that," Boyle says. "He's got a heart of gold. You won't find anyone as generous. He's almost generous to a fault."

Boyle says he receives a number of calls from riders commenting on Bovenkamp's service. Most praise his generosity, but others, usually first-time riders, sometimes call in to complain about his blaring voice.

"It's that loud, stentorian voice. Sometimes he acts like he's still in the Marines. If he were in church you wouldn't want to
Boyle says after a period of time those same riders usually recognize Bovenkamp's generosity and look past the loudness and extreme resonance in his voice.

Regular rider Darlene Kreiter (A.K.A. "buddy" to Bovenkamp) says she likes Bovenkamp's loud voice.

"I smile every time he tells us where the next bus stop is. One time I heard another gentleman on the bus talking about the time when Larry named off all the flavors of ice cream to his passengers while passing an ice-cream parlor. He's boisterous, but absolutely wonderful," Kreiter says.

Raybon-Wise, newcomer to Western, finds Bovenkamp's loud voice helps her recognize stops.

"I'm a first-time rider so I find it very helpful that he loudly calls out all the stops. Not all bus drivers actually do that," she says.

Bovenkamp says he has had many rewarding experiences while being a WTA bus driver, but one in particular struck a chord in his memory.

It happened at the Fairhaven College bus stop. Bovenkamp says when he stopped, a large group of 3 to 4-year-old daycare kids stepped on the crowded, morning bus. Bovenkamp, naturally good with kids, excitedly yelled, "Hi kids! How are we doing today?" As students moved back to let the kids in, Bovenkamp says one little girl stood next to him as he pulled away from the stop.

When he arrived at the next destination the children all piled off the bus and Bovenkamp yelled in his naturally strong voice. "Bye kids! Have a nice day!" After getting off the bus, the little girl who had stood next to him turned around and said, "I love you bus driver," and stepped back on the bus to give him a hug.

Although most of Bovenkamp's customers hold a nice disposition, he, like other drivers, has come across those few individuals who have crossed the line while on the bus.

With the bus mostly empty during a prolonged stop, Bovenkamp takes a quick moment to catch up on the sports news in The Seattle Times. Photo by Chris Fuller.
At Edmonds Underwater Park, scuba divers have an opportunity to explore the wonders of the deep. Cory Chagami infiltrates the ranks of divers to expose their underwater world. Photos by Chris Fuller.

At 8 a.m., the empty parking lot fills with cars the way flying seagulls pounce one after another on a dropped piece of bread.

To the right of the ferry terminal lie numerous submerged vessels, pillars, a dry dock and huge cement rings used as part of the divers’ underwater playground. Sitting impatiently in the line of cars, the only thing visible out on the bay are the scattered buoys resembling balloons tethered to sunken treasures. The dark-blue water is calm at Edmonds Underwater Park, also known as Brackett’s Landing.

Divers pour out of their cars, some already dressed in their suits. A sunny sky and clear water make it an ideal day for diving.

Jason Depew and Chris Wormley begin the lengthy process of putting on their wetsuits. The divers struggle with the skin-tight neoprene suits they swear are several sizes too small. Unlike drysuits that allow a layer of air next to the divers’ bodies to keep them warm, with wetsuits divers depend on their body-heat to warm a thin layer of water absorbed in the neoprene.

Booties, gloves and hoods cover their extremities and a tightly tied weight belt completes the ensemble. After a few tugs and pulls on straps, the divers carry their gear to the water.

By now, an hour has passed and several millimeters of neoprene on their upper bodies have made the divers uncomfortably warm. The mid-morning sun bears down, causing sweat beads to appear on their exposed faces. Their timing, or lack thereof, couldn’t be better because it coincides with the 9:18 a.m. high tide.

Two-inch thick ropes encrusted with barnacles and algae map out an underwater grid for the divers to follow. The divers follow the ropes to sunken tugboats where they encounter fish and other animals. The sunken objects attract the animals to this man-made reef. Numerous anemones, crab and fish make Brackett’s Landing their home.

Advanced divers come prepared with their own scuba equipment. Most novice divers rent air-tanks and suits from dive shops.

“IT would be nice to have your own suit," says Depew. "You know, you never know where it’s been before it’s against you.”

Becoming a certified diver begins with classes and pool sessions spanning three weeks. Students go on open-water dives as the final part of their training.

“We always have a buddy check our equipment after we have,” Depew explains.

The check includes making sure the oxygen tank is securely attached to the buoyancy controlling device (B.C.D.) and testing the primary and secondary air hoses and pressure gauge. Safety first is the rule, so checking can’t happen enough.
Divers monitor their gauges constantly because mistakes can happen at any time. The amount of oxygen in their tanks is measured in p.s.i., pounds per square inch, and a full tank is typically measured at 3,000 p.s.i. For beginners the first half of a dive in open water is normally timed to take the tank down to 1,500 p.s.i., and the second half takes the tank down to 500 p.s.i., usually a good time to get out of the water.

"Last time I was here, we only went down 35 feet," says Wormley. "So, we'll just stay down until the tanks are empty."

When diving in deeper waters, divers must re-pressurize before surfacing to avoid decompression sickness, commonly called "the bends." During dives of 45 feet or more, the nitrogen in the air dissolves in body tissues and isn't absorbed. Staying underwater too long can cause the nitrogen to form bubbles in the body. Symptoms vary from vomiting to paralysis and even death.

"A good rule is one foot per second," says Wormley, a diver of 10 years.

Depew and Wormley intently eye the map of the park and formulate their dive path out loud.

"We'll swim out to past the jetty first because there's nothing until we get past it," Wormley says referring to the pier-like rock structure. "Next, we can go left, then out further and see what's out there. That should use up our tanks."

The divers finally make their way into the water so we don't trip on our fins and fall with all that gear on," says Wormley. "Being face down with all the gear would make it hard to get up."

Cringing faces and gritting teeth attest to the water's chilling temperature — all 41 degrees of it. The waterline swallows their bodies and the divers shiver through the inch-wide snorkel.

"Did you?" Depew asks.
"Uh-huh, you?" Wormley asks.
"Uh-huh."

Slightly warmer, the two fill their B.C.D.s with air for the swim out to the point of decent.

The divers release the air from their B.C.D.s and make their way past the barnacle-covered structures to the ropes. Fish blend perfectly with the rocks, and Depew and Wormley are surprised as the rocks they grab onto dart away. Crab and shrimp quickly duck down when shadowed by the divers, and starfish cling to the rocks as best they can.

Bubbles break the surface 45 minutes later and Depew's yellow mask and snorkel become visible. Shortly after, his head rises from the water and he takes a look around for Wormley. Wormley's head bobs with the waves a few seconds later and he acknowledges a good dive with a thumbs-up gesture.

Depew and Wormley, out of breath with red mask lines imprinted on their faces, simultaneously begin to ask each other questions through blue lips and chattering teeth.

"Did you see the flounder I was playing with?" asks Wormley, who grabbed the tail of a flounder and followed it as it scurried from place to place during the dive.

"I passed by a cod who was sitting on the bottom and it moved, but was still facing me. Then it starts swimming at me, right at my face and I was swatting away at it with both hands," Depew says, wildly swatting his arms.

"Rock cods' nests are scattered throughout the park and Depew probably ventured too close to a nest site containing eggs."

Back on land, the divers begin to defrost their bodies.

"The suit keeps you warm, but not warm enough," Depew says. "Thousands of needles prick their numb feet and hands. Depew peels the wetsuit from his body and steam rises from him in the crisp Edmonds' air."

Done with their day of diving, Depew and Wormley pack up their gear.

The parking lot is quiet; the divers dress in warm sweaters and drive away, leaving behind the sunken treasures for someone else to discover.
cold feet & wet balls

Battling soggy greens and blustering winds, Daniel J. Peters wades through a cheap game of golf at Wayne Olsen’s Riverside Golf Course in Ferndale.

It’s cold.
It’s windy.
It’s wet.
It’s winter. I’m alone, and I’m playing golf.

As I come off the ninth hole after a great game — I chipped one in from 20 feet for birdie — no one greets me at the clubhouse. It’s empty, and the usually vibrant neon beer signs are dark. Dark, because the clubhouse is deserted this time of year when the only rule at Wayne Olsen’s Riverside Golf Course in Ferndale is the honor system.

“We don’t have too much trouble with people sneaking onto the course; we work off the honor system,” says Norman Olsen, who works for his stepmother at the family-owned course. “We make sure license plates match the people playing.”

It’s not tough to match the license plate on a beat-up Toyota Corolla to its owner. It’s the only car in the lot, and I’m the only golfer on the course. I stuff a wadded five spot into an envelope the size of a Chinese finger trap and write my name and plate number on the outside.

Riverside is a “good course for beginners, seniors and people who don’t like a lot of challenges,” Olsen says.

The course features long, open fairways and is perfect for the poor Western student because it has the cheapest green fees in the county: $8 for the first nine holes and $4 more to play 18 holes. It’s so cheap, a round of golf at Riverside and a case of Heineken (beer is required for serious golfing) costs the same as a round of golf and a case of Keystone elsewhere.

A thermos of coffee, however, goes better with the winter
storm that has turned the long green fairways into 400-yard waterbeds with saturated grass sheets.

Rain makes the course soggy in November, and sometimes the Nooksack River even floods its banks, but the day after Halloween, $5 buys all the dirty, wet and cold winter golf a person can take. I could only take 9 holes.

“Some of the fairways can drain better because they’re higher up,” Olsen says.

A light rain adds to the fun while I play, clouding my glasses and turning already-soaked dirt on some of the lower fairways into sticky mud. A pond that once merely separated the first and fourth holes now fills the first fairway.

For the unfortunate golfer stuck in the new first-fairway lake, Olsen suggests fishing the errant ball from the mire and depositing it on any semi-dry piece of turf.

“Every person has their own version of winter rules,” he says.

For a winter rule of my own, I tee up any ball that sinks into the turf, including the one I fished from the lake.

What I make up for in distance by teeing up in the fairway, I lose in direction as the high winds keep goosing my balls effortlessly away from the greens like the duck and seagull feathers floating around the course.

A polyurethane long-john top and a lined sweat-coat don’t keep out the chill as the same high winds drop the temperature on the course to a toasty 34 degrees Fahrenheit.

The winds are so strong that the red, blue, yellow and white flagged pins whip wildly around the edge of the cup, till 45 degrees or lie toppled on the green.

The winter season officially ends March 1 with the opening of the clubhouse, but Riverside continues charging its $5 winter rate until the course dries out, Olsen says, taking a long drag on his slim cigar.

Olsen begins repairing the course’s winter-damage when it dries, but for as long as it rains, golfers can enjoy the childlike atmosphere of the muddy course.

I run around Riverside with water squishing into my shoes, snot threatening to stream into my beard and mud covering my hands and pant legs.

Unsupervised, I chase ball after ball around the course, sandwiched between the Nooksack River and Interstate-5, bouncing one ball through the Dairy Queen drive-thru and onto the second hole green.

“It counts,” Olsen says. “The course was here before they were,” he adds.

The course was well before the Dairy Queen and the restaurant’s current owners, Denise and Scott Whitman.

Whitman says she repaired the existing net protecting the restaurant drive-thru when she bought the restaurant in April 1999.

“We thought about making it taller,” Whitman says. “But it was just not cost effective.”

Dairy Queen maintains the net purely as a courtesy to its customers.

Had my golf ball not bounced straight through the parking lot and instead, hit a pimple-faced senior skipping second period, sending him to the hospital, I would be liable for his medical bills.

Resembling St. Andrews, the original golf course in Scotland, Riverside has remained relatively the same since its construction in 1929, owner Jeannie Olsen says.

“Good old-fashioned golf,” she says. “No gimmies, no fluffies.”

Riverside has even outlasted the patriotic paint job on a neighboring smokestack. As ‘Old Glory’ peels and fades from the stack, the course remains and watches the development of Ferndale.

“It’s not for sale,” Jeannie says suddenly.

“The signs are for an adjacent lot.”

Jeannie says she supports the role of the golf course as part of Ferndale’s history and has chosen not to upgrade the course to current standards.

“We do what we do to keep the green fees affordable,” she says. “This is a blue-collar course.”

Tiger Woods and Vijay Singh will never battle for a championship at Riverside, but a Ferndale son or daughter might learn to love the game of golf at a course where no one takes a tee time; a person’s best is good enough, and the only dress code is weather-appropriate.

Photo by Daniel J. Peters
Braving the gore, Sara Buckwitz delves into the bowels of Ferndale's slaughterhouse, witnessing the conversion from bovine to burger.

Photos by Erin Fredrichs and Chris Fuller.

At Ferry Brothers Inc. in Ferndale the process of converting an alert bovine to a vacuum-packed beef product takes approximately 45 minutes. Fabricating the beef and byproducts that many Americans consume daily requires a small arsenal of trained meatpacking professionals — 110 full-time employees.

Early in the morning, before the sunlight brightens the white 50,000 square-foot plant, cattle start to moo as if in anticipation. The plant looms quietly off exit 263 giving drivers on Portal Way no indication of its inner workings. Ferry Brothers slaughters about 300 cattle each day, starting at 5:30 a.m. One by one, the cattle exit the trailer to begin the day’s journey. The cattle, dirty from travel and cramped living quarters, walk through a “swim wash” of chlorinated water that loosens caked-on fecal matter, dust, and whatever else is embedded in their hides.

While still soaking wet, the cattle follow a narrow, approximately 4-foot wide track around the outside of the building. The “race way,” as it’s called, has a slight incline, so when cattle reach the stun box, they are one story above ground. This proves valuable later, when parts of the entire carcass are discarded. The parts can fall through trap doors on the floor into semi-truck trailers parked underneath the building. The cattle don’t know any of this, thankfully. They can’t turn back, either. Every six-or-so feet the cattle duck under a gate that only swings one way. Then, a Ferry Brothers employee uses a water hose to rinse the animal and wash away the sludge on the raceway. As they approach the 6-foot by 4-foot metal pen, while sideling and a partial roof shield the cattle from potential gawkers in passing cars.

A drenched, nutmeg-brown cow with wet, creamy cuts on her head and a yellow ear tag marked 262 ambles into the stall, and the cold steel door drops behind her. She doesn’t seem nervous, even though she has no room to turn her head, much less her body. A metal plate lifts her head, while a wet electrified plate touches the end of her snout. Slightly, the body goes limp from the shock of four amps at 500 volts. She slumbers, unconscious — however if given a few minutes, she would awaken.

The metal door on her right lifts, and she falls onto a metal table that transports her to the floor. The table tilts so that she flips, and her underside facing toward All, the slaughterman.

After he sanitizes his medium-sized knife and rinses his hands off the blood from the previous cow, he approaches the unfeeling Number 262.

All, a practicing Muslim, turns toward Mekka, the holy city of Islam in Western Saudi Arabia. He recites three prayers in Arabic: “In the name of God, God is great. God is great.” Quickly and fluidly, he creates a one-foot long incision from the jaw along the neck.
A box of meat begins its journey into the world of carnivores.

Blood surges from the wound to the table to the once-white floor. Whatever comes near, floor grates swallow. The floor, though white and textured like the walkway around a public swimming pool, appears stained a murky red until the evening cleaning.

Draining all the blood is one aspect required to make the meat Halal, or permitted for Muslim consumption. Halal is part of the Islamic dietary laws as defined in the Holy Koran and other sacred Islamic texts. The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America’s website includes a list of requirements to make food Halal. A Muslim in good stead of the community must slaughter the animal, and the slaughterman must kill the animal in the name of Allah.

Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America inspector Sabir Ali certifies the Ferry Brothers’ operation. He volunteers his services for IFANCA, which regulates Halal certification of food and beverages. Ferry Brothers has produced Halal-certified beef for the last year.

Before Ferry Brothers made Halal beef products, Ali, a doctor of food science, says it was difficult for Muslims to find Halal beef. So difficult, that many would purchase live animals and perform the proper rituals themselves in order to meet the Islamic dietary laws. Ferry Brothers caters to the 45,000 Muslims in British Columbia, and Ali has helped promote their products in that community.

To stay in accordance with Halal standards and USDA standards, the bleeding animal never touches the kill floor. The slaughterman attaches cow 262’s right rear leg to a chain that lowers from the ceiling. The mechanism lifts the draining carcass and hangs it by a hook on a motorized track. The system, transporting dangling carcasses in various states of dismemberment, looks much like the one used at the dry cleaners to suspend laundry, but on a larger scale, with sturdier hangers.

As the body snakes its way around the first curve of the track, men sporting white lab coats, rubber boots, hairnets and hard hats hack off the ears and hooves. The employees work diligently, rarely talking, focused on their task. Some stand about nine-feet up on metal floors that line the path of the carcasses. The workers stare into the lower abdomen of the animal as they remove body parts. Others work on the floor cutting at the head, neck, shoulders and front legs.

John Sheehan, executive vice president and co-owner of Ferry Brothers, says every part of the body has a market, from the brain to the feet. What the employees do with the carcass depends on the orders for the day.

Aurora Medical Supplies buys the blood from the fetal calves to study cancer and AIDS. Science classes will sometimes purchase the fetuses or the cattle eyes to dissect and study. Muslims often use the feet in a soup called Poya.

Sheehan has eaten the soup.

"It was alright," he says, but furrowed his brow and grimaced a bit when recalling the experience.

Muslims consider the brain a delicacy. Sheehan tried it in an attempt to understand the cultural differences. He says that though he can eat oysters and sushi all day, he can hardly palate the flavor of brain matter. It's the idea of eating brains that makes him uncomfortable, but Sheehan shows no outward sign of discomfort when watching the process of reducing cattle into edible portions.

One of the men peels down the hide and feeds it into a spinning cylinder near the floor. As the machine pulls on the skin, the man gently slices the
Workers separate meat from bone during the final stages of the slaughter.

Fatty layer to release it from the body. Head to leg stump, the beast is now a mostly uniform pale whitish color with spots of dark reddish brown peaking through where the fat has been cut away.

The hide, all in one piece, is sent to Korea for processing, then sent back to the United States in the form of jackets, gloves and other leather goods.

After another kill-floor technician removes the head, the time arrives for the removal of internal organs. The next person on the kill floor pushes a metal cart underneath the carcass. He slices the animal's underbelly from groin to neck. The internal organs fall into the cart which is pushed to the side where the organs are separated, boxed, weighed and shipped out. The carcass floats forward.

A man on a hydraulic lift pulls out a three-foot chainsaw-type apparatus. The carcass hangs with its back to him. Along the spinal column, he saws the carcass into two as he lowers himself toward the ground by stepping on a small round button on the floor of the lift.

Now the Ferry Brothers' inspector and the USDA inspector, suspended on lifts opposite each other, study each half carcass looking for any sort of abscess, cancer or disease. The two full-time employees float up and down studying it. If one finds a fault, then he opens a metal trap door below and cuts the carcass loose. The carcass falls through the hole into a waiting truck. If, however, both approve of the meat, it leaves the kill floor to be steam cleaned. It glides down a slight incline to an 11-second steam bath. Sheehan helped design the prototype for this steam pasteurizer.

Standing about 16-feet tall, 14-feet long and 3.5-feet wide, it pummels the carcass with 195-degree steam to eliminate any contaminants. So far the company has not found any contaminants that survive the heat, Sheehan says.

The clean carcass enters the boning room, where it is whittled down to its different cuts. More people in lab coats slice away at the hanging cattle bits until nothing is left hanging on the dull-gray hooks. The cuts of beef roll along the conveyor belt around the room until they are vacuum-packed and shrink-wrapped. Into one of 3000 boxes a day they land, labeled and sealed, to be cooled to a brisk 29 degrees Fahrenheit.

Cooling the meat can take anywhere from 12 hours to a couple days depending on the desired quality of the meat. For fast-food burger chains, the meat is cooled the quickest. For the choice meats sold at grocery stores, the meat is cooled more slowly to maintain as much of the flavor as possible. At 29 degrees the meat is still considered fresh and can be sold for up to 120 days, Sheehan says. Thus it can be shipped fresh to foreign markets.

"Eventually it will all be done mechanically five to 10 years down the road," Sheehan says, referring to the boning process.

Ferry Brothers produced $45 million of cattle products in 1999. Their beef can be found anywhere from the supermarket to fast-food chains. In 45 minutes, Ferry Brothers has made a killing.