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Santa run

- Comet to make a near pass
- Co-op elects board of directors
- Fire District 16 fire reports

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Home away from North Pole is Minter

By Scott Turner, KP News

There's a twinkle in his blue eyes and a gentleness in his voice that belies his 85 years. But those very qualities make Sanford "Sandy" Elken the perfect Santa Claus.

Elken, who has lived in Minter since 1998, has been playing the jolly old elf for nearly six decades.

It all began back in the early 1950s when he was assigned to be a photographer during his stint in the Army.

That led to a civilian job as a professional photographer taking photos of kids as they visited Santa at big department stores.

"The company I worked for had me being the official photographer for Frederick & Nelson in Seattle," Elken said. "Then they sent me to Spokane to do the same thing."

As it happened, the photography studio always furnished the beards and wigs for

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Photo by Scott Turner, KP News

Santa Claus (aka Sandy Elken) made a special trip to the Yankee Clipper in Key Center last month to get a pre-Christmas trim by shop owner Nita Garnier.

Park levy fails to get needed votes to pass

By Rick Sorrels, KP News

The Key Pen Parks levy received 53 percent of the votes cast, but fell short of the 60 percent required to pass.

When the park commissioners voted in June to place the park property tax levy on the November general election ballot, the income forecast was dismal. Sales tax receipts and property tax receipts were still falling, and higher priority municipal governments were taking all the taxes collected, with a forecast that Key Pen Parks would stop receiving any tax revenues by sometime in 2014.

The economy has started to recover. Home values have increased a bit in all areas of Pierce County except the Key Peninsula, which still dropped 1.5 percent in 2013. Sales tax receipts and property tax receipts have finally stopped falling and have actually increased some, according to Scott Gallacher, the Key Pen Parks director.

Pierce County just released its 2014 budget.

"The numbers now show that KP Parks can survive 2014, and keep our parks open and clean without the help from the recent levy that failed," Gallacher said. "The pinch will not hit us now until 2015. By then, we hope the economy will recover further, to provide even more relief."

The district just approved its budget for 2014. "There is no money for any construction, but there is \$75,000 for planning the intersection project for the entrance to Gateway Park along SR-302," Gallacher said. "Capital improvement cost for this project will take \$750,000 in 2015, and another \$250,000 in 2016."

He said the Gateway Park is the district's highest priority for developing the parks they care for.

"We cannot develop it until after we construct access from SR-302 that meets the required standards. The \$1 million cost is non-negotiable. That's what it costs today," he said.

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Creating a Vibrant Community **CIVIC CENTER**

Holly Hendrick, Marketing & Facilities Coordinator, Key Peninsula Civic Center

As this year draws to a close, we reflect on the many wonderful partnerships fostered here at the Key Peninsula Civic Center (KPCC).

At the beginning of 2013, the KPCC was able to provide space for the Pierce County Library Book Mobile, providing access to our local library and a computer lab while the Key Center location was remodeled.

Thanks to our relationship with Boy Scout Troop #220, the Civic Center grounds have become a more inviting space with the addition of new picnic tables and a patio area near the museum.

Through the KPCC's commercial kitchen, we incubated small food businesses, including For the Love of Spice, Olson Boys BBQ, and Steepers Tea.

Together, with Two Waters Arts Alliance, you've been "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and connected with a diverse, talented artisan network.

Every week, small farmers and food producers from the Key Peninsula, and a little further afield, host a marketplace, with the Fresh Food Revolution Co-op (FFR) to support their livelihoods within the our walls.

The KPCC was able to act as a fiscal sponsor for the FFR, this fall, receiving a grant from The Russell Family Foundation to launch the

FFR's new Kids' Educational Garden located at Key Pen Parks' Gateway Park.

In 2013, the KPCC sponsored fundraisers for the Key Peninsula Preschool Co-op's annual Trike-a-thon, which provides scholarships for local families, and Peninsula High School's Rotary supported Interact Club, allowing students to travel to Peru to install computers in schools.

Every Friday night, during the school year, not only does the KPCC open our doors to create a safe, fun place for kids to be kids, through our part-time staff and wonderful network of "Friends of the Key Peninsula Civic Center," we mentor local teenagers in leadership roles to coordinate and manage the Skate Night program.

Did you stop by the Key Peninsula Historical Society Museum, located in the annex building behind the main Civic Center, this past year? They've been hosting an amazing series of history classes for children.

Yes, community happens here.

To find out more about the programs, events, classes, clubs, and ideas for creating wonderful events at the Key Peninsula Civic Center, please visit our website: www.kpciviccenter.org, or, just stop by!

The KPCC's doors are open 8am - 9pm, 7 days a week. 17010 S. Vaughn Rd KP N, Vaughn, WA 98394. 253-884-3456. kpciviccenter@centurytel.net.

CORNER

(From Santa, Page 1)

the department store Santas, while the stores provided the suits.

It was in Spokane, at the end of a particularly challenging day of working with a particularly challenging Santa, that Elken acquired a Santa suit of his own.

"I traded a beard and wig for a Santa suit and when I got back home, I started playing Santa for my friends' kids in Seattle," he recalled.

That was in 1954. He's been playing Santa ever since and does it for the pure joy of seeing kids smile.

"I love kids and I never had any of my own so that's why I do this. To this day, when I see a kid, I just want to make them smile," he said, gazing up through his natural bushy brows.

Elken doesn't work for big department stores anymore. Instead, he frequents private events and smaller community stores like Food Market on the Key.

And he never gives a big, boisterous "Ho-Ho-Ho!" because he doesn't ever want to scare the little ones.

"When I have a kid that's scared or crying, the first thing I do is get down on the floor at their level and I tell them, 'Look. Now you're taller than I am,' and they usually calm down right away. And I just talk gentle to them," he said with a grin.

And when a kid doesn't know what to say when Santa asks what he or she wants for Christmas, Elken has a trick for that,

Want to help Santa help little kids?

For information or to donate to the Washington Elk's Therapy Program for Children, call (253) 472-6223 or send monetary donations to P.O. Box 110760 Tacoma, WA 98411. For information, visit waelks.net/therapyprogram.

too: "I just say, 'Oh I bet I know what you want. I'm going to bring you some surprises.' That way they're looking forward to Christmas Eve, no matter what their economic status might be," he said.

Nita Garnier, owner of the Yankee Clipper in Key Center, has known Elken for more than five years.

"I've always thought he'd make the perfect Santa," she said. "He's such a personable, caring man and he has the most beautiful blue eyes. And he always has a joke and likes to make people laugh. And you can tell that the kids just love him."

Elken can be hired for private functions, including family gatherings, right up until 3 p.m. on Christmas Eve. That night he makes an annual visit to the home of a specific family. It's a tradition that's been going on for more than 40 years, he said.

Since his very first Santa appearance, Elken has donated all the money he's made to the Washington State Elks Therapy Program for Children. The money pays for therapy for children who have developmental or medical problems and whose parents can't afford professional care.

"I've personally seen how they help those kids and it's like a miracle," he said.

To hire Santa (aka Sandy Elken) for a personal appearance, contact him at his special North Pole number, (253) 851-0271.

KPCCA Welcomes New Board Officers

The Key Peninsula Civic Center Association (KPCCA) elected new Board Officers on November 14.

Phil Bauer will be the new KPCCA Board President, a position he held 2005-2006. Scott Dervaes and Patricia Medveckus return at 1st and 2nd Vice Presidents, respectively. Other officers include: Bruce Macdonald, Treasurer and Secretary, Irene Torres and Tracy Geiss, At-

Large Members, as well as, Peggy Gablehouse, who will remain the Human Resources chairperson.

Eighteen community members make up the current KPCCA board; anyone who lives, owns property, or works on the Key Peninsula is eligible to join.

The KPCCA Board meets on the 2nd Thursday of the month at 7pm, in the Whitmore Room.

Want to see Santa?

Santa will be at Food Market at Key Center Dec. 14 from 11 to 3 p.m. He'll make an appearance at Food Market at Lake Kathryn Dec. 21, 11 to 3 p.m.

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Gallacher said the project is important not only for the park but for future parking and access to 360 Trails park.

The Key Pen Parks budget for 2014 cites total expenses at \$789,142.

Besides the costs of maintaining what they currently have, the only other bud-

get item for any improvements over the next couple of years is a small sum for planning the KP Trails System.

"Key Pen Parks thanks the voters of the Key Peninsula for their support of the levy. Even though the levy did not pass as it needed 60 percent, we are grateful for the 53 percent who voted yes," Gallacher said.



www.kpciviccenter.org
kpciviccenter@centurytel.net
 253-884-3456

The Key Peninsula Civic Center is a 501(c)3, private non-profit. We rely on rentals, fundraisers, and donations to keep our doors open, and our rentals affordable for the community. Thank you for your support!