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THE NEWS TRIBUNE

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE SOUTH SOUND

Lawyer warned over attempts to advise Pierce County sheriff

BY PETER TALBOT
ptalbot@thenewstribune.com

A King County judge said Thursday he was very troubled by emails that showed a private attorney had tried to give Pierce County Sheriff Keith Swank

legal advice this week in violation of his orders.

Superior Court Judge Michael Ryan opted not to sanction the lawyer, Joan Mell, who Pierce County Prosecutor Mary Robnett has sued for allegedly invading her core functions as sole legal advisor to county

officials. Ryan said he would show Mell some grace.

But Ryan likely won't look as kindly on future violations of his June 16 preliminary injunction that barred Mell from acting as a lawyer for the sheriff. Next time, he said, he would investigate Mell for contempt of court.

"If there is ultimately discovery in this case, and it uncovers that you've been having discussions with Sheriff Swank, after my injunction has been issued, related to anything that addresses his official duties, and it's legal in nature, you can expect the court will not take

that lightly," Ryan said. "And we'll do a full and thorough investigation to see whether or not you are in contempt."

"You cc'ing Sheriff Swank, at his county address and then giving legal advice as to how he should do things is a violation of my order, but I'm giving you a pass this time," Ryan said. "But it's not going to happen again."

Mell said she appreciated Ryan's deference but that she did not intentionally copy Swank on the email in his official capacity. Ryan, seeming in

SEE LAWYER, 4A

Spanaway Lake homeless village gets permit OK from county

BY CAMERON SHEPPARD
csheppard@thenewstribune.com

A unique but controversial project intended to house nearly 300 chronically homeless individuals near Spanaway Lake has received permit approval from Pierce County.

The approval is the final contingency required by Pierce County in order for it to obligate more than \$22 million towards the project.

The permits mark a beginning to the construction phase of the project and the end to a highly contentious process of approval.

The project, called the Good Neighbor Village, will be owned and operated by Tacoma Rescue Mission — one of Pierce County's largest homeless shelter operators.

On Aug. 18, Tacoma Rescue Mission announced the Pierce County Planning Department had officially approved the site development permit for the project.

The village promises to bring

SEE HOMELESS, 4A



LIESBETH POWERS Liesbeth Powers / lpowers@thenewstribune.com

Mike Herrington, left, FBI Special Agent in Charge in Seattle, speaks about the takedown of a drug-trafficking ring during a Thursday press conference at the Tacoma Police Department. The ring was the subject of an 18-month investigation, including a two-month wiretap, led by the FBI.

Wiretap exposed alleged fentanyl route from Phoenix to Tacoma

BY SHEA JOHNSON
shjohnson@thenewstribune.com

Sixteen people, including some with ties to a Tacoma street gang, have been charged and/or arrested following an 18-month investigation into a

multi-state drug-trafficking ring in which couriers allegedly brought fentanyl into Washington through checked luggage, authorities announced Thursday.

During a news conference held at Tacoma Police Department headquarters, federal and

local law enforcement officials described what Tacoma Police Chief Patti Jackson called "an incredibly successful operation" led by the FBI and assisted by several other agencies, including TPD and the Pierce County Sheriff's Office.

In the preceding 36 hours,

authorities executed 13 search warrants as part of the large-scale takedown that primarily targeted known members or associates of the Knoccout Crips street gang, a transnational criminal group which has

SEE WIRETAP, 4A

Key bridge to Mount Rainier closed; will WSDOT build new one?

BY ISABELA LUND
ilund@thenewstribune.com

The Washington State Department of Transportation is now one step closer to deciding the fate of the state Route 165

Carbon River Fairfax Bridge.

WSDOT released its planning study on Thursday, outlining two options they are pursuing after permanently closing the bridge on April 22, 2025. These options include:

- Building a bridge replacement north of the bridge's existing location.
- Tearing down the existing bridge and not building a new one.

These are two of the seven

options WSDOT was considering when the agency first started its \$1.5 million planning study. WSDOT does not currently have funding for any of the options; all of the agency's estimated time frames would start from whenever officials are able to identify funding.

The 103-year-old, single-lane bridge is permanently closed because its steel supports were deteriorating, posing a safety

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