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12A

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THE NEWS TRIBUNE

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE SOUTH SOUND

Jury awards \$55M to victim of ‘bikini barista’ owner

BY SHEA JOHNSON
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A Pierce County jury has returned a \$55 million verdict in favor of a girl who was sexually abused by the owner of a “bikini barista” coffee stand in the Tri-Cities, court records show.

The verdict came Tuesday following several days of trial in a lawsuit brought by the girl’s mother against Laurence Lee Rawdon, 62, who was sentenced to seven years to life in prison last year after pleading guilty to second-degree child rape, according to court documents. In taking a plea bargain, Rawdon

admitted to abusing the girl over a two-year period in Buckley, where he, the victim and the victim’s mother shared a home, court records show.

In November 2024, the girl’s mother sued Rawdon on behalf of her daughter in Pierce County Superior Court, seeking to hold Rawdon civilly liable for

assault, sexual battery and intentionally inflicting severe emotional distress beginning when the girl — who is now a teenager — was about 10. Jurors determined that \$55.5 million would reasonably compensate the victim for past and future damages caused by Rawdon’s conduct, court records show.

The civil verdict, which was slightly more than attorneys had asked for, is one of the largest in recent memory in Pierce County, if not the state of Washington, according to Kevin Hastings, one of two lawyers representing the plaintiffs.

“I see the significance of this case as being (the victim) seeking full accountability and full responsibility for what was done,” Hastings said in an interview Thursday. “The number reflects our community’s view of the nature and extent of the harm purported against (her) but it also speaks to validation

SEE VERDICT, 3A



DEBBIE COCKRELL debbie.cockrell@thenewstribune.com

Tacoma’s Old City Hall, 625 Commerce St., has been undergoing multi-phase rehabilitation the past few years, to serve as a future home for new offices, retail, dining, micro-apartments and more.

Tacoma’s Old City Hall unveils SheWorks coworking space

BY DEBBIE COCKRELL
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It’s been 8 years since local developer Eli Moreno and his Surge Co. firm were selected by the City of Tacoma to redevelop Old City Hall.

Sept. 12, the historic property, 625 Commerce St., saw its first public tenant celebration in the building, which is in the midst of its massive update.

The News Tribune in April reported the planned arrival of SheWorks, a family-friendly coworking space. The Sept. 12 celebration hosted by the business was an unveiling not just of their space but a chance for attendees to see inside the renewed building, which is undergoing a top-to-bottom refresh and structural overhaul.

“Our goal was just to get them here, get them seeing this space,” said Ashley Whitney,

SheWorks founder, at Saturday’s preview. “And obviously, when you walk in, you’re like, ‘OK, I’m done. I will become a member.’”

The business takes a large portion of the fourth floor, with coworking and a childcare space.

Moreno noted that the focus of Saturday’s event was for SheWorks more than Old City Hall.

“We’re super excited that what they’re doing. We are true believers in their business model, much needed space here

like that in Tacoma,” he said.

“It’s just wonderful to see that life come back to the building, which is the whole reason the project started — not to leave this beautiful gem unattended and without life,” said Guion Rosenzweig, a development consultant who served as project manager for Old City Hall’s first phase.

According to the Surge team, Phase 1, which encompasses all units on the building’s second, third, and fourth floors, will be ready to rent by year’s end.

Phase 2 is set to start next year and encompass the first floor (on Pacific Avenue), the fifth floor

SEE OLD CITY HALL, 5A

Supreme Court won’t let Postal Service restrict mail ballots

BY ANDREW CHUNG
Reuters

The U.S. Supreme Court declined on Monday to let the U.S. Postal Service enforce a rule targeting mail-in ballots, dealing a setback to President Donald Trump’s effort to restrict voting by mail ahead of November’s midterm elections that will determine control of Congress.

The justices denied the Justice Department’s request to lift a ruling by Boston-based U.S. District Judge Indira Talwani that blocked the Postal Service from enforcing the measure while legal challenges by states and voting-rights groups proceed. The agency adopted the measure after Trump issued a March executive order aimed at tightening rules governing mail voting.

“The government is unlikely to succeed on the merits of its challenge to the District Court’s preliminary injunction,” the court said in its brief, one-paragraph order.

Justice Samuel Alito, joined by fellow conservative Justice Clarence Thomas, dissented from Monday’s decision. No other justice dissented publicly. The court has a 6-3 conservative majority.

Trump’s fellow Republicans are locked in a tight battle to retain control of Congress in the midterms. Restricting mail-in ballots would stand to benefit Republicans given that

SEE MAIL BALLOTS, 8A

Ribbon-cutting marks end of construction on SR-167 project

BY AUSTIN COPE
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Three semi trucks and a crowd of roughly 100 people in business attire and bright orange construction vests gathered on an empty stretch of new asphalt near Fife on Friday for a ceremonial ribbon-cutting before a new expressway opens

this weekend.

The ceremony, which was not advertised publicly, came two days before the first two miles of SR-167 expressway open to all traffic between I-5 and the Port of Tacoma on Sunday, Sept. 13 by 9 a.m.

It was capped by a truck, pulling a shipping container, which

SEE SR-167, 3A



AUSTIN COPE The News Tribune

Local and state officials prepare for a ribbon-cutting for the first phase of the SR-167 completion project near Fife, Wash. on Sept. 11, 2026. The two-mile stretch of road will open to the public on Sept. 13.



MIKE BLAKE Reuters file

Election workers extract mail-in ballots at the registrar of voters’ office during the California primary election in San Diego on June 2. The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday blocked President Donald Trump’s plan to restrict voting by mail, ruling that it is too late to impose new postal service rules for the November election.



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