

April 27, 2004

THE ISLANDS' WEEKLY

VOLUME 22, NUMBER 17

Aides to Senators Cantwell and Murray Visit Lopez

by Leta Currie Marshall

For the second time this spring, Congressional aides visited Lopez last week on behalf of their bosses in that other Washington.

Sally Hintz, Northwest Regional Director for Senator Maria Cantwell, and Rachelle Hein, Northwest Regional Representative for Senator Patty Murray, arrived by ferry on Wednesday morning, April 21. They first met with representatives of Lopez Housing Options (LOHO), a group that is working to establish a senior-housing hamlet.

LOHO co-founder Murray Trelease said the meeting at Grace Hall went well, and that Sally Hintz told them Senator Cantwell is especially interested in affordable housing.

"They advised us on applying to specific government agencies, and seemed pleased at the progress we've made so far," Trelease said. The aides indicated that the Senators would most likely be willing to write letters in support of LOHO.

Hein and Hintz then visited Lopez School in response to an invitation from Jeanna Carter, Public Relations Liaison. They met with Carter, School Superintendent Larry Johnson, County Commissioner Rhea Miller, and several students. From there several carloads went down the road to S&S Homestead, the farm of Henning Sehmsdorf and Elizabeth Simpson.

The aides were given a tour of the garden and greenhouse that produce vegetables for the owners as well as 25 families who subscribe to shares of the produce. They admired the fat cattle and sheep grazing on the green grass, and enjoyed homegrown apple cider in the spacious kitchen where foods

are prepared and canned. They stepped carefully around the chatty chickens that wander freely through the yard.

Hein and Hintz listened as three Lopez High School students—Josh Marshak, Jane Crawford, and Poppy Dalton—explained why they had become regular visitors and workers at S&S Homestead. Just the day before, the students had been at the farm planting dozens of tomato plants.

Marshak said, "I'm interested in sustainable practices of all sorts. People, especially in the United States, need to learn about food production, what that means to people in other parts of the world, and how that can be done in a more humane way, without destroying our resources."

"I admire this kind of living, and what Elizabeth and Henning are doing here," said Crawford. Both have been in the program nearly two years. Dalton learned from her friends about the agriculture class and got involved last fall.

As educators, Sehmsdorf and Simpson place a high priority on making use of their farm as a teaching tool, and have established a non-profit to ensure its future as such. Sehmsdorf spoke of his wish to see all Lopez K-12 students involved in hands-on learning about growing and harvesting healthy food. Students have made a beginning by growing potatoes and greens for the school cafeteria.

Another goal is to have a greenhouse on the school campus. As part of her master's studies, Carter is working out a K-12 model for involving all students in food production. She is working under the tutelage of Sehmsdorf and Simpson, both former professors at the University of Washington.

Hintz is herself an avid gardener and is interested in sustainable practices. She and Hein listened as their hosts made point after point in their case for sustainable agriculture. Simpson told them that potatoes grown using monoculture methods are treated with 52 poisons, including a fungicide so toxic that farmers can't go into their fields for three days after using it. Sehmsdorf added that Monsanto's latest potato variety is actually registered as a pesticide by the Environmental Protection Agency. Sarah Wanless, an intern who has been at S&S since January and will stay on until August, said she is working with the school to bring a special-education student to the farm to enjoy the healthy benefits of being outside, digging in the soil, and nurturing plants.

Sehmsdorf discussed H.R. 2626, the Farm-To-Cafeteria Projects Act, which is in subcommittee and has been endorsed by many states and organizations. Hintz and Hein were not familiar with the bill but said they would check on its status.

At the end of the farm tour, the Congressional aides joined Lopez students in the school lunchroom, where they enjoyed organic Lopez-grown green salads and spaghetti with sauce featuring ground beef from a chemical-free Lopez cow. Commissioner Miller marveled at the number of children she observed eating their salads with relish.

After their Lopez visit, Hintz and Hein traveled on to Friday Harbor to meet with other constituents and hear their concerns.