

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Trina Gwerder named Mason Transit Employee of the Year**

For keeping daily operations running smoothly and for inspiring employees during what Mason Transit Authority officials agreed has been “a challenging time for our community,” Trina Gwerder is MTA’s Employee of the Year.



Gwerder

Gwerder has worked at the MTA for 14 years, starting out as a shelter monitor. As one of three operations supervisors, she plans, supervises and coordinates transit schedules and services, in addition to supervising about 34 drivers.

Coworkers described Gwerder as having “the biggest heart and compassion for the customers we serve,” while also characterizing her as fair, caring and providing guidance “in an uplifting way, that leaves you wanting to perform to the best of your ability.”

“Trina keeps everything running smoothly,” Mason Transit General Manager Danette Brannin said. “She cares about people and leads by example. We are very lucky to have her at MTA.”

When she spoke with the *Shelton-Mason County Journal*, Gwerder was incredulous at receiving such acclaim, insisting that she was being awarded simply for doing her job.

“I’m a pretty positive person, so I believe in coming to work with a positive attitude,” said Gwerder, whose optimistic approach is reflected in her insistence that every problem at a workplace has a solution, if you look hard enough for it. “If anything, this award should be going to the Mason Transit employees as a whole, what with the year we’ve all had. In a year of COVID, they were all ‘Employees of the Year.’”

MTA staff nominate fellow employees for Employee of the Year every February, while Mason Transit leadership and the Employee Engagement Committee select the recipient based on those employee nominations.

**Station 21 closes take-back box, PCHS & Rite Aid host their own**

The “Take-Back Box” at North Mason Regional Fire Authority Station 21, on Old Belfair Highway, was taken out of service on Wednesday, but take-back boxes will be available at both Peninsula Community Health Services and Rite Aid in Belfair.

Due to what they described as “the tremendous success” of the take-back boxes in the community, the North Mason Regional Fire Authority and the Mason County Sheriff’s Office reported that they’ve been overwhelmed in their attempts to keep up with the take-back box located at Station 21.

“We are thrilled by the success of this program, and are grateful to have had a part in it,” the NMRFA said in a press statement.

“Unfortunately, the take-back box fills up faster than it can be emptied, and the outdoor location poses a security issue that cannot be overlooked.”

Unlike the take-back box at Station 21, the take-back boxes at the pharmacy locations are backed by the state, to ensure the pharmacies can keep up with the increased demand, which the NMRFA touted as helping to keep the community safe.

Peninsula Community Health Services is located at 31 NE state Route 300 in Belfair, while Rite Aid is located at 23940 NE state Route 3 in Belfair.

**Sheriff’s Office, fire districts assist neighboring agencies**

The Mason County Sheriff’s Office reported that a department police dog assisted Thurston County deputies in finding a domestic violence suspect Feb. 11.

“After a short track into the woods, Ryder located the subject hiding in a tree,” according to Mason County Sheriff’s Facebook page.

In other neighbors-helping-neighbors news, the North Mason Regional Fire Authority reported that Engine 21 had just returned from helping Grapeview Fire on Feb. 12 at a garage fire when it was sent to help Union Fire on a chimney fire.

“Other emergencies don’t stop because the snow starts,” according to the NMRFA Facebook page.

The North Mason fire authority was busy on the evening of Feb. 12. North Mason was called to a house fire with flames coming through the roof in Tahuya just after 7 p.m.

“Despite degrading road conditions, firefighters were able to prevent the fire from spreading to other nearby homes,” according to the NMRFA Facebook page. “It took several hours and a couple thousand gallons of water to fully extinguish the blaze, (but) there are no reported injuries.”

A water tender from Union Fire also responded, as did a medic unit from Central Mason Fire and EMS, and a South Kitsap water tender.

Although the NMRFA reported no response calls on its social media Feb. 13, the evening of Feb. 14 saw the NMRFA Facebook page post that the fire authority’s units had arrived on the scene of a structure fire on Northeast Katchemak Lane, north of Belfair, with multiple other such agencies arriving to assist.

And the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the Mason County Sheriff’s Office issued a pair of traffic alerts due to structure fires that left their adjacent roadways either partially blocked or fully closed on Feb. 15.

The first was shortly before noon, for a fire near the 2700 block of state Route 302, just outside of Allyn, which drew the sheriff’s office, the Washington State Patrol and Mason Fire, while the second was not long after 6 p.m., for a fire near the intersection of West Shelton Valley and West Cloquallum roads, which required Mason Fire to block Shelton Valley Road due to the home’s driveway.

In both cases, the roads were reopened in roughly an hour.

■ *Compiled by reporter Kirk Boxleitner.*

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