BREAKING HEARTS & BODY PARTS

BELLINGHAM'S ROLLER BETTIES SKATE FOR EMPOWERMENT & ATTITUDE

ALSO:

FLIRTY FITNESS
LIFE BEYOND AIDS
RESTLESS BONES
I’ll be honest. The first quarter I wrote for a publication, I was intimidated by the editors. They seemed so much older, wiser and more experienced than me. It took me a while to have confidence in myself and my abilities, but now here I am an editor.

Many of the people in this issue also have found their confidence, and they are accomplishing amazing things. Unintentionally, this issue features many women and coincides with Women’s History Month. The women at Femininite are producing heartfelt, poignant pieces about what it means to be a woman. Kelly Hill is living with AIDS and has found a rewarding job helping other women live with the disease as well. The Bellingham Roller Betties celebrate strength and self-expression by strapping on their roller skates.

I hope you find a story in this issue that not only interests you, but inspires you to have confidence in yourself and do what makes you happy.

Thanks for reading.

Kira Freed
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A Bellingham Resident Recalls His Role in the Day of Infamy.
“When I feel lazy and don’t want to take my meds, I feel selfish because there are so many people out there in the world who can’t get medication,” Hill says.
Kelly Hill nervously crushed the ice cubes in her vodka gimlet with a straw while she sat in the tiny corner seat of the Horseshoe Café and waited for her date to return from the bathroom. They had gone out a couple of times before, and she knew she hadn’t put him at risk yet, but it was pretty obvious he was ready to have sex. Her date came back, took a swig of his beer and smiled.

“I have to tell you something,” Hill, 30, said. “I have AIDS.”

Her date smiled and said, “Kelly, that doesn’t make me any less hot for you.”

Now, Hill sits in the same tiny corner seat of the Horseshoe Café reminiscing about the first time she had to tell a partner she had AIDS. She pulls her black hat over her pixie-cut chocolate hair and crosses her tiny feet drawing attention to her retro black leggings and plum socks. Looking at Hill’s 4-foot-11-inch frame, it’s hard to imagine everything this small creature has gone through.

“I don’t think I will ever forget that,” Hill says. “It made every other time easier.”

Before her ex-boyfriend, she didn’t have AIDS or a child. Her life from the start of the relationship to the end was irreversibly different.

“I didn’t know how to date as a positive person or be a mom, but I felt like I was still the same person in many ways,” Hill says.

Hill grew up in Oak Harbor, Wash. At 20, her boyfriend at the time was commuting from Oak Harbor to Western everyday, so they decided to move to Bellingham together. The relationship didn’t last, but Hill loved Bellingham. She received her associate degree at Whatcom Community College and transferred to Western to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Human Services.

In April 2000, her new Bellingham boyfriend became ill, Hill says. When the couple couldn’t figure out what was wrong, Hill took him to St. Joseph Hospital. Doctors’ tests revealed he had AIDS. Because her boyfriend didn’t know when he’d become infected the doctors had no way to measure how long he’d had AIDS, Hill says.

“At first, I didn’t freak out,” she says. “I went into support mode for my boyfriend because he was freaking out.”

Hill waited a month before visiting the Evergreen AIDS Foundation in downtown Bellingham to set up a time to get tested. The foundation sent a representative to her boyfriend’s apartment to give Hill the test so she could feel comfortable and no one else would know she took it. When the man returned two weeks later with the test results, Hill sat calmly on the couch while he informed her that she was HIV-positive. He waited at the apartment with her for her boyfriend to come home, but eventually decided she was stable and left.

Hill put on her coat and heels and walked back to her apartment on North Garden Street where she lived with four other girls. Hill hadn’t told her roommates that her boyfriend had AIDS because she felt it wasn’t her place, but they could tell something was wrong. Hill sat down on her roommate’s bed and finally let the words pour out of her. After she finished her story, her roommate started crying hysterically. Hill finally let herself cry.

“I think going through it with somebody and dealing with it together helped,” Hill says looking back on her and her boyfriend’s struggle. “He had a lot harder time with it, and I think supporting him helped me.”

Hill’s mother died last April from pancreatic cancer. She never told her mother she had AIDS because she was afraid of how her mother would judge her. Hill leans on her friends and co-workers for support.

“Washington state residents are very fortunate,” says Deborah Westergreen, services administrator for the Evergreen AIDS Foundation. “In other states, patients have to wait two to three years to get their medications. In the ’80s, having AIDS was a death sentence. Now, because of medications, folks can still live long, full lives.”

Hill pays $20 each month for her medication, but she would pay $12,000 each month without health insurance. Her work also has an Early Intervention Program that helps HIV-positive employees with medical services, counseling and emotional support, health education, case management and risk reduction.
Regardless of their ability to pay.

"When I feel lazy and don’t want to take my meds I feel selfish because there are so many people out there in the world who can’t get medication," Hill says. "So, I try not to take my life for granted because I know I am really lucky."

For the most part, AIDS has not changed her life, Hill says. She gets her blood drawn every three months and takes two pills every night to maintain a low viral load and high Thymus cell count. T-cells are white blood cells that the immune system uses to fight infection. HIV-positive people lose their T-cells, rendering their bodies susceptible to sickness. A common cold can develop into a fatal illness.

What really changed Hill’s life was having her son, Avram, she says.

One year after they learned they were positive, Hill and her boyfriend found out she was pregnant. She started taking HIV medication that was safe for pregnant mothers after the first trimester to lower her transmission rate. Hill could have had a regular birth with HIV as long as her T-cell count was high and she was on medication, but her T-cells dropped dangerously low, forcing the doctors to perform a Cesarean section.

"There hasn’t been a child born in Washington State in 10 years that was positive," Hill says.

Avram has been tested every four months since his birth, and he is still negative.

A year after Avram’s birth, Hill was diagnosed with AIDS. It was initially difficult for her to say that she had AIDS because of the stigma related to having AIDS. Once she realized that it was just a matter of terminology, she says she felt better.

Usually, HIV takes up to 10 years to escalate into AIDS, Hill says. But, after her pregnancy dropped her T-cells dangerously low she was more susceptible.

The wild waves in Hill’s life still haven’t calmed. Avram is now five and has developmental disabilities, but so far, doctors haven’t diagnosed his disabilities. He just learned to walk and still is not talking or potty-trained. He has not figured out how to use utensils and just learned how to drink out of a regular glass.

"It’s so frustrating," Hill says. "All the tests always come back as normal and it’s hard when something’s wrong and no one can help you."

Avram has gone through various treatments with numerous specialists since he was one month old. Their next hope is the Children’s Developmental and Disabilities Center at the University of Washington, which specializes in Avram’s disabilities. Hill is still hopeful.

Avram’s father takes care of their son 50 percent of the time and loves his son more than what seems humanly possible, Hill says, the most important thing he can do. Avram has a little of his father in him, but Hill thinks she shares the most similarities with their son. Hill and Avram are both affectionate and easy-going. She says Avram is a happy child and has a good sense of humor about life.

Hill says Avram has a lot to teach her. He makes her less selfish. She says it helps her to be completely involved in something outside of herself. He teaches her patience. Hill says she understands how people could be impatient with him. He has temper tantrums and no one knows why. But you can’t take it out on him.

If Hill didn’t have Avram she would still be partying all the time, she says. He gave her direction and helped her to live the healthier lifestyle she needed.

"It’s not who I am," Hill says when asked how AIDS has changed her life. "I don’t want it to take over my life. I have two choices. I can live my life and be happy or sit around and be depressed. There are so many other things about me, and I don’t let this control me."

Hill has two quarters left at Western, but she’s not currently enrolled. She wants to finish her degree someday and might take Western classes online from Seattle. For now, she works at BABES Network YWCA as a peer counselor and the outreach coordinator. BABES provides services for women living with HIV and AIDS.

BABES has five employees, three of whom are HIV positive or have AIDS. They are all passionate about their work and enjoy their tight circle. Memos aren’t needed in this office; the five employees just spin around in their chairs and talk to each other.

Nicole Price, 32, is a peer counselor and event coordinator for BABES, is HIV positive. Price says the health department still tells patients they only need to be tested if they are at high risk.

"It’s really frustrating," Price says. "If you are having sex it should be the only requirement for getting tested. Period. Whatever."

An estimated 1,039,000 to 1,185,000 Americans are infected with HIV, epidemiologist for the Washington Health Department Tom Jaenicke says. A total of 15,991 HIV/AIDS cases were reported in Washington State in 10 years that was positive, Hill says.

People don’t think it will happen to them, Hill says. AIDS spreads when it’s preventable.

Couples need to be open and honest and get tested together, she says. No one can tell if someone is infected and a lot of people are and don’t know it. People are more worried about getting pregnant, Hill says, but worse scenarios are possible. Couples will do more to prevent pregnancy than to prevent sexually transmitted infections, she says.

"I haven’t done anything different than Kelly did," Hill’s boss, Sarah Benton says. "The only difference is I didn’t get it and Kelly did."

If people start taking HIV tests as a part of their annual exam, it can cut back on the spread of the virus and save lives. After all that she has experienced, Hill sits in the same corner seat of the Horseshoe Café, 6 years later — still alive and still fighting. ☛
Bellingham's 20-year Cold Case

Twenty years ago, someone disappeared. But nobody knows who. Lisa Harvey investigates Bellingham's most notorious cold case. Design by Terrence Nowicki.

Someone's missing, but no one seems to have missed him.

He had dark wavy hair, parted to the side so that a wisp swept across his deeply creased forehead. Large dark eyes juxtapose a beaky nose, settled between prominent cheekbones. His long upper lip protruded slightly over the lower, settled atop a strong square jaw line.

Or maybe he had short light hair, a smooth forehead, and deeply furrowed, arched eyebrows. Maybe his large ears matched an elongated nose.

Or maybe the missing person was a woman?
Come September 2007, 20 years will have passed since the discovery of a body in the No. 9 chimney at Bellingham’s Georgia Pacific West Inc.’s paper mill site. Although different theories have surfaced, including the postulation that the victim was female, no leads have brought police closer to solving the mystery. The remains of a person who must have had a family and a home seemingly popped out of nowhere. Two sketches act as reminders of what many view as one of Bellingham’s most well-known cold cases.

A forensic sketch artist at the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation drew the first sets of sketches in 1987. A Bellingham police officer, who had just completed a forensic artist course, drew the second set in 2000.

The 1987 sketches depict a man with long hair and Native American features, whereas the 2000 set depict a man with shorter hair and more bulbous features.

Orman Darby, 63, former public relations director for G-P, says speculation existed in 1987 that the remains had been those of someone of Native American heritage or descent.

“Hopefully someday, someone will recognize that drawing and know who it might be,” Bellingham police detective Al Jensen says.

While he was not involved in the initial investigation, Jensen, 53, has taken a special interest in following the case. Holding a thick white binder stuffed with G-P skeleton case documents, Jensen rarely has to look anything up. He nearly has the details of the case memorized.

“There has to be a family out there somewhere with questions,” Jensen says.

Although the case has faded from public thought, it persists as one of Bellingham’s biggest mysteries. Who was the G-P Skeleton? How did he or she die? Why has no one come forward missing a loved one, friend or co-worker? Why is the case unsolved?

## Details add to mystery

After an examination by the Whatcom County Medical Examiner, Dr. Robert Gibb, and personnel from the Bellingham Police Identification Unit, the victim was described as a 20- to 40-year-old male; the skeleton was likely male due to pelvic measurements. Officials estimated the body had been inside the chimney for a few days, according to a Bellingham Police press release dated Sept. 23, 1987.

He was between 5 feet 8 to 9 inches tall, and weighed somewhere between 130 and 155 pounds. The victim had small feet, probably wearing a size 8 shoe, and exhibited good dental work, including a number of fillings and evidence of a root canal.

Unfortunately, despite the presence of dental work, the victim’s records did not match any of those of missing people who fit similar descriptions, Jensen says.

Police checked missing persons records filed up to three years before the date the remains were discovered, and as the case progressed, three years after. Jensen says eventually all missing person leads were eliminated in the United States and Canada.

Furthermore, the body was found with no identifying possessions, says Jensen. No wallet, no pieces of identifying jewelry and no keys were found beside the skeleton. The only remnants found were jeans, the sole of a right shoe or boot and part of a Continental Airlines ticket or baggage claim slip. The remains didn’t provide the police any clues as to who the person was.

What’s even more unusual was how difficult it must have been for

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**Worker finds skeleton**

The story begins Sept. 20, 1987, when a worker at the G-P site noticed a spike in the temperature graphs for the chimney of the No. 9 boiler, Jensen says. Because it was unusual and possibly indicated a steam leak, the employee went to check the stack out. Lying at the bottom of the chimney atop metal pipes were a human’s skeletal remains.

Not exactly an everyday discovery.

According to facts listed on the Doe Network Web site, a volunteer organization that assists law enforcement agencies in solving cold cases concerning unexplained disappearances and unidentified victims, the pipes, which carried boiler exhaust-heated water, were 240 degrees. The air inside the chimney was 95 degrees, unless the boiler was running, when temperatures reached 370 degrees.

Although tissue remained, the skeleton was badly burned due to extreme temperatures in the chimney, Jensen says.

“I took pictures of it while it was still in the flue,” Darby says.

“It was most disturbing.”

Darby says the G-P community was shocked to discover such a horrific scene.

“It was like something had just dropped out of the blue,” he says.

No one could explain how or why the skeleton was in the chimney: the stack wasn’t normally checked. No one knew how long the body might have been there.

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*© RIGHT: The paper mill, as it once appeared.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF WHATCOM MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND ART
I remember going and touring the location," says Dean Kahn, 55, The Bellingham Herald neighbors editor. "It was weird; it struck me more when I toured the location."

Kahn reported the initial discovery of the body, but his name was not attributed on the article. He has written most of the articles since, and his last article on the case was published in November 2006, with a column in October 2006 surmising the case details of the last 19 years.

Kahn says he remembers the chimney being difficult to reach. The person had to climb a number of stairs inside the plant, and then make his way to the roof of the building.

"It would be quite the fluke if someone just stumbled on it," Kahn says. "Getting to the entry point would take some doing."

Jensen echoes Kahn's speculation. Although a metal door was present at the base of the stack, he says it took police two hours to pry it open, making it an unfeasible way for the person to have gotten in. Additionally, a medical examination yielded the presence of broken bones, indicating the body probably fell into the stack.

The unusual location of the body fueled speculation that the discovery was that of a murder or suicide victim. But who was the killer, if any, who died, and why?

**Questions remain unanswered**

Darby says the finding disturbed the plant's employees, who wondered how the incident could have happened.

"It was like walking into your back yard and finding a dead body on your deck," Darby says.

Jensen says the plant accounted for all of its employees, mostly through pay records and personal contact. When it was evident no one was missing, police and plant employees had few clues to the identity of the mystery skeleton. The mystery deepened when the skeleton failed to match any other missing person's reports from the region and beyond.

By 1993 the case became inactive.

**The case reopens**

Jensen says the case remained inactive until 2000, when an officer drew the second set of sketches.

Jensen received more leads on the case after the release of the new sketches, but none of them proved to be fruitful. In 2003, the remains were sent to the Washington State Patrol crime lab for DNA analysis. Jensen says he hoped the analysis might provide new avenues for solving the case. Unfortunately, the DNA analysis failed due to the extreme heat subjected to the skeleton; there wasn't any DNA left to test.

"When there was no DNA, that put an end to us," Jensen says.

The remains were cremated and put to rest, Jensen says. However, the police department still retains copies of all physical records involved.

When the Bellingham Police Department exhausted all leads in 2003, Jensen deactivated the case again. However, with the publication of Kahn's article in October 2006, Jensen has once again temporarily reactivated it.

The Doe Network obtained information regarding the G-P skeleton from The Bellingham Herald's coverage of the story and published the case on its Web site, Todd Matthews, Doe Network media representative says.

He says the Doe Network hasn't received tips concerning the case. Matthews says as of December 2006, the FBI National Crime Information Center has 110,484 missing persons, and 6,208 unidentified persons listed in the United States and Canada.

However, grisly mysteries, such as the unidentified skeleton, are not common in Bellingham.

"It's unusual," Jensen says. "It's something that doesn't happen a lot here in Bellingham."

Kahn also continues to follow the case, occasionally writing new stories on the subject.

"It's always been floating around in the back of my mind," he says.

Twenty years have produced no substantial leads, Jensen says. Although people have come forward with information, it hasn't materialized into any resolution, making the case as much a mystery today as it was in 1987.

"It's a topic of endless conjecture," Darby says.

Despite the odds, Jensen still seems hopeful the case will one day be resolved. Does he think he will ever solve the case?

Jensen smiles and says, "I would hope I can."

Maybe someday, someone will look at the drawings and see a loved one, an acquaintance or a familiar face and be able to close a case that has confounded the Bellingham community for two decades. Maybe someday we'll know exactly what he or she looked like, what they were doing at G-P and what they left behind. However, until that day, the G-P skeleton will remain Bellingham's own unsolved mystery.

If you have any information about this case please contact:

**BELLINGHAM POLICE**

**Detective A.L. Jensen – (360) 676-7683**

You may remain anonymous when submitting information.
Welcome to Fairhaven. A booming city in the late 1800s, Fairhaven’s rapid growth buckled just a few short years later. In 1903, Fairhaven combined with the cities of Sehome, Whatcom and Bellingham Bay to form the city of Bellingham. As a tourist destination, most Fairhaven visitors are enchanted by the unique shops and cheerful streets, but night in the ‘Haven is even more beautiful than during the day.

Photos by Erin Dewey
Design by Liz McNeil

b & d) The boardwalk and pier, some of which is built on original railroad pilings, is a popular destination for people interested in walking or biking.

c) Behind Skylark’s Hidden Café exists what owner Don White calls ‘an oasis from the city.’ More than 30,000 lights cover the tree which increases White’s electric bill by $100 each month.
a) Built in 1903, The Old Bank Building is owned by Ken Imus, the original visionary behind Fairhaven’s restoration in the 1970s.

e) Just one of the many wrought iron benches helping visitors enjoy the laid-back atmosphere of daily life in Fairhaven.
UP & n UP tials
Garlands and tiny white lights twinkle on the fringe of the stage at the World Famous Up & Up Tavern. Lime cleaning solution lingers in the air; the floor is spotless. Aside from a few jovial voices coming from barstools, the only sound is a trickling fountain inside a keg hanging from the ceiling.

The transformation of the tavern — well known to college students as a rowdy, nighttime watering hole — honors the wedding of Ryan Lemuiex, 31, and his fiancée of three years, Michelle Clifton, 30, who have been regulars at the Up & Up since their first date in April 2003.

A burly man wearing overalls and a gray-speckled beard puts a plastic bucket under the counter, keys jingling on his hip. Ian Relay is the owner of the Up & Up. He is also the minister of Lemuiex and Clifton's wedding in half an hour.

Laughter and conversations from the growing assembly gradually replace the gurgle from the fountain. The groom, wearing a white shirt, necktie and dark slacks, shifts his weight from foot to foot while talking with more casually dressed wedding-goers, some who wear jeans.

Up & Up employee and wedding guest Derek Jackman arrives wearing hiking boots and a black suit over a T-shirt with the tavern's white vulture emblem.

"It's Up & Up formal," Jackman proclaims.

Someone opens the backdoor and a large dog named Taku, who resembles a husky, sneaks through the wedge of light in the doorway, sniffing the floor and the hands of guests. Relay, who Lemuiex says was ordained on the Internet after the couple asked to have the wedding at the tavern, delivers a pint of beer to the groom. Black slacks replace Relay's overalls and a dark shirt, tie and red suspenders substitute his T-shirt.

Clifton says Lemuiex proposed to her in December 2004 at the Chrysalis Inn & Spa in Bellingham. Originally, the couple planned to marry on a paddleboat in New Orleans until Hurricane Katrina wiped out that dream, and Clifton and Lemuiex plotted a new location for the wedding, she says.

"Ryan mentioned jokingly that we should do it at the Up & Up," Clifton says.

The couple asked Relay, who said he would be honored, especially if he could perform the ceremony.

"He got ordained just for us," Clifton says.

Relay confidently runs through what he refers to as the "hand-off" of the bride with Lemuiex, who listens intently. While many couples rehearse weddings ahead of time, Lemuiex says he and Clifton did not.

"Why would we do that?" Lemuiex smiles and adds, "That's just not us."

Cameras flash. A sparkling disco ball spins slowly above the stage. A few guests shoot pool and others perch next to the fireplace where a tripod holds a video camera focused on the stage steps.

Finally, the bride — wearing a black floor-length gown and a red shawl around her shoulders — enters through the same backdoor as Taku. Clifton's gown laces up her back with white ribbon. She carries an arrangement of red and white roses and baby's breath tied with ribbons. Clifton says she chose the colors for the wedding from her dress.

"I didn't want a white dress," Clifton says, "I saw [the black dress] laced up the back and said, 'I have to try that one!'"

The glow from the fireplace and the chorus of guests compliment her; all eyes are on the bride and the atmosphere in the room feels complete since her arrival. Clifton poses for the camera with a female guest, showing off their matching black high heels.

"I was nervous this morning when I was finishing the flower arrangements," Clifton says. "But I relaxed once I saw people I know."

The bride mingles with guests while the groom steps out for a cigarette with friends.

"Beer, that's what I need," Relay says, sauntering behind the bar and filling a pint glass.

The bar is noisy with chatter while guests adjust patio chairs, brought inside as spares, around candlelit tables. Relay and Lemuiex confer under the garlands as Clifton waits near the back of the room to walk down the aisle with her father. The winter wedding is cozy in the tavern, and Clifton and her father make their way without music through the gathering of about 100 guests toward Lemuiex.

"We are gathered here today in this house of beer and lager," Relay says, and the crowd erupts with laughter.

His style is humorous and quick, but full of wisdom. Relay says friendship is the foundation of love, and marriage is more like a road trip than a destination.

Ryan and Michelle Lemuiex on their wedding night at The World Famous Up & Up Tavern. PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE LEMUIEX

"First and foremost, always be friends," Relay says. "Marriage is not a perfect couple that comes together, but an imperfect couple enjoying each others differences."

Five minutes later Clifton and Lemuiex say, "We do," and kiss. Boisterous applause and cheers from family and friends fill the tavern.

"[The ceremony] was better than I had hoped," Clifton says. "It was relaxing, everyone had fun, and everything went smoothly."

During the wedding planning, Clifton says she cut out everything she and her girlfriends disliked about traditional weddings — sitting through long ceremonies, sitting through long toasts, and lining up for the tossing of the bouquet.

Clifton says she and Lemuiex did not intend to have a first dance, until guests began asking the band about it.

"They made us do a dance," Clifton says, laughing with her husband. "I don't remember the song. We've never danced with each other before."

A friend of the couple, a chef, gave them a wedding cake, and friends who play in a band performed at the reception. The total cost of the wedding — after purchasing food, flowers and clothes — was $1,500, Clifton says.

— Jenny Leak

Design by Liz McNeil
Black fishnet stockings barely cover the exposed skin between an olive mini-skirt and a pair of Converse that match the Kool-Aid red highlights in Heather Davidson’s hair. Japanese-themed tattoos creep out beneath her short shirt sleeves, moving down to her elbows and ending with a pair of cherries at her wrist and the word ‘heathens...’ scrawled across the outside of her right forearm.

Trading the Converse for black Riedell skates with red wheels and laces, Davidson, who goes by the roller derby name ‘Lucinda Streets,’ puts on her knee, elbow and wrist guards for the Bellingham Roller Betties’ weekly Tuesday practice at Skagit Skate in Burlington.

“It is intimidating to get out there and put yourself on wheels,” Lucinda Streets says as she struggles to get a red metallic helmet over her two hair buns.

“We put our skills together to make shit happen. All of us hadn’t skated in God knows how long, but roller derby came along and now we’re skating all the time.”

- Nottie A. Saiwant

The Bellingham Roller Betties, an all-female flat-track roller derby league formed in 2006, is a nonprofit organization owned and operated by members of the league. Suzy Everson, or ‘Nottie A. Saiwant,’ is a Fairhaven student and one of the founding members of the Betties. She saw an article about women creating a roller derby league and wanted to do it too.

“A group of women got together and said, ‘We want to do roller derby,’ ” says Nottie A. Saiwant. Her short jean skirt and red fishnets contrast with the blue streaks in her light brown hair. “We put our skills
together to make shit happen. All of us hadn’t skated in God knows how long, but roller derby came along and now we’re skating all the time.”

Leo Seltzer, a cinema chain owner, combined dance marathons popular in 1932 with endurance racing and turned it into a competition he called roller derby. In 1935, Seltzer hosted the first Transcontinental Roller Derby, a race to roller skate 3,000 miles on a closed track. The teams consisted of two individuals. After 39 days of 11.5-hour skating shifts, Clarice Martin and Bernie McKay won the title, after only nine teams finished the race from the original 25.

In the years to follow, roller derby became more physical and underwent periods of demise and re-emergence before the 1980s and 1990s arrival of staged roller derby competitions called Roller Jam and RollerGames. In 2001, the all-female roller derby leagues started and have since multiplied across the country.

Although the Betties like to have nicknames for their roller derby persona and dress the roller derby part, they are quick to stress that the matches are not staged events.

*continued on next page*

Roller Betty Autumn Aticweapon also know as Autumn Shreve, waits to begin the next drill during practice.

PHOTO BY TAYLOR WILLIAMS
“Seeing women wearing short skirts and beating each other up is some guys’ fantasy,” says Lucinda Streets. “But it is important to know that it is not just a show. It is a lot of hard work forming this from the ground up as a grassroots organization. Our league is a rolling empire. We gain strength and camaraderie every time we get together.”

Lucinda Streets says she remembers the first day she went to league recruitment, Sept. 19, 2006, because it changed her life.

“First and foremost, it has taught me to play nice with other women,” Lucinda Streets says, laughing. “It has restored my confidence, not to mention the health benefits of getting off my butt!”

Helen Damnation, otherwise known as Tricia Duffy, 25, discovered the league through its MySpace page. She devotes most of her time to roller derby and likes the way everyone works toward a common goal, regardless of their lives outside the sport, she says.

“Before moving to Bellingham, I was homeless for four years,” Helen Damnation says. “I moved in with my brother and had to start from scratch. This is something that has really helped me. I moved here and suddenly I have 30 close girlfriends.”

Helen Damnation says her boyfriend calls himself a ‘derby widower’ because she is always busy with roller derby and the Betties, taking time away that he could be spending with her.

Sheeza Brickhouse, also known as, Katie Taylor at roller derby practice, held at Skagit Skate in Burlington.

PHOTO BY TAYLOR WILLIAMS

“I structure everything else around derby,” Helen Damnation says. “This is what I do. My energy is here.”

Although the Bellingham Roller Betties are one league with more than 30 members, eventually they would like to break into teams similar to their ‘roll-models’, Seattle’s league, the Rat City Rollergirls. Rat City consists of five teams including the Derby Liberation Front, whose motto is ‘Smash the State, Learn to Skate,’ and the Sockit Wenches who dress like vintage hot rod mechanics. Each team chooses its own name, theme and attire. The Betties also hope to create a travel team, with players drawn from the entire league, inviting other teams to play and travel elsewhere for games and tournaments.

No matter what happens to the league in the future, it is obvious that roller derby is more than just a sport to the women involved.

“It makes me feel strong and fearless, like I can do whatever I set my mind to,” says Nottie A. Saiwant.

“Plus,” she says laughing, “I get to knock bitches down.” — Erin Dewey

Design by Taylor Williams

Do you have what it takes to be a Betty?

Take this simple quiz to find out...

- Are you 18 years or older?
- Are you willing to commit up to three evenings a week to become a derby queen?
- Can you beg, borrow or earn the money to buy your own equipment?
- When at the grocery store, do you find yourself dreaming of ramming your cart into that rude woman next to you?
- Have you ever worn roller skates to a location not intended for roller skates?
- Do your daytime activities require you to be “nice” to people all day?
- Can you string together seven naughty words into a cohesive thought?
- Have you watched roller derby and thought, “I need to do that?”

If you answered “yes” to the first three, you’ve got what it takes to be a Betty. “Yes” to any of the others and you get bonus points...
i dumped a girl in high school because she was cutting into my video game time. It was perhaps the most difficult decision in my life: should I spend my hard-earned money on dates and gifts or should I buy a Playstation 2 and a game where I could shoot zombies? The choice was tough, but inevitably, I could make only one possible conclusion.

I detest zombies.

My sordid love affair with the gaming medium began at the tender age of four. Much like today, I was a simple child and was easily seduced by the bright flashing lights and the boops and beeps of the ground-breaking 8-bit sound. This was at an age when I first met Mario: a mustachioed do-gooder in the guise of a mushroom-popping Italian stereotype. Mamma Mia! At my naïve age, Mario played the Virgil to my Dante. Together, we embarked on a digital journey that spanning the years has cost me a plethora of brain cells, a slew of missed opportunities and countless hours, though I have maintained a trim, near Adonis-physique. Go figure.

Unfortunately, the world is not heavily populated by people of the same extremely awesome rationale as me. Believe it or not, a population, aka “crybabies,” disparage the sacred art of video games. All the things I relish about the medium — the encouragement of sloth, the ability to physically turn your brain off, the technological advances that allow a player to see a head explode in fully-rendered, photo-realistic 3D — opponents of games think are not heaven-sent! According to people of an alleged greater es teem than I, people like Sen. Joseph Lieberman and Florida attorney Jack Thompson, video games are the current pariah that is turning American children into raving sociopaths and damning society as we know it.

Well, actually, I think games are in the middle of the, “what’s damning society” spectrum, probably squeezed somewhere in-between gay marriage and failing to wash your hands before dinner. But I digress.

The Columbine school shooting got the, “Let’s blame video games and other media instead of taking personal responsibility” ball rolling back in 1999 when the popular computer game “DOOM” was pegged as the murder simulator that trained killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold.

Now, I first played “DOOM” when I was age nine. Regard less of how many times I beat it and how many zombies and demons from hell I dispatched with my mighty cache of weapons, if I was put in a scenario in which I was handed a gun and told to kill, I would probably make a mess in my pants. It’s not a video game that can cause a person to kill so easily — it’s a screw in the old brain that becomes a little loose.

My big beef with the gaming opposition is it makes gamers out to be easily manipulated, stupid sheep who are in no way responsible for their actions. I will readily admit that I’m pretty dumb, but I still know the difference between what’s right and what’s wrong.

Many moons have passed since my first rendezvous with games and I think I have become at least a smidgen wiser. I realize that as much as I love video games, they do have problems. Not to say games are the sole source of said problems, but I’d be foolish to say they are not a contributor.

Exhibit A: my overweight friend who fears the outside and would rather live in a fantasy world than face the real one.

Exhibit B: my cousin who has relied on video games as an escape for so long that he is unable to maintain a conversation without mentioning games or whipping out his newest portable gaming system.

Like all vices and virtues, gaming must come in moderation. Thank God my parents had the sense to hide the game controllers during the school week and forced me into Little League. Thank any god my folks had the decency to force me to make social interactions. I may have complained then, but at least now I actually have friends in the real world. My friend and cousin did not have the same guidance, and though video games may not have been the direct cause of their problems, they certainly aren’t helping them.

I will never blame games for the mistakes I have made in my life. It isn’t Mario’s fault I procrastinated on writing this editorial; it’s mine for being incredibly lazy. And as much as I loath to admit, it’s not the Playstation 2’s fault that I broke up with my high school girlfriend, causing her to seek greener pastures in the loving arms of another woman. That was all me, and frankly, I don’t plan on changing for quite a while.

I still detest zombies.

—Jon Brandenburg

Design by Terrence Nowicki
IN AN APARTMENT in the York neighborhood, five women gather to outline their strategy. Their mission is to educate, build and celebrate a local network of creative women. The five friends, who have known each other for years, are bursting with enthusiasm for their project.

“I love these women!” Western alumna Sarah Kerber says with a smile that never really leaves her face. The other women echo her sentiment.

They call themselves the “Grrrl Group,” though by definition these girls are women. Together for a prepublication planning meeting, the women are hardly able to contain their excitement about *Femeninete*, the zine they produce.

A *zine* is a self-published magazine concerning any subject its creators choose. The most important thing is that the publication is done purely out of passion, Sarah Kerber says.

“The only reason we’re doing it is because we think we can,” Western junior Breanne Gearheart says. “Not because someone told us we could.”

The women formed the group in December 2005, and published their first issue in August 2006. The issue contained a celebration of masturbation, a story about eating vegan and other articles focused on women’s experiences, including racial identity and sexual assault. The second issue featured a symposium for women to share how their body perceptions had affected their lives, a letter to Planned Parenthood urging the organization to create a more inclusive environment for lesbian and bisexual women and another on how sex for fun could save the world.

Besides text, the zine features visual images. Artwork ranges from women’s drawings of their bodies to a picture of Frida Kahlo that illustrates a short profile of the feminist artist. The profile was part of a regular column, “Herstory,” that the zine features to recognize important components of the women’s movement throughout history, Sarah Kerber says.

“So many of our contributors just have some form of expression hidden in their notebooks or journals,” Fairhaven senior Misty Fall says. “We have an open forum for them.”
Gearheart says she has seen other local zines, but none that focus specifically on women’s empowerment.

“I just came up with the idea and I got so excited I called all my closest girlfriends and they were like screaming through the phone,” Western alumna Eve Kerber says. “We’d all reached a place in our lives where we needed some kind of an outlet.”

The group felt the community needed a local publication concerning women, and they decided to do something about it, Eve Kerber says.

“I heard stories of sexual abuse and violation, of women being victims of the culture around us,” Eve Kerber says. “I heard so many stories around me of similar experiences with mine, either positive or negative, that we all kept a secret.”

The zine’s articles provide women a chance to relate to other women, freeing them from the idea they are somehow different from the social norm, Eve Kerber says.

Femeninite is free to interested community members. The Grrrl Group pays for the printing costs, she says.

“We put this out on our own buck and therefore we don’t have any sponsors we’re accountable to,” Fall says. “It’s pure expression with no limits but the ones we agree upon together and that allows a wonderful, free form of expression.”

Taking advantage of their freedom to write about controversial subjects, the women published the first issue with a theme of “SelfLove” in August 2006.

“We distributed the Selflove issue at a bar we went to and everyone was talking about masturbation,” Sarah Kerber says. “One of our goals is creating a sense of connection to people you know and others you don’t.”

The next issue’s theme was “Bodyhealth,” and after their special erotic issue they will do a home-themed issue, Eve Kerber says.

“Our idea behind the themes was to go on a journey with ourselves and invite the community to go with us, so we started from within and we are taking it step by step outwards,” Eve Kerber says.

The erotic issue came out mid-February to coincide with Valentine’s Day and Western’s “V-Week,” a week dedicated to preventing violence against women. Unlike the regular issues, which are free, this fund-raising issue costs $10, or $8 for the zine’s subscribers. The women sold it themselves around campus during “V-Week.” It also is available at Video Extreme, The Newstand, Babes in Toyland in Seattle or by mail order.

“The money raised from the erotic issue, beyond its printing costs, is going to be used to support the printing costs of the zines we provide for free,” Sarah Kerber says. “It’s the only local erotic publication we know of.”

Although being an “erotic woman” still can be a social taboo, eroticism is an important facet of femininity, Gearheart says.

“For me, how I feel in my woman’s body is pretty erotic,” Whatcom Community College student Nikki Romick says. “And I’m cool with that.”

Sometimes women in the community feel like they are alone or alienated from others, which can be disempowering, Romick says. One of the group’s main goals is to give women back the sense of power by showing that anybody can make their own alternative to the mainstream media, she says.

“For me, it was like I had all these really interesting ideas, feelings and internal dialogue to live with, and I had to get this out of me,”

[continued on next page]
Gearheart says. “The zine is an uncensored venue to do that where I don’t have to please a professor or anyone so I can say whatever I want.”

Managed, deliberate chaos is how the group refers to their publication process, Gearheart says. Creation of an unbridled community space to provide an opportunity to critique the mainstream media by participating in an alternative to it is one part of the women’s mission statement for their zine.

While the group works to make their zine part of the local community, the publication also provides the busy women a chance to spend time with each other.

“We push each other and feed off each other,” Romick says. “When we make a decision, it’s as a group. There’s no hierarchy.”

Some zine-makers do all their layout with the cut-and-paste method, but the Grrrl Group plugs everything into the pages with Adobe InDesign, the digital graphic design program used most commonly in professional publications. They taught themselves how to use the software.

“We’ve been learning so much about design,” Eve Kerber says. “It is absolutely a homemade zine, even though it is done in a design format. It is five of us up at 2 a.m. with rice and beans from the taco truck.”

But the women don’t want the zine to just be about what they have to say. They are eager for submissions from anyone who is “feminine-friendly,” man or woman.

“We had the idea that it wouldn’t just be us girls, that it’d be something that grows,” Gearheart says. “We wanted to create a space where people can say something and be heard to promote the idea of togetherness and solidarity.”

Bringing the community together with the power of expression can be liberating. The list of names of people who have submitted their work to the publications reflects Femeninetê’s success reaching feminists in the community. The five women who started the zine could just rest on their laurels, satisfied that they accomplished their goal, but instead they plan to keep addressing important topics in future issues.
Backcountry Heroes

Mountain sport enthusiasts love the thrill and challenge of climbing and hiking — until something goes wrong. Codi Hamblin meets the brave volunteers who save their lives. Photos by Michelle Rybolt. Design by Taylor Williams.

The only light coming from the cold garage is the flickering of tea-lights representing the life of the stranded rock climber rescuers are attempting to save. Crouched and huddled together are four small clusters of men and women dressed in puffy down jackets and wool hats. Fumbling over blue, green and red climbing ropes, each group attempts to quickly assemble a rope system to lower the climber from a cliff. The team to first assemble their rescue line with the candle remaining lit receives a box of homemade brownies.

This scenario is no ordinary rescue mission for Bellingham Mountain Rescue volunteers, but is one of many training sessions the crew faces to prepare for the rescues that may lie ahead. Each year, thousands of people venture into the backcountry and climb the peaks of the North Cascades, but not everyone makes it back unharmed. That's when the skills and energy from mountain rescue volunteers are vital.

“We live in a beautiful area to recreate in, and people come from all over the country to see it,” says Lynn Dayton, who has volunteered since 1967. “You can call it an attractive nuisance.”

Bellingham Mountain Rescue formed in 1955 after back-to-back accidents occurred on Mount Shuksan, which encouraged a rescue team to form and help save the climbers from both accidents, Dayton says. The team organized to create Whatcom County’s mountain rescue squad, and today is part of the Mountain Rescue Association, a national organization serving as a resource for other search and rescue teams in the United States.

Mountain rescue volunteers respond to various scenarios in backcountry terrain, says Abby Gorham, who has volunteered since 1972. Most missions involve rescuing lost or injured hikers and mountain climbers in the wilderness and in alpine terrain.

Being called to a rescue is unpredictable, says Harry Patz, a volunteer since 1972. The...
busiest months are April through September, which is the peak season for trail hiking and mountain climbing. Volunteers respond to calls in the winter as well, which may include snowmobilers, backcountry skiers and snowboarders, and ice climbers.

A rescue mission begins when someone in need of help in the wilderness calls 911. The call is then transferred to the Whatcom County Sheriff’s Office, Gorham says. The volunteers for this mountain rescue unit work with two search and rescue coordinators from the sheriff’s office, who then transfer the call to search and rescue, Gorham says. Search and rescue contacts Gorham, Patz or Dayton, who are the operations leaders for the Bellingham unit and are responsible for contacting and organizing volunteers.

Operations leaders run the show when responding to a mission, Gorham says. They retrieve the rescue team’s truck from the search and rescue building and provide each team with directions and information that will help team leaders with their decision-making.

When riding in the truck out to the mission, Gorham says she tries to create a plan of action: Who will be the medic? Who will be in charge of rigging the rope? What skills do volunteers have necessary for this rescue?

Western senior Becca Nelson, a second-year volunteer, responded to her first rescue mission last September. She was excited to finally participate, she says, and was nervous because she didn’t know what to expect.

“I thought, ‘Sweet, this is my chance,’ ” Nelson says as her eyes widen and a smile spreads across her face. “The first thing that went through my mind was, am I qualified for this mission?”

Prior to attending the rescue she says she had different ideas about what to expect, but was surprised to find the event wasn’t as stressful as she anticipated. Nelson says she was unsure how she could help since the rescue was on glaciated terrain, and she has limited experience traveling quickly across glaciers. She helped carry water and ropes up to volunteers who were up on the glacier for most of the night rescuing a climber from a crevasse, and she carried packs down the mountain for those volunteers exhausted from the mission.

Rescues are not only physically exhausting, but mentally exhausting, Nelson says. Participating in the mission made her anxious for future rescues.

“T’m not on this planet to serve myself,” Nelson says. “It [Earth] is a lot bigger than that, and I want to have a way to give back.”

Western junior Brent Smith, another second-year volunteer, says weather is one of the biggest challenges during a mission. Sometimes the rain will pour as volunteers are quickly traveling across icy glaciers, which become more slippery from rain. He says spending time in various weather conditions helped prepare him for the conditions he faces during a mission.

“Sometimes the challenge is trying to keep yourself and the rest of the rescue team safe,” Smith says. “It’s not only about the risks of the mission, but also the risks of the weather.”

Western students Becca Nelson and Brent Smith pose with the rescue line they assembled at a Bellingham Mountain Rescue meeting.
the party safe out of harms way,” Smith says.
Volunteering as a student requires time management, Smith says. Responding to a mission can be a tough decision because he may have a test the next day and the rescue can last for three. Nelson says she turned down a request because she had too much schoolwork to leave behind.
“Volunteers want you to try and be involved as much as you can, but they are not going to look down at you if you can’t make it,” she says.

Dayton says because volunteers receive more missions in the summer they always need to have a pack prepared with the necessary equipment during this season, including an extra duffle bag of gear in case the rescue lasts several days. He usually carpools to work, but in the summer he drives alone with his pack and equipment so he can quickly respond to a mission should one occur, Dayton says.
Responding to a rescue is an emotional rollercoaster because so much is happening, Dayton says. A mission is like trying to fit pieces of a puzzle together, and the challenge is collecting as much information as possible in order to make the necessary decisions, he says.
“As you are getting more information, your anxiety and adrenaline increases,” Dayton says.
Missions can last from a few hours to several days. Sometimes volunteers cannot participate from start to finish, Dayton says. He once worked through an entire mission, which lasted several hours, searching for three young children who had wandered from their parents’ vehicle.
“I was there to see the parents and kids reunite,” he says. “To see the anxiety of the parents relieved, that was really worth seeing.”

The 25 volunteers improve their mountaineering skills by attending at least 11 training sessions each year to prepare for rescue missions.
“We use training to build skill and team camaraderie,” he says.
A single volunteer spends approximately 50 to 100 hours of their time preparing and attending rescues every year, Dayton says. He can’t imagine not using his mountain rescue skills to save somebody lost or injured in the wilderness. But as a mountain rescue volunteer he needs his family’s support, sometimes at their expense, he says.
“I was called away for 24 hours on my daughter’s first birthday,” Dayton says. “[My wife and daughter] still haven’t forgotten that.”

Most of the volunteers spend their free time enjoying the outdoors, and can always be found recreating on Mount Baker. One of the reasons he joined mountain rescue, aside from helping others, was to meet outdoor enthusiasts he can trust with his life on the mountain.
“[Volunteers] are really serious about what they do, and they have a lot of fun with what they do,” Smith says.

Having completed their training, one group hollers after successfully tying their rescue line. The candle glows, illuminating their faces. The fluorescent lights are flicked on, revealing a garage that houses several ambulance-like rescue trucks and a World War II amphibious troop vehicle. Old oil leak puddles dabble the cold cement floor, and tall shelves filled with rescue gear line the back wall.
A volunteer distributes brownies to the winning group. As they indulge in their chocolate prize the other volunteers abandon their own projects to see how the team assembled their mainline. In a real-life scenario it’s not the brownies, but the rewarding satisfaction of helping another. 🍫
A faint glow reflects off the gold exotic-dance poles and into the mirrored wall that captures Yolanda Heying reaching her dense shoulders forward. Her fingers graze the pale wood floor as her curled upper body slowly waves away from her powerful thighs that fold onto her feet. The fluid stretch of her toned back resembles an awakening lioness. Incense smoke drifts over a white feather boa draped on a slender bamboo lamp. Students emulate Heying’s movements with their bodies, in sync with voices of the African savannah and a calm R&B rhythm that spill from speakers above.

Welcome to the “Sexy Flexy” class at Fitness Exotica, where women practice sensual movement and increase flexibility. Heying, 43, opened the studio in August 2006 and offers classes designed to help women get fit in a non-traditional way, she says.

“It’s all about getting in touch with your sensual side,” Heying says. “…Getting in touch with your body. Touching. Feeling.”

Four years before opening her own studio, a friend introduced Heying, a champion bodybuilder and former gymnast, to a pole dancing class at Crunch Gym in Los Angeles.

“(Heying) believes in what she does,” says Christie Rainer, 37, a Western alumna who teaches the “Bootlicious Boogie” class at Fitness Exotica. “Sometimes fitness instructors (teach) as a side job or hobby. Her whole life is testimony to fitness.”

Heying’s 20-year career in bodybuilding competitions ended in 2005. A torn Achilles tendon forced her into a knee-length cast for almost three months and caused her to seek a new venture. She remembered pole dancing in Los Angeles and researched the possibility of opening a studio in Bellingham, where she and her husband have lived for 12 years.

Heying devoted every weekend for three months to classes at Tantra Fitness in Vancouver, British Columbia to earn her pole dance and cardio striptease certification.

In May 2006, she transformed an old print shop into Fitness Exotica, converting the 700-square-foot space to include eight poles and a mirrored wall.

Now, Heying spends her days as a personal trainer at Gold’s Gym and her nights at the studio. She teaches cardio striptease, pole dancing, “Sexy Flexy” and “Booty Camp,” plus a free “Teaser Class” that incorporates portions of each class for potential students to try out on Saturday mornings. Her clientele ranges from Western students to middle-aged women.

“(Heying) is great,” Bellingham resident Sarah Marlow, 24, says. “She worked with me over and over until I got the step down. She wouldn’t say ‘Oh, you didn’t get it, too bad’ and keep going. (Other aerobics instructors) are just at the front of the class and just teaching away and not worrying if people are keeping up or not.”

Marlow has tried Curves, yoga and other aerobics classes, but got bored with the repetitive routines, she says. She initially thought the Fitness Exotica classes would embarrass her, but says she realized that everyone else was learning and making mistakes too.

“Once we’re all going you start focusing on yourself and no one else,” Heying says. “It’s...
about letting go of inhibitions.”

During a “Bootylicious Boogie” class, Rainer’s energetic instructions bounce off the peach walls. Her voice rises above the pumping beats as if a tiny microphone were tucked under the royal blue bandana that hides her cropped brown curls.

Rainer thrusts her open palms toward the front mirror, as though challenging her own image to a dance-off. While half of the class concentrates on the next step, others spring effortlessly off the floor.

Western junior Gemma Santa Maria started classes at Fitness Exotica in January after she became frustrated with Western’s early morning and crowded fitness classes, she says. In her first two weeks, she attended approximately 10 classes at the studio.

“At first I was really giggly and now I’m like, ‘whatever,’” Santa Maria says. “It’s just a movement. The reason people work out is to get to know their body.”

Heying says no actual stripping takes place, and though she welcomes male pole dancers for private party rentals, she restricts men from attending group classes. She wants women to feel comfortable rolling their hips or bending over without worrying about who’s watching, she says.

“It really makes you feel good and makes you feel sexy, which is something every woman needs to feel,” Marlow says.

After an hour of fist pumping and booty shaking, Rainer thanks the class and flips off the music. As she turns to pull her baby-blue sweatshirt back on, two women can’t help but practice moves from a previous class. They grab a pole and strut halfway around, stopping to slide their backs down the sturdy metal. If they follow Heying’s example, someday they’ll swing their bodies effortlessly around the 8.5-foot post, with legs poised, arms taut and wearing a proud smile.

— Deanna Holmquist

Design by Liz McNeil
A massive castle-like building, the Washington National Guard Armory, looms over Boulevard Park. The windows of this deserted fortress face west over Bellingham Bay, as they have for nearly a century. Its gray formidable exterior, constructed of local Chuckanut sandstone, is weathered yet strong, giving it the feel of an old stalwart general, stationed high on the bluff against North State Street to keep watch over the water.

However, the seemingly isolated and obscure building drew attention in 2006 when it landed on the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation’s list of 10 most endangered properties. The Trust, a statewide non-profit, works to maintain community heritage through the preservation of historic landmarks, says the Trust’s Board Member and Bellingham City Planning official Katie Franks.

Now nearly forgotten, this building once flourished in the community. It was built by the Washington National Guard in 1910 to serve as a military training station, Western Washington University’s Property Manager Doug Forhan says. The National Guard used the armory primarily for marching drills and rifle practice, but the location of the building was also an asset for keeping an eye on the navigable waters of Bellingham Bay, states a report prepared by the Washington Trust for Endangered Buildings.

The armory functioned in this capacity until the end of WWII, when the National Guard’s need for a military training site became obsolete, Forhan says. The armory was converted to a roller skating rink in 1953. The rink, known as Mead’s Rolladium, was named for its managers, Gladys and Ray Mead. The National Guard sold the building and surrounding property to Western Washington University in 1972 for $1, Forhan says.

Despite the change in ownership the Meads continued to manage the Rolladium, which had become a popular hangout for the high school crowd, Forhan says.

“I think people probably had their first kiss there,” Forhan says. “I think people held hands there with that special someone. I think people skated away many an afternoon in that old armory.”

Water damage forced the Rolladium to close in 1989. Today, the armory is used for storage, Forhan says. Old desks, tables and chairs retire to the main floor of the building along with the Western theatre department’s scene-shop props collecting dust in an area that was once the drill hall for the National Guard.

**The Armory was built to serve as a military training station and used for marching drills, rifle practice and monitoring Bellingham Bay.**

PHOTOS BY LINCOLN SMITH
“Imagine the biggest attic you have ever seen,” Forhan says, “That’s what the armory is like inside right now.”

The armory is now suited for little more than a large storage building, Forhan says. The structural damage sustained by the building due to water leakage makes it unsafe for daily use without renovations to make it more sound, Forhan says.

Because of its prime bay-view location and multi-family zoning, the property is a target for developers wanting to tear down the armory and build condominiums or apartment complexes in its place, Forhan says.

This kind of development is exactly what the Trust is trying to prevent, Washington Trust’s Cathy Wickwire says. By preserving historical landmarks, a community can maintain a sense of history and a sense of place, Wickwire says. Restoring landmarks contributes to economic development in a way that still incorporates integrity. The building can still be preserved and used, Wickwire says.

“People take it for granted that these buildings are always going to be there,” Wickwire says. “Then they are shocked when they learn that no, [that building] is not protected in any way, and it gets torn down.”

The Trust aims to help owners of historically important buildings make decisions about the building’s future by suggesting possible options for preserving them, Wickwire says.

“It’s not like we are going to sweep in like white knights and say, ‘Here’s how to save everything.’ ” Wickwire says. “We just bring attention to the building and help people decide what they want to do.”

Western definitely sees the armory’s value and has made a collaborative effort to try and find a use for it that will maintain its important local history, Wickwire says.

Forhan says no definitive plans have been made for the property yet, but it is on Western’s agenda in the next few years. Western wants to be a good steward of this building, he says. With other on-campus buildings needing attention and funding, the sale or restoration of the armory has taken a back seat.

Western is not in the market to give the building up yet, says Forhan, but if they do, the Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the Washington Trust, will look for alternatives that honor the historic integrity of this landmark.

“How is there value in history?” Forhan says. “Yes. Is there value in architecture? Yes. We want to leave a nice legacy for this community.”

— Lindsay Budzier

Design by Liz McNeil