

# Come home to Langley for the holidays

2007 holiday season will be very different from last year for Whidbey merchants

By Carolyn Browne Tamler

**THE 2006 HOLIDAY** season for merchants in Langley will be remembered for its numerous debilitating power outages, the loss of thousands of dollars' worth of perishable inventories and considerable financial hardship on most of the businesses in town.

Mary-Elizabeth Rosenberg, co-owner with her husband of Mike's Place Family Restaurant & Creamery in downtown Langley, remembers encouraging her fellow merchants to go forward: "Let's not cry any more. Let's do something!"

Her rallying cry resounded not only with the local business community but with the larger community of South Whidbey. All came together to create a very special and different holiday season for 2007. Rosenberg spearheaded the planning committee, and Kim Tiller, owner of Whidbey Soap Company, came up with the theme: Come Home to Langley for the Holidays.

The concept was to create a month-long event to increase business during the off-peak season with two major goals: bringing more holiday shoppers to Langley during the month of December, and encouraging residents to shop locally. Rosenberg notes, "The spirit of the event has been amazing! People were looking for something positive on which to focus their energies, and the cooperative teamwork of this project has been exceptional."

## VOLUNTEERS STEP FORWARD

The planning committee sought ideas, support and energy from everyone in the community. Rosenberg says, "No one who was approached for help turned us down." The breadth of involvement from community leaders of this committee – from bank managers to business owners – was key to bringing the plans to fruition.

The "Christmas Masterminds," as the group calls themselves, met regularly with electricians, city planners, the city administrator and other interested members of the community to ensure that all of the tasks would be accomplished. The event combined the energies of students in the South Whidbey School District, community organizations, merchants, residents, theater production companies, banks, charitable groups and professional businesses. Nearly everyone became part of the transformation of the town.

Finding sponsors was no problem. Some of the major supporters who donated money, materials and physical goods included: Puget Sound Energy,



Langley merchants are betting that a new holiday shopping program, including festive decor throughout downtown, will bring a crowd to join this solitary fellow.

Molly Swope with Windermere Real Estate, Lumberman's, Fred Meyer, SYSCO and Food Services of America (FSA) food distributors, Wells Fargo, Whidbey Telecom, Frontier Lumber, Village Pizzeria, Bruce Bell Landscaping, Northwest Public Relations and Whidbey Island Bank.

Puget Sound Energy donated 25 fresh trees that were cut by Bruce Bell Landscaping, and placed around town under the direction of Kay Lagerquist. FSA provided dinner for the holiday dance after the tree lighting and all of the hot chocolate and hot cider for the town from Thanksgiving weekend to Christmas. Bayview School did video recordings of the preparations and journalized the event with photographs.

The spirit of the holiday season was demonstrated in many ways in Langley. In July, Kim Tiller, who had been a great source of creativity and energy, suffered three strokes and had surgery in October at the Stanford Medical Hospital. Several Langley merchants decorated her shop while she was recovering and assisted other storeowners who needed help getting

their shops ready for the holidays.

One of the most original ideas that utilized the talents of many different members of the community was the creation of special gift boxes that were placed around downtown Langley. Students from the middle and high school constructed and gift-wrapped 30 boxes that were placed in different locations throughout downtown. Underneath each box was the name of a merchant, "Happy Holidays from (Name of business)." Each "gift" was labeled on top with a name of some of the real gifts of life including such invaluable treasures as: "Love," "Tolerance," "Compassion," "Peace," "Wisdom," "Health," "Perseverance" and "Joy."

#### MONTH OF CELEBRATIONS

All of the preparations culminated on Nov. 24 with "The Lighting of Langley" and Langley's sculptural tree in Langley Park. The town was lit with big, colorful lights; strings of lights hung across the street; icicle lights,

garlands and ribbons were everywhere; all the public buildings were lit. A Candy Cane Lane was created through Frick Lane continuing across Second Street through Langley Village, with full high arches of white and red icicle lights with huge lit candy canes.

Special "rein-pacas" accompanied Santa's sleigh to the tree lighting ceremony. To the experienced eye, they were alpacas from the Inca Pride 4-H Club dressed in costume and topped with antlers.

The centerpiece of Langley Park was a sculptural tree created by local artist Kathleen Devaney located over a labyrinth located in the park and decorated with more than 200 yards of live pine bough garland. Both Langley's current Mayor Neil Colburn and Mayor-elect Paul Samuelson were on hand to flip the switch that turned on the lights that local residents and business owners had been putting up for weeks.

Just in case a power outage occurs again, five generators were available for distribution to keep things bright and

colorful.

To kick off the holiday shopping season the Saturday after Thanksgiving, Langley hosted its first downtown Christmas parade. Langley businesses created an "Alive after Five" event for Dec. 1, with businesses open until 8 p.m., giving out special discounts and promotions for shoppers. On Sunday, Dec. 2, the Langley Chamber hosted its 14th annual Tour and Taste of South Whidbey Lodgings.

Throughout December, activities for all ages are continuing. On the weekends, children can be photographed with Santa at his workshop. Also for kids, One Angel Place Chocolate Bar owner Mona Neubauer spends her Sunday afternoons with a crew of junior bakers in her shop making and decorating holiday cookies and gingerbread houses.

A special Langley Farmers Market, operated by the Bayview Farmers Market, is open every Saturday, from noon to 5 p.m. adjacent to City Hall.

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