SPECIAL FOCUS: BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

E-waste: Appearing now at an office near you

Local organization working to alleviate impact of toxic discarded electronics

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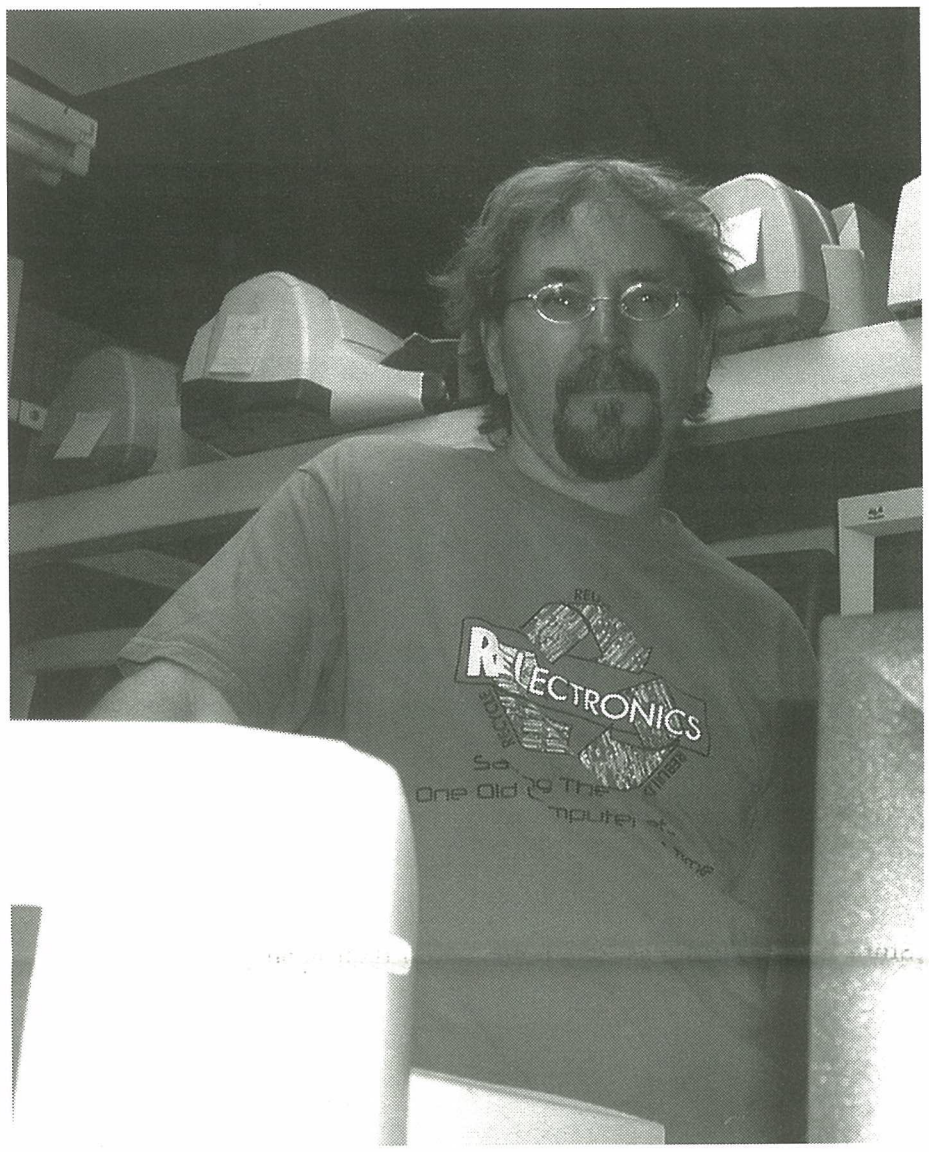

RE Lectronics Program Manager Greg Waters, pictured above, said local businesses generate the largest volume of local e-waste — which means companies need to be extra diligent when it comes to recycling responsibly. RE Lectronics accepts most unwanted electronic equipment and either reuses it, rebuilds it or recycles it.

It is interesting that Greg Waters describes the scene — one including stacks of microwave ovens, computer monitors and various electronic stock — as a "triage."

After all, the term is usually used in the context of a hospital setting, where triage refers to a system used by emergency or medical personnel to prioritize medical resources when the number of injured exceeds the medical provisions at hand.

Considering that Waters, program manager for RE Lectronics — a volunteer-based program that works to either reuse, rebuild or recycle discarded electronic equipment in Whatcom County — is the lone paid employee with the organization, it is no surprise he likens the environment to an overburdened hospital. In this atmosphere, however, the patients are a mosaic of electronic equipment brought to the facility by Whatcom County residents and businesses unburdening themselves of workplace relics.

He is literally man against the machines. However, on this day, he is not alone.

In a couple of side rooms neighboring the "triage" are about a half-dozen volunteers, each of them plugging away on various projects. Some are cutting wires and cords, readying them for proper recycling, while others are dissecting computer hard drives, and examining if the machines are good candidates for rebuilding. Machinery is divided into usable, individual parts, such as metals, plastics, wires, and aluminums, and then either reused as parts in refurbished computers or sent to the appropriate recycler.

"It's quite a process," he said. "Hopefully, we can then put them up for sale for a really discounted price. We figure that the best way to recycle is to reuse."

This buzz of activity is par for the course, considering the scope of the program. Each year of its existence, RE Lectronics has grown acutely. When it was established in 2004, Waters said the outfit recycled approximately 20,000 pounds of electronic waste. The following year, that number jumped to 70,000 pounds, and by the end of this year, he said he expected RE Lectronics to accumulate and recycle 115,000 pounds — not to mention an additional 10,000 to 15,000 pounds of equipment suitable for reuse.

"If you are using electronics, you are either going to be part of the problem or part of the solution."

In 2005, program laborers tested and assembled more than 100 computers, monitors and televisions that were sold from The RE Store on Holly Street, where the program is based. As the backbone of the program, volunteers clocked more than 1,500 volunteer hours during the year. In 2006, volunteers are averaging about 300 hours per month, Waters said.

"If you are using electronics, you are either going to be part of the problem or part of the solution," said Waters, who started as program manager earlier this spring. For businesses — companies that are often stocked with desktop computers and other heavy electronic equipment — the issue of what to do with broken down or obsolete machinery can take on an even more significant meaning.

Exporting toxins on a massive scale

Electronic equipment, as defined by the International Association of Electronics Recyclers (IAER), "is a product or apparatus that has its primary functions provided by electronics circuitry and components."

For companies, that means everything from computers, scanners and copiers, to telephones, X-ray machines and cell phones — as well as a wide range in between.

According to the IAER — a trade association for the electronics recycling industry — approximately three billion pieces of consumer electronics will be scrapped by 2010 around the world. Of the electronics collected for recycling in the United States, the group estimates that more than 50 percent of that amount is shipped overseas for recycling in countries such as China and India.

Currently, the U.S. has no federal laws that prohibit the export of toxic e-waste for recycling purposes. Many of these antiquated appliances that are shipped abroad — which are supposedly 'recycled' — end up as toxic waste, with hazardous components exposed, packed into landfills or burned.

The results of this trend have been well documented in recent years, often articulated through graphic tales of severe water pollution and heaps of wire and metal littering overseas communities. Heavy metals, especially lead from televisions and computer monitors — but also mercury and cadmium — can leach into the ground, finding their way into lakes, rivers, streams, and ground water.

"We are exporting our toxins from the U.S. on a massive scale," Waters said. "This is the kind of 'recycling' that we are trying to prevent. We don't want things to end up in landfills."

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that less than 10 percent of all unwanted consumer electronics are recycled. The EPA's most recent estimate is that more than 2 million tons of e-waste end up in U.S. landfills each year, and e-waste — which is the fastest growing part of the municipal waste stream both in the U.S. and Europe — accounts for as much as 40 percent of lead in U.S. landfills.

The issue will likely only get worse: the Washington State Department of Ecology predicts

Anything usable is rebuilt by volunteers and sold

that between 2003 and 2010, more than 4.5 million computer processing units, 3.5 million cathode ray tube monitors and 1.5 million flat panel monitors will become obsolete in Washington state.

The reduction of overseas electronic waste exportation and electronic refuse going to landfills are the cornerstones of RE Lectronics, which was founded by Tom Emrich and funded in part through a grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology.

"(Tom) had this idea, so he went around looking for volunteers to help him do it," Waters said. "He went to the Linux Users Group here in Bellingham, and that's where most of my core volunteers here are still from. They started upstairs in a back room, and their idea at first was rebuilding computers, and it became really apparent that there was a lot of electronics out there."

Whatcom County definitely has a need for an effective electronics waste-recycling program. In 2005, according to RE Sources, an estimated 4,500 computers and televisions were disposed of, and this number is expected to rise each year.

"They do good work down here," said RE Lectronics volunteer Christian Gorte, who was working his first day on the job. Gorte runs a local program that helps build computers for kids who can't afford them, and became a volunteer to glean parts for his efforts. "I think it's very important. They are taking care of stuff that needs to be recycled properly."

About 75 percent to 90 percent of the electronic equipment that finds its way to RE Lectronics is recycled, Waters said, and the remainder is reused. Cathode-ray tube technology, or CRT technology — primarily older computer monitors and TVs — are the most recycled items by weight, Waters said.

Very little in the way of electronics can't be recycled, he said — aside from small household appliances such as toasters.

"Other than those smaller things, bring it in, and we'll make sure that the circuit boards get out of it, and that it doesn't end up just tossed in the landfill and contributing to the heavy-metal problems," he said.

How to get involved

Because local businesses generate the largest volume of local e-waste, RE Lectronics developed a project called Business Solutions, which works with each business individually to meet their needs through a variety of services, including pickup and delivery, a flexible pricing structure, needs assessment and invoicing.

"We have several businesses that we work with, and we are just in the middle of trying to get together a whole outreach program to businesses so that they know we even exist, so that they know there is a responsible way to deal with their electronics," Waters said.

Waters said data security is very important to RE Lectronics, and appropriate measures are taken to ensure that all sensitive personal information on the recycled computers is destroyed.

In general, prices are by item or weight: $14 per monitor; $19 per television set, and 45 cents per pound for all other devices and electronic hardware, including computers, printers, portable devices, and others. The costs offset the expenses of recycling. Pentium III or higher-level computers can be donated at no charge.

Rebuilt RE Lectronics computers are also available at The RE Store for as little as one-tenth the price of a new computer and come with a warranty. Televisions, VCRs, stereos, fax machines and other equipment are also available for purchase.

The issue is growing in importance, and some local companies are starting to take notice.

Northwest Computer in Bellingham started remanufacturing toner cartridges in 2004 comprised of recycled components for laser printers.

By the end of last year, the company was selling more refurbished cartridges than name-brand products, and it recently inked a two-year contract with the state of Washington to provide it with remanufactured toner cartridges.

The business also works with RE Lectronics. John D'Onofrio, owner of Northwest Computer, said the program — and the overriding issue of e-waste — are important things to consider.

"The old model of keeping your eye on the ball until it has passed you doesn't work anymore," D'Onofrio said. "We have to pay attention to the cyclical nature of manufacturing."

Northwest Computer donates computers and computer parts to RE Lectronics that have been tested by a Northwest Computer service technician. The parts are sorted into those that function and those that don't, and RE Lectronics picks up these parts on a regular basis, D'Onofrio said. The workable parts are used in discounted, rebuilt computers, and the remainder is recycled.

According to Waters, between June and August of this year, Northwest Computer donated 47 computer monitors — as well as 1,354 pounds of computer parts and 1,662 pounds of printers and computer accessories.

"The low-income community benefits, because they get to buy computers, where otherwise they couldn't afford them," he said. "RE Lectronics benefits, because the money they raise in doing this helps support their other community programs. And we benefit because we get to offer an additional value for our clients by virtue of being able to take (unwanted computers) off their hands."

While Waters believes too many local companies are not doing enough about the issue, he said he is hopeful about he future.

"Often, there are economic factors that are driving the need to upgrade or change the electronics or whatever you're doing, and that is a part of doing business and being competitive," he said. "That's totally understandable. I think the main thing is to make sure that (businesses) are responsibly recycling."

For more information, visit the RE Lectronics Web site at www.relectronics.org.

State passes new electronic product recycling law

Washington state lawmakers recently decided to get serious about electronic waste.

The state Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6428 earlier this year establishing an electronic product recycling law.

The law requires manufacturers of electronic products to provide consumer-convenient recycling services throughout the state no later than Jan. 1, 2009. Under the law, services are to be provided to households, small businesses, small local governments, charities and school districts. Electronic products that are included are televisions, computers, computer monitors and laptop and portable computers.

The legislation mandates that manufacturers provide recycling services throughout the state at no cost to those it serves. In April, the state Department of Ecology began developing a rule to implement the new law.

The rule requires manufacturers of covered electronic products to register with the department, pay an annual administrative fee to cover the agency's costs and brand their products sold in or into Washington state. It also requires retailers to sell only branded products, and detail the enforcement process and associated penalties for non-compliance.

'I always push the envelope'

From drag racing to auto repair to running his business – piano tuning – Charley White doesn't let the fact that he's blind stop him from accomplishing his goals

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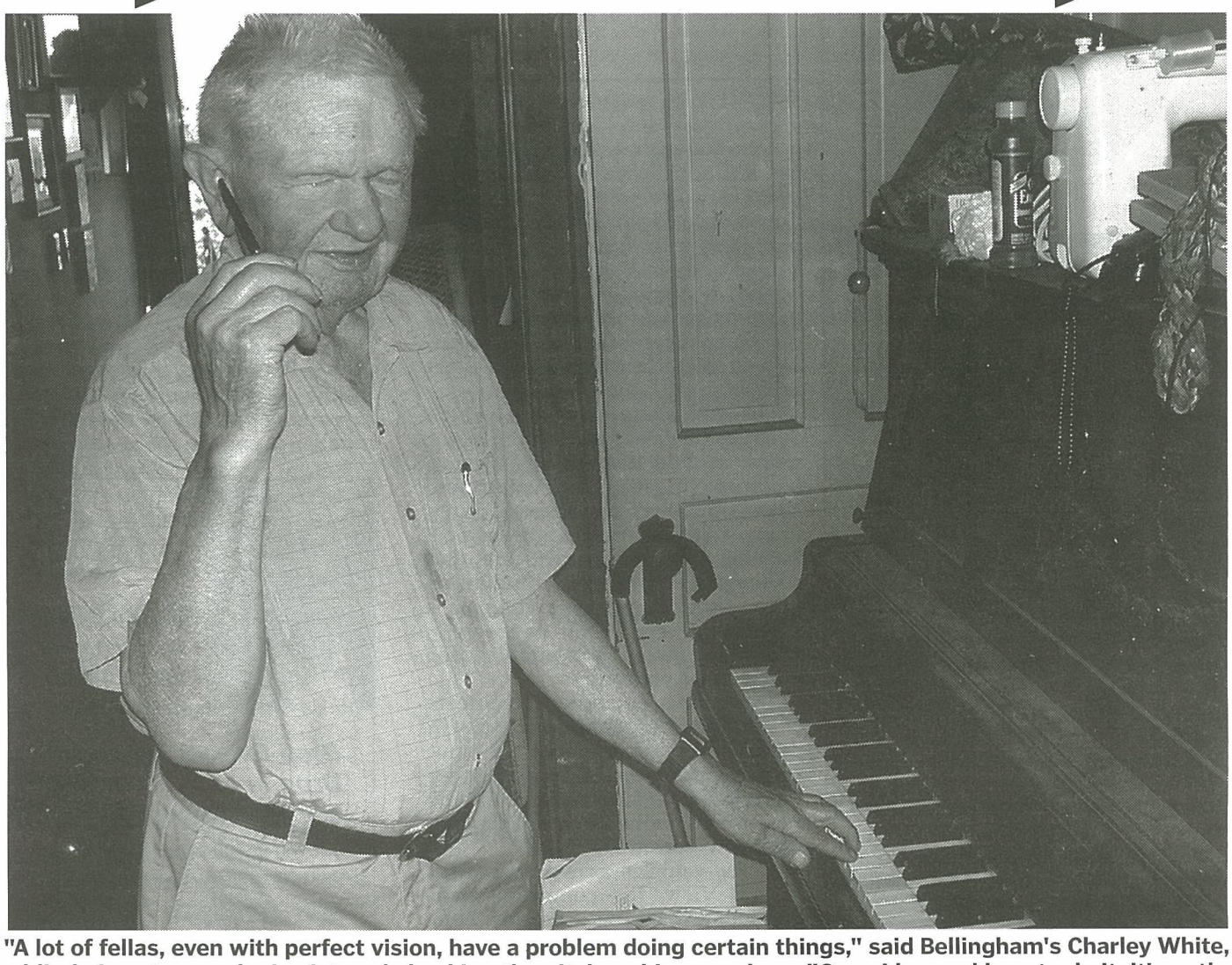


"A lot of fellas, even with perfect vision, have a problem doing certain things," said Bellingham's Charley White, a blind piano tuner who is pictured checking the pitch on his own piano. "Once I learned how to do it, it's nothing to me." While the technique of piano tuning isn't complicated in theory, *piano tuning is very much a skill, as* it requires patience, a good ear and practice.

The story starts like a lot of good stories do — with a buildup.

"I used to drag race. The '57 Chevs came out, and they were hot. But I had an old '47 Plymouth, and nobody knew that I had hopped it up. And so I had a bunch of my best buddies with me, and this guy goes, 'You wanna drag that sled?'"

Charley White, now 70, remembers his reply.

"An-y-time." And so they were off, down a long, dusty Eastern Washington road used specifically for such events. As White retells the story from a lounge chair in Bellingham's Beaver Inn — one of his regular haunts — a broad smile stretches across his wrinkled face.

"I shocked the hell out of him," said White of the other driver. "He was sitting there spinning his tires and I dropped the clutch in that baby and we were off and down the road. He couldn't catch me until I was doing damn near 90 (miles per hour)."

As he talks, the smile grows.

"My buddy was riding beside me to help me steer and keep it going on the right track," White said. "Oh God, I shook so bad the next day, I told myself I'd never do it again. No way. If I'd a wrecked and killed us all or hurt any of us, I'd have had a hard time living with it."

The story is already a good one. But it improves even more when you throw in this detail: Charley White doesn't have any eyes.

The fact is, White has never seen. He has been blind since birth. It's also a fact that the feisty Bellingham resident has always pushed the limitations of his disability in all areas of his life. That's why it comes as no surprise that White owns Major Minor Piano Service, a piano tuning and repair company. White has been a Bellingham-based piano tuner since he started here in the summer of 1958, and has been involved with the trade since he was 14.

"I always push the envelope," he said.

'Get on it and pedal'

As she grins from behind the bar, Katina Briles, a bartender at the Beaver Inn, said she is suspicious of White.

"He's really, really funny," said Briles. "I think he can actually see, and he just lies to everybody. He can tell everybody in here by their voices. He knows everyone."

She said White often stops by the Beaver for coffee once or twice per day, and is a regular downtown character.

"I think everybody in this town knows him," she said. "Especially downtown."

She said White normally sits in the same stool at the end of the bar.

"He's really nice, and really generous," she said. "Sometimes he'll bring me fruit, and sometimes he brings food that he's cooked."

Drag racing. Cooking food. Owning a business. These activities are difficult enough for those who have the benefit of sight. For White, they are but a few items on a list of many.

An inventory of some of his injuries reveals some of his character: He said his arm has been broken twice — once from a roller-skating accident, and once on a bike. He said he also enjoys hiking and playing darts.

A response to the question of how he could ride a bike reveals some of his soul.

"You get on it and pedal," he said, with a characteristic chuckle. "I don't know how you ride a bicycle."

His ability to "sense" without seeing is a gift, he said.

"When my health is good, I can walk down the sidewalk and tell you if there is a hose laying on it," he said.

It's this sense that has allowed him to develop his skills as a mechanic.

"I can just look at something and fix it," he said. "I've had junk brought to me and put it back together."

This mechanical ability is not something everyone has, he admits.

"It depends on the individual," he said. "You either have it or you don't have it. Hell, I have worked with sighted people who drive me up a wall. I've had people work for me — drive for me and that sort of stuff — and I'll say, 'Here, why don't you tighten all these screws.' And I'll show them how to get at them because they're a little bit hard to see. Pretty soon they aggravate me so bad I take (the tool) away from them and tell 'em to go sit down and read a book."

White was born in Colfax, in the heart of the Palouse in Eastern Washington, and he started learning piano tuning in high school at the age of 14. It was also during his

'They don't give you a chance to feel sorry for yourself'

youth that he learned to be independent, as he left home to attend the Washington State School for the Blind in Vancouver, Wash., from age 7 to 19. Following high school, he attended the Piano Hospital and Training Center for two years to become a registered piano technician.

"I was independent anyway, but that really made me independent," he said.

He doesn't like people doing things for him to this day.

"I do everything. I run power tools, saws and drills. And I still have 10 fingers," he said. He also doesn't like it when people speak for him, something that seems to happen all too often with blind people, he said.

"It's an automatic thing for people," White said. "They want to talk for that blind person or whatever. No! ... Sometimes it sounds like you're being rude. But you're not being rude. You have to sound that way a little bit to get your point across, you know?"

Move on to the next job

Being a blind business owner has its challenges, White said — especially in an industry that can be very complex.

"There are a little over 7,000 moving parts in a piano, depending on what you're working on," he said. When he started tuning pianos, he would charge a minimum of $8 for a job. Today, that minimum charge has risen to $70. Aside from the price and the higher taxes, he said not a whole lot has changed about the job.

"It's time consuming and it takes a lot of patience to do it correctly," said White, who added it takes him the same amount of time to tune or repair a piano as a person with sight. "If I didn't have patience, I'd be in a world of hurt."

The most difficult part of his job is getting to and from jobs, he said. To help, he has hired drivers from time to time, and sometimes customers even provide transportation.

"I don't advertise the fact I'm blind," he said. "A lot of times, when I go into a stranger's home, they'll just about have a heart attack when they find out I'm blind."

The more uncomfortable the customer, the better, joked Charley.

"I get over to the piano, and the first thing you know, I'm tearing it all apart. So when I see they're really uncomfortable, my favorite thing to do is make them even more uncomfortable," he said, laughing. "I'll say, 'Ah damn, I haven't taken the course on putting it back together.' And they go, 'You're kidding aren't ya?' And I say, 'Yeah. No problem.' I've had these things come to me in a box and I have to sit down and figure the parts out and put it back together."

He said fellow colleagues in the field have been known to call him and ask his advice, he said.

"I'm a schooled technician," he said. "A lot of times, they're calling me to figure out how to do something."

David Steege, a registered piano technician in Bellingham, has worked in the industry for the past 31 years. He owns David Steege Piano Service, and also works as a piano technician for Western Washington University.

Over the years, he has crossed paths with White several times. During their meetings, the two would trade ideas and advice, Steege said.

"I know that his customers really like his work," Steege said. "I've always thought of him as a wonderful person and a great colleague."

Steege said he was often amazed at White's ability to overcome his blindness — as well as his ability to sense.

"I've heard (some of his) customers say how he would have a sense for the positioning of a piano in room, in terms of, 'Well, if you put it over against that wall, it would sound better,'" Steege said. "He was always known for doing incredibly fine tunings."

When his business was at its height, White said he would set a goal of servicing three to four clients per day.

"I can't even say (how many pianos I've tuned). I don't pay attention," he said. "I just move on to the next job." He would also travel around the region for work.

"When I was really going at it, I used to do Whidbey Island and the San Juan Islands, and the Concrete area" he said. "I enjoy it. Especially when I'm feeling good. I'll go anyplace, anytime."

A piano that is "kept up" — meaning it has been tuned on a regular basis at least once per year — may take 1.5 to two hours, depending on the make. Repairs can take much longer.

"I've spent days on major jobs," he said. Because of age and medical issues, he said, he usually works with just a handful of customers per week now.

In addition to mechanical training, White said he has also been schooled musically. He started playing the piano in second grade, and he still plays the instrument, along with the saxophone and clarinet.

This depth of knowledge — as well as a fearless attitude — has kept White going all these years.

"I've helped train people who have gone blind (later in life) and they have a lot of things to overcome," he said. "You have to kick them in the butt and get 'em going. Don't be afraid of it, it won't do any more than bite ya."

Charley-isms

Charley White has a unique view on life. The following is a collection of some random "Charley-isms."

On his true passion: "My true love is automobiles ... I had my eyes set on doing something in the automobile industry. It probably just wasn't ready for me yet."

On his younger brother's 1956 Thunderbird Roadster: "I go down to his place, and the only place I go is out to the garage and drool all over it. I love those things. It's a beautiful design ... When they came out with it, they should never have messed with it."

On car design: "I've always loved foreign cars and I've always gone to car shows ... You can tell just by feeling them out a little bit. And you don't have to feel, feel, feel, feel. You can just get a general line. A lot of blind people paw everything, you might say. That's not me ... There are certain things I check out: the line of it. (I run my fingers) from the front to the back. I check out spots here and there ... I have a tremendous ability for a mental picture, immediately."

On his illness: "At that time they didn't know what they know now. A child born with the same condition today would pretty much have a 99 percent chance of perfect vision. But that's progress, thank God."

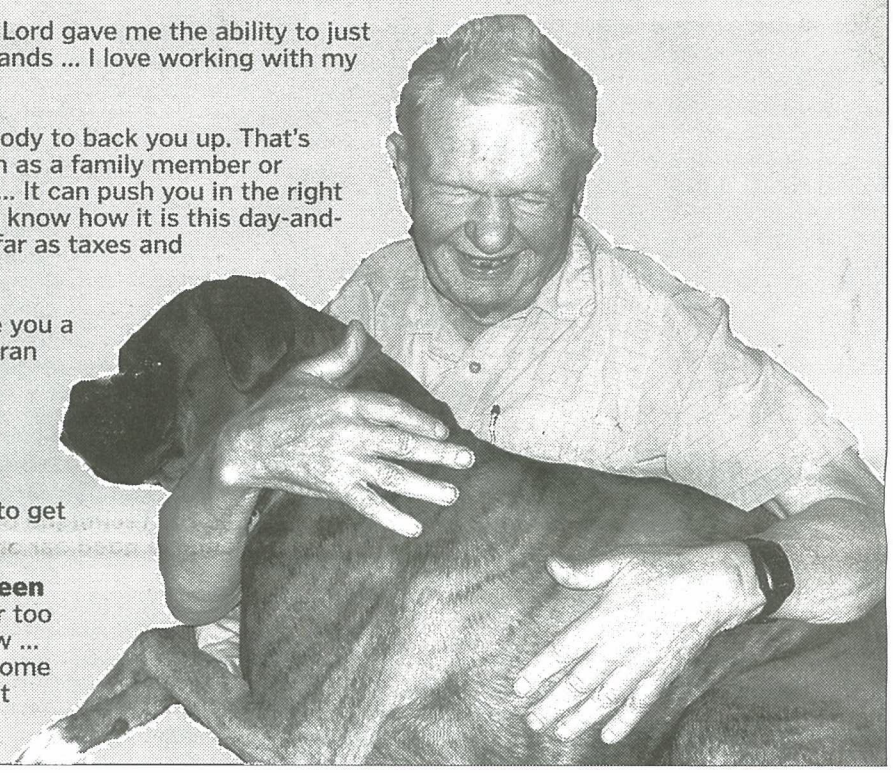
On his gifts: "My gift is me. The dear Lord gave me the ability to just do everything mechanical and with my hands ... I love working with my hands."

On starting a business: "Find somebody to back you up. That's always No. 1. Always have a backup (such as a family member or friend). Which I didn't. And it was tough ... It can push you in the right direction to do things business-wise. You know how it is this day-and-age, man: It just keeps getting worse as far as taxes and all this kind of crap."

On boarding school: "They don't give you a chance to feel sorry for yourself. 'So you ran into that tree. You'll get over it.'"

On talking to parents of blind kids: "The parents are always the problem, because they want to baby the kids. It's normal ... (I would tell them) 'He's going to get hurt. Just accept the fact. He mends.'"

On whether his life's journey has been difficult: "I can't say one way or another too much because it's the only journey I know ... Somebody who has gone blind later for some reason or another can give you a different answer."



WHAT IF? Revisiting

Project would have changed the face of the downtown and likely rendered Bellis Fair a moot point – but at what cost?

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A proposed downtown mall, as seen in this rendering, would have altered the face of present-day Bellingham. A California-based development company proposed to build a two-story, enclosed mall with three major department stores on Railroad Avenue between Chestnut and Magnolia streets, but plans never got off the ground following a pivotal 1982 election that prevented the construction of two downtown parking garages. Image courtesy of the City of Bellingham.

Envision the elements that make up Bellis Fair.

Stores and cars, customers and kiosks. Now imagine picking up those components, moving them due south, and dropping 450,000 square feet of that retail space in the heart of downtown Bellingham.

In the early 1980s, this scenario wasn't too far from becoming a reality.

Roughly 25 years ago, Sutter Hill, Ltd., a California-based development company, proposed to build a two-story, enclosed mall with three major department stores on Railroad Avenue between Chestnut and Magnolia streets. The plans to build, however, never got off the ground due in large part to the city voters' unwillingness to provide public funding for two parking garages and a utility corridor that would have supported the mall.

The idea for a downtown mall was eventually defeated — opening the door for David Syre, founder and CEO of Trillium Corp., to build Bellis Fair on the Guide Meridian.

"It would have been an entirely different Bellingham," said Brian Griffin, current chairman of the Depot Market Square Committee, as well as a former proponent of the downtown mall. "It's hard to imagine what (downtown) would've been."

The downtown mall is just one of many proposed development projects that never came to pass for a variety of reasons — and it's also a good example of how decisions made now have the power to transform cities in the future.

Parking plans

Sitting in his office in 2006, John Kole has no doubts about his actions in 1982.

That was the year Kole, who owns John Kole Vehicle Repair in Bellingham, authored an initiative measure called Proposition 1 that appeared on the city voting ballot. The measure prohibited the city from using its credit or money to build parking facilities in connection with commercial development – in this case the downtown mall.

The initiative narrowly passed (52 percent to 48 percent of 15,862 voters) and the parking garages — which would have cost the city $15.5 million at the time — were never built. Immediately following the election, Sutter Hill announced it was dropping its plans to build the downtown mall, a $50 million project.

"Without (public money) to put it together, it's economically impossible," said Phil Davidson, a Sutter Hill representative, in The Bellingham Herald

g the downtown mall

two days after the November 1982 elections. "We can't pass that cost on to our tenants."

In turn, Kole felt it was unfair to pass those costs on to the public, he said.

"I felt it was unfair that (the parking garages) would be subsidized," Kole said. "I didn't feel it was appropriate for the public to pay for these parking garages. I felt the mall developer should be the one that's involved with that. And that started it."

Kole, who has run for city council four times (unsuccessfully), has been politically active for much of his time in Bellingham. He originally came to the area as a student at Western Washington University, and he's been in town ever since.

"I was kind of the Tim Eyman of the '80s for Bellingham," said Kole. "People hate Eyman (conservative political activist) because he's always bringing up something that half of them are for and half of them are against."

Kole

To garner support for the initiative, he canvassed the city with his wife and children — literally going door to door.

"My wife and I went through town, through all the neighborhoods, with our kids in a wagon," he said. "At the time, we were able to get about 3,000 people registered to vote, and a lot of people were unaware that there was an issue or that there was a mall being thought of being built downtown."

For Kole, the downtown mall development was essentially a nonissue, he said. His passion was to prevent public funding for the garages.

"I had no aversion to the mall (downtown)," Kole said. "I was not even thinking of anything like Bellis Fair."

Griffin and Kole were perhaps the most visible spokespeople on the issue.

"It was a long time ago, and it brings back strong memories," said Griffin after reading his guest column in the *Herald* regarding his opposition to the initiative. Its passage weighed heavily on Griffin, who was the co-chairman of Forward Bellingham, a group that opposed Kole's initiative. "(I felt) intense disappointment. We knew that the developer (Sutter Hill) would immediately leave, and they did. And without a committed developer, nothing else could happen."

Developer Ken Hertz, the city's mayor from 1976-1984, said he was pulling for the downtown mall, but he knew a lot had to happen for that to occur.

"In order to do the downtown mall, several things had to take place," Hertz said. "First, we had to acquire a lot of property. And that meant that if we had people in the way that simply did not want to sell, we had to go through the condemnation process. And we made it clear up front that, in fact, we were prepared to do that. Most people were inclined to agree with it, and there was very little condemnation required, but there was some."

A lack of land was the biggest issue Syre had with the downtown proposal.

"It would have been fine if it could meet the needs of the major retailers," Syre said of the downtown plan. "But it's very difficult for a downtown to accommodate that kind of expansion."

Syre, who said he had nothing to do with the parking garage issue (both Syre and Kole said they didn't even meet face-to-face until after the election), said he knew Kole's initiative was important to determining the future development plans of the city — which he hoped included the construction of a mall on what was then the outskirts of Bellingham.

"I knew the public officials at the time had put a lot of weight on that issue," Syre said. "I knew the city would be more receptive to other community development (after the initiative passed)." Enter Bellis Fair.

Guide the way

Griffin doesn't mince words when it comes to the way he feels about parts of North Bellingham, particularly along the Guide Meridian near the mall.

"Bellis Fair ... has created a traffic monster and sprawl that doesn't appeal to me at all," Griffin said. "Had we been successful building a downtown mall, maybe we'd have a vibrant downtown community."

He also admits he doesn't know what would've happened had the mall been built downtown.

"It's very difficult (to say what the city would be like with a downtown mall). I've asked myself that question a number of times. The downtown mall might have failed. Traffic might have been awful in the downtown and it isn't now. I abhor the north end of Bellingham. I think it's awful. But maybe we would have brought that kind of overcrowding and un-aesthetic growth to the center of the city. I guess my answer is I'm not sure."

Syre said Bellis Fair's location has allowed other retailers to move into the area, and helped the local economy.

"It's created a regional infrastructure for retail in Whatcom County," he said. "It was probably the economic driver of the decade."

Hertz, who pushed for the downtown mall, said he also supported Bellis Fair when the downtown proposal failed. He even worked at Trillium for more than a decade after his two terms as mayor.

"I absolutely supported Bellis Fair," Hertz said. "In fact I joined Trillium. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. I wanted to see a nice facility go in."

However, he does wonder what the city would have and could have been like with the downtown facility.

"I can only point to places like Bellevue Square," Hertz said. "I thought it would have been a huge plus, and I still think it would have been a huge plus. I think we would have seen residential develop around it because retail draws residential ... I think we would have seen a whole different central core of the city."

Kole said he has no regrets with how things have developed in Bellingham.

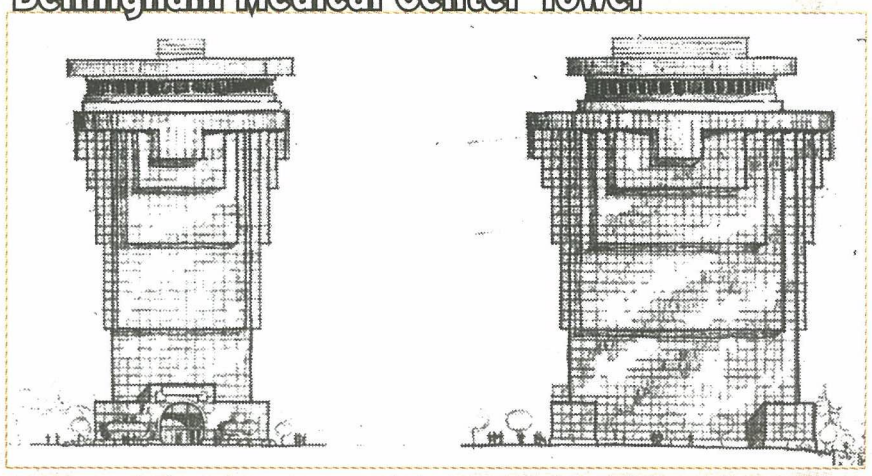
"I'm glad we did (the initiative campaign)," he said. "It was a great exercise. It does prove that one person or a group of people – not very many – can make a difference."

And play a major part in shaping the face and future of a city.

Other famous 'what-ifs'

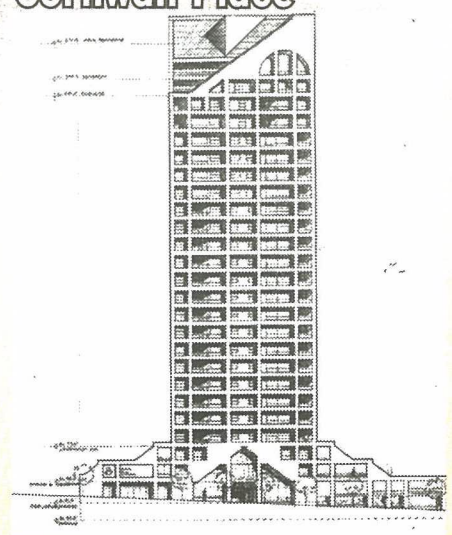
Like any city, Bellingham is rife with grand plans that never quite make it out of the drawing-board stage — let alone permitting. Local architect Dave Christensen talked to the BBJ about a few of these projects that, for whatever reason, just never made it to reality.

Bellingham Medical Center Tower



"Corner of Grand Avenue and C Street, circa 1981 with Johnson, Erlewine & Christensen. This was a 12-story office building for Ron Benson of Quadron Corp.; seemed like there was a demand for medical and professional office space ... but not."

Cornwall Place



"Cornwall Place was a 25-story condo tower at Cornwall Avenue and Maple Street, (where Cabochon Construction is proposing a smaller version now) for the Morris Piha Company, circa 1981, with Johnson, Erlewine & Christensen. Morris Piha had some kids going to Western and he thought that parents would buy condos for their kids, in lieu of paying rent at a dorm, etc. It went through bidding."

Cornwall Place (again)

"This was the second design for this site at Maple and Cornwall Avenue, after the 25-story condo died. For the Morris Piha Co., circa 1980, while I was with with Johnson, Erlewine & Christensen."