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Port of Olympia Crane is Home for Peregrine Falcon Chicks

A wooden box atop a 175-foot high gantry crane at the Port of Olympia's marine terminal seems an unlikely place to start a family, but it's home for a pair of peregrine falcons and their offspring. Three chicks – two males and one female - hatched in early May and appear to be thriving.

Falcon experts on contract with the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife, were at the Port last week to band the chicks' legs for easier identification. Along with the regular Fish and Wildlife band, a Visual ID (VID) band was attached so observers can track the birds without handling them.

In 2004, the Port and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife installed plywood nesting boxes on the two Port cranes, and falcons have nested on the southernmost crane every year since then with mixed results. One chick hatched in 2004, and in 2005, eggs were laid, but there were no chicks. Last year's nesting resulted in three chicks. The adult birds are one of three known pairs in Thurston County. While encouraged by the chicks' progress, experts caution that there is a high mortality rate for young falcons during their first year.

"We're really pleased with the outcome," said Port Commissioner Bill McGregor. "It's not uncommon for falcons to nest in urban areas, and these birds do not appear to be bothered by the working waterfront activities."

Peregrine falcons are the world's swiftest birds, flying at speeds of 30-60 mph. They feed almost exclusively on other birds they usually take in mid-flight. They were on the edge of extinction in the 1970s from exposure to pesticides but have since been removed from the endangered species list. The state currently monitors about 145 pairs.

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About the Port of Olympia

The southernmost deepwater port on Puget Sound, the Port of Olympia is Thurston County's partner in economic opportunity. The Port owns and operates a diversified international shipping terminal, an established niche facility that handles a range of breakbulk and project cargoes. The Port also owns and operates a strategically located regional airport, a vibrant 656-slip recreational marina and boat haulout/repair facility, and a thriving real estate division. A community port, it generates an estimated 2,600 jobs in Thurston County and indirectly over 5,000 jobs in Washington State.