

KITSAP

September 2025

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*At BARN, members create intricate glass marbles, a study in patience and precision.*  
*Photo courtesy of BARN*

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## Protecting Kitsap's Future

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Formed in response to aerial pesticide spraying near Hansville, the Kitsap Environmental Coalition has grown into a countywide voice for clean water, healthy forests, and sustainable land use. Through education, advocacy, and partnerships, the volunteer-run nonprofit works to protect natural resources while inspiring community engagement and long-term ecological stewardship.

## Driving Connection

### Airporter Carries Kitsap Travelers for Nearly Half a Century

Since 1979, the Bremerton-Kitsap Airporter has connected peninsula residents to Sea-Tac with reliable, affordable service. Founded by Navy veteran Richard Asche and still family-run, the company has carried more than 4.7 million passengers. With loyal employees, community ties, and a legacy of service, the Airporter remains a Kitsap lifeline.

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# Creativity, Connection, and Community

**For** **WARD**  
THINKING

**W**elcome to the September edition of Kitsap Business. This month we feature stories about the people and organizations in our region who are putting creativity, persistence, and community at the center of their work. Together, they show us that business isn't only about commerce – it's also about how we connect, how we adapt, and how we shape the places we live.

On Bainbridge Island, the Bainbridge Artisan Resource Network – better known as BARN – has grown from a handful of woodworkers looking for space into a 25,000-square-foot facility alive with activity. Walk through its doors and you'll find looms, saws, soldering irons, and even 3D printers in use, often side by side. BARN is more than a collection of studios. It's an experiment in community learning, where people share knowledge, carry forward traditions, and test new tools that expand what's possible.

Elsewhere in the county, the Kitsap Environmental Coalition has turned concern into long-term advocacy. What began as neighbors organizing to stop aerial pesticide spraying has developed into a countywide network working to safeguard water, soil, and forests. Their efforts illustrate how local action can evolve into durable civic infrastructure – driven not by professional advocates, but by residents willing to do the slow, often difficult work of persistence.

In Poulsbo, Vibe Coworks shows what happens when the workplace itself becomes a platform for collaboration. Remote workers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs gather there not just for office space, but for the chance encounters and shared energy that lead to partnerships and new ventures. In a time when many are navigating hybrid work or building businesses from home, Vibe demonstrates how intentional design can restore something that's often missing: connection.

Long before coworking was a concept, the Bremerton-Kitsap Airporth was quietly connecting people across the region. Founded in 1979 by Richard Asche and his



family, the company has become a fixture for Kitsap travelers. Its story is not one of rapid disruption or flashy growth, but of consistency – shuttles that run on schedule, drivers who know their passengers, and a business that has endured by doing the basics well, year after year.

Finally, in this issue's Executive Q&A, we sit down with Jason Driver, Executive Director of Kitsap Regional Library. His vision reflects both continuity and change: a library system that has anchored Kitsap communities for generations, and one that is now expanding into new roles as a hub for technology, workforce development, and civic life.

Taken together, these stories highlight

something important about Kitsap: progress here often grows out of collaboration and care. Whether through shared workshops, environmental advocacy, flexible workplaces, public services, or even a reliable shuttle ride, the work being done is rooted in a sense of responsibility to one another.

As always, it's our privilege to share these stories with you. They remind us that the strength of a community lies not in abstract ideals, but in the practical choices people make every day to build, sustain, and improve the place we call home. ■

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# KITSAP **BUSINESS**

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*The 25,000-square-foot BARN facility serves as a hub for creativity and connection on Bainbridge Island.*

*Photos courtesy of BARN*

# A Creative Force

## BARN Shapes the Future of Art and Innovation on Bainbridge

**By Quinn Propst** | Ward Media Staff Reporter

**O**n a sun-dappled morning on Bainbridge Island, the hum of creativity is palpable inside the Bainbridge Artisan Resource Network – better known as BARN.

In the sprawling 25,000-square-foot facility, the air is alive with the sounds of saws in the woodshop, the rhythmic clatter of looms in the fiber studio, and the quiet focus of artists, makers, and learners of all ages. But BARN is more than just a collection of studios and tools; it is a living, breathing community where craft, learning, and service come together to foster connection and innovation.

### A VISION ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

BARN's story begins with a simple need: a group of woodworkers on Bainbridge Island searching for a shared space.

"We got started as the Bainbridge Community Woodshop," BARN's Executive Director Grae Drake said. "We spent several years looking for a space to create a community wood shop, and we struggled. We identified a

space that was much larger than we could handle just for a wood shop, and so invited some other folks in to say, 'Hey, maybe we could share the rent and tackle this thing altogether.'"

That spirit of collaboration proved transformative. What began as a quest for a woodshop soon blossomed into something much more ambitious – a community center that would bring together artists,

craftspeople, and makers from across disciplines.

"Out of that meeting came the idea of something that was more ambitious in scope than just a community wood shop. It was really a community center," Drake said.

After testing the concept in a leased space in Rolling Bay, where woodworking, jewelry making, and even 3D printing and laser cutting all happened in close quarters, the BARN team set their sights higher.

"We really figured out what the operating model was, how to do classes, how to handle registrations, all the boring operational stuff," he said. "At that same time, we were fundraising for designing and then building this place, which is 10 times that size."

Today, BARN's purpose-built facility is a testament to the power of community vision and determination.

### A PLACE FOR EVERY MAKER

Step inside BARN, and you'll find a dizzying array of studios: wood, glass, fiber, culinary, tech, metal fabrication, jewelry, print and book arts, and more. Each is equipped with professional-grade

*Artists in the Glass Arts Studio piece together colorful mosaic mirrors.*





tools and staffed by passionate volunteers.

The studios are open to both members and the public, with a \$20 drop-in fee for non-members and free access for those with memberships. But the real value, Drake insists, is not just in the equipment, but in the people.

"Even if you have a table saw in your garage, you're often limited in what you can do for yourself by the equipment that you have or have access to, and so having shared equipment here lets us offer the kind of scale and quality that people can't get to on their own," he said. "But even more important than the equipment is the brain trust of skills and knowledge and expertise that congregates and then grows here."

### **PASSING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS GENERATIONS**

BARN's mission is clear: to foster community through craft, learning, and service.

"We teach a lot here," he said. "We're really focused on passing knowledge along intergenerationally, and things that people have learned and want to make sure continues in the world."

Classes range from beginner workshops to advanced masterclasses, and the studios buzz with activity as people of all ages and backgrounds come together to learn, create, and share.

The organization is also deeply committed to community service.

"We do a lot of community service projects," he said. "The library right now has about three or four of BARN's projects. We repaired and replaced one of the foot



bridges there, the large Japanese gate. And then, most recently, we redid their sign. I guess they had chronically had a problem with high school students walking by the sign and creatively rearranging the letters, so we built them a new sign."

### **A UNIQUE MODEL OF OWNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT**

What truly sets BARN apart from other maker spaces or craft schools is its unique operating model.

"At every other institution that I'm familiar with, there's a studio tech who is organizing the programming and caring for the equipment and kind of handling the day-to-day operations," he said. "Here at BARN, we do have a staff, but the staff is handling the boring details about insurance and state or corporate filings and fundraising events. The business of the studios is really run almost

entirely by and for the people that are using the studios."

This model fosters a sense of ownership and investment among members.

"There's about 30,000 hours a year of volunteer time," Drake said. "It's people who are already invested in that area, and then they have ownership over it."

### **IMPACT THAT REACHES FAR AND WIDE**

BARN's influence extends well beyond Bainbridge Island.

"We have had an enormous number of people reach out to us because they heard about or saw firsthand BARN's model, and they'd like to have something like this in their community," he said. "Close to 100 different communities have reached out to me just in the three years that I have been director here."

One particularly meaningful moment came when a woodworker from Tucson, Arizona, called to say they were building a 30,000-square-foot space inspired by BARN.

"We have stepped into that role of showing people what is possible to do, and so I am thrilled about that," he said.

### **INNOVATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF TRADITION AND TECHNOLOGY**

BARN is a place where traditional craftsmanship meets modern digital tools.

"There is a big push to retain those traditions, and that's relatively recent, even going back 70 years, I think there was much less of an awareness that you're losing those traditions," Drake said.

The fiber studio, for example, is named

*A fiber artist displays a vibrant silk painting created in BARN's Fiber Studio.*



## Feature

after Marguerite Porter Davidson, a fiber artist who published a book in the 1950s documenting weaving traditions so that they would not be lost to time – a resource still revered today.

At the same time, BARN embraces new technologies.

"The things that you can accomplish with a CNC wood router, right? You can create inlays with an extraordinary amount of detail that are impossible by hand, no matter how skilled you are," he said. "We have traditional looms... but we also have the machines that allow for new modes of expression, not because they create production work more quickly, but because they unlock new techniques and kind of expand the palette of what it's available to work with."

### STORIES OF SUCCESS AND TRANSFORMATION

BARN has been the launchpad for countless personal and professional journeys. One standout story is that of a local registered nurse who used BARN's tech lab to design and prototype a device that makes administering slow injections easier and more comfortable for both patients and healthcare providers.

Some chemo patients need an injection administered slowly, over the course of about eight minutes. The nurse administering the injection has to very slowly push the depressor the entire length of time, which is exhausting for the nurse. She knew there had to be a better way.

"She designed in the tech lab and then prototyped, over several iterations, a device that would allow the nurse or other healthcare provider to slowly, just kind of screw down this thing to take the pressure off of those muscles and to make it really simple to consistently administer over that time window," Drake said. "It's more

*Participants learn the traditional art of fish skin basketry in the Fiber Studio.*



*Summer at BARN is alive with classes and workshops designed to spark creativity in youth.*

comfortable for the patient, it's much more comfortable for the medical provider, and it's more accurate, and that was a thing that came out of the tech lab."

Jewelry artist Robin Callahan, now nationally recognized, honed her craft in BARN's jewelry studio.

"She did a lot of her early learning in jewelry design and fabrication here at BARN," he said. "So she really came out of the jewelry studio."

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

BARN is not resting on its laurels. Plans are underway to expand the facility, add new studios, and bring in more regional and national talent.

"More and more, we are bringing distinguished artists to Bainbridge Island to share what they know with this community," he said. "Part of our strategic plan is to be very deliberate in reaching beyond Bainbridge Island with our impact, like our community service projects, and having more of those and a higher proportion of those happen off of Bainbridge Island is a specific goal in our strategic plan."

A major upcoming event is Handwork: Celebrating American Craft 2026, a nationwide celebration of American craft organized by Craft in America.

"Our participation will be a week of

intensive workshops offered by distinguished artists in April of 2026," he said. "We have never done an event like this where we filled up the entire building with intensive workshops at the same time. I am very excited about some of the artists who are going to be coming, and I'm very interested to see what the energy is like when we've got that kind of intense work happening throughout the building."

### A PLACE FOR ALL

Perhaps the most important message BARN wants to share is that its doors are open to everyone.

"One of the things that continues to surprise me when I talk to people out beyond Bainbridge Island about BARN, one of the questions I get is like, 'Oh, are non-Bainbridge Islanders allowed to participate?' And it shocks me that that's even a question," he said. "If you would be excited to do any of the creative work that happens here, please come in and do it. We love to have you here."

### A LASTING IMPACT

As BARN looks to the future, its mission remains steadfast: to build community through creativity, expand its reach, and inspire others to do the same.

"I hope people walk away with contact information for some of the people that they met here, so they can keep those relationships going," Drake said. "And I hope their mind is churning with opportunities to come back and do some creative work."

In a world that often feels disconnected, BARN stands as a beacon of what's possible when people come together to create, learn, and serve. On Bainbridge Island and beyond, its impact is felt in every project, every class, and every connection made within its welcoming walls. ■





# Technology

## Your 2026 Technology Budget

A Small Business Guide to Auditing, Planning, and Optimizing

By Jon Hoehne | CMIT Solutions

For most businesses on a calendar year budget, it's probably time to start thinking about the 2026 budget. What are the big goals for next year? What market conditions are you expecting to deal with? And among the myriad other questions that go into the budgeting process, here's one that often gets overlooked: How much does technology really figure into your budget?

### THE HIDDEN COSTS IN YOUR TECH STACK

Technology costs and savings opportunities can hide in unexpected places.

For example, when is the last time you looked at your ISP bill? If you haven't renegotiated with your current provider lately, they may have newer plans with more bandwidth at lower prices.

If you've got a VOIP phone system, are all your licenses in use or can you trim some of the fat? If you don't have a VOIP phone system, are you missing out on potential savings of 40-50% compared to traditional phone lines?

And what about all the IT tools and subscriptions your team uses? Did the sales team ask for something really cool, but the productivity savings weren't there? That "game-changing" CRM might be costing you \$200 per user per month while your team still lives in spreadsheets.

### YOUR STEP-BY-STEP TECH AUDIT PROCESS

All these costs can add up fast, and the right level of spending can vary greatly from business to business. Once you have a clear idea of your business goals for the upcoming year, consider the following steps.

### STEP 1: ASSESS CURRENT VALUE

The potential savings here can either go straight to your bottom line or enable you to more freely explore other technology.

**Make a comprehensive list of all your recurring technology expenses:**

- **Infrastructure:** ISP, office phones, mobile phones, email and web hosting, cloud storage.
- **Managed services:** Remote monitoring, endpoint detection and response, backup subscriptions.
- **Software subscriptions:** Applications your employees use to get work done.
- **Security and insurance:** Are you getting all the discounts you can on business and cyber insurance? Implementing robust cybersecurity controls can often help lower your premiums.

### STEP 2: IDENTIFY PAIN POINTS AND HIDDEN COSTS

What pain is your existing technology causing? Here are some common issues:

- **Older devices:** Computers over 4 years old can cause productivity losses and pose higher security risks.
- **Integration issues:** When employees complain that program A doesn't work with program B properly, there's always extra work in manual data entry or troubleshooting the disconnect.
- **Network performance:** The network is slow, but you're not sure why. This could be costing each employee productive time daily.

**Ask your team!** They are an invaluable source of ideas and are sure to have their

own unique perspective. Consider an anonymous survey to get honest feedback.

### QUICK WINS FOR IMMEDIATE SAVINGS

Once you start to get data, don't ignore your quick wins. Look for these opportunities:

- **Consolidate overlapping tools:** Marketing might use Canva while Design uses Adobe - can you standardize?
- **Negotiate multi-year contracts:** Lock in bigger savings on core services.
- **Right-size licenses:** Audit user lists monthly - former employees often retain access for months.
- **Bundle services:** Many vendors offer significant discounts for multiple products.



### STEP 3: BUILDING YOUR 2026 TECHNOLOGY ROADMAP

You can't change everything at once. Use the data you collected in steps 1 and 2 to evaluate your opportunities and build a roadmap that considers your overall business goals. It could be as simple as one initiative per quarter.

### WHAT CAN AN MSP DO FOR YOU?

A Managed Service Provider can accelerate this process by analyzing your spending, conducting independent assessments and providing clear options. Once you've chosen your path, they can manage and track your assets, as well as lead strategic projects, ensuring proper implementation.

Effective technology budgeting is about spending smarter. The time you invest now in auditing and planning will pay dividends throughout 2026 in improved productivity, reduced costs, and better business outcomes. ■

## Feature

# Protecting Kitsap's Future

## Inside the Work of the Environmental Coalition

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter



Photos courtesy of KEC

State Representative Greg Nance with KEC member Carol Price, wearing a paper-mâché tree sculpture by Jefferson County artist Jessica Randall, at Discover Kingston.

**W**hen residents near Hansville first heard that aerial pesticide spraying was coming to the clear-cut timberlands just outside their community, they didn't know they were about to start a countywide movement.

The news hit in 2018, at the height of national headlines about glyphosate – the active ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup – and the growing list of lawsuits linking it to cancer and other serious illnesses. People in Kitsap County began to connect the dots between those headlines and the reality in their own backyard.

"Our goal is to champion the protection and restoration of Kitsap County's natural environment and being sure that it's healthy, both for people and for all of life," says Beverly Parsons, a longtime member and current secretary of the Kitsap Environmental Coalition (KEC).

For KEC, that means keeping Kitsap's water, air, and soil clean. KEC is determined to Keep Kitsap Green.

### THE SPARK: HANSVILLE CLEAR-CUT

The coalition's origin story begins with the timber company Pope Resources, which owned a tract of forest outside Hansville. After clear-cutting the land, Pope planned to spray pesticides from the air to control regrowth.

The plan immediately raised red flags. Residents worried about toxins drifting into their neighborhoods, contaminating wells, harming wildlife, and endangering human health. The timing made those fears even sharper. "It was a heightened moment of awareness," Parsons said. "People realized we needed to protect our environment from this."

Digging into the details, locals discovered Pope had divided its property into smaller units to avoid a full review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

"People said, 'Wait a minute. That doesn't seem right,'" she said. Determined to fight, they filed an appeal to stop the spray. But they quickly ran into the harsh economics of environmental advocacy. Filing the appeal required thousands of dollars in fees. When they learned a lawyer would cost \$35,000, the challenge became even steeper.

The community rallied. A benefit auction raised \$16,000 – an impressive amount for a fledgling grassroots effort – but still far short of what was needed.

"So all this awareness was coming to people," she said. "How do you stand up for things with all these costs? It's so extreme, and so what you were seeing was a combination of people concerned about the environment, but also realizing how the whole system works."

### FROM PROTEST TO POLICY

The Hansville fight became the crucible in which KEC was forged. Within months,



the group grew to hundreds of concerned residents. A handful had the skills and experience to give the movement staying power – a CPA, a business administrator, people who knew how to create a nonprofit.

"We were lucky to have people with the right skills," she said. "That's what really got us organized."

KEC soon notched early wins, persuading the North Kitsap School District and Kitsap County to stop spraying glyphosate on school grounds and roadsides.

"One of our members' dogs got sick after walking along a sprayed roadside," she said. "It made the issue real for people."

## BUILDING A BROADER MISSION

While pesticide spraying remained a central issue, KEC expanded its work to address land use, development pressures, and climate change. They became regular voices at Board of Natural Resources meetings, testified at public hearings, and held community walks in local forests.

"It was about getting people involved and making their voices heard," she said.

The coalition partnered with other organizations – including 350 Seattle and the Pacific Northwest Forest Climate Alliance – to share information and coordinate action across counties.

"You need to know there are other people dealing with the same thing," she said. "It's about sharing information and building support."

## EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE

KEC quickly realized that protecting the environment wasn't just about fighting harmful projects – it was about changing

public understanding. One of their most effective tools became a monthly educational forum at Kingston's Village Green.

"We started out showing films like *Behind the Emerald Curtain*, about clear-cutting in the Pacific Northwest," she said. "Now we have speakers and discussions on a range of topics. We get about 50 people each time. It's about building awareness and community."

The coalition's newsletter, with nearly 900 subscribers, is another vital tool.

"Our newsletter is our main communication structure," she said. "It's how we mobilize people."

## THE CHALLENGES OF STAYING GRASSROOTS

For all its successes, KEC faces the realities of being a volunteer-run nonprofit.

"We're strictly a volunteer organization, so there's always a risk of burnout," she said.

Board members are limited to two consecutive two-year terms, and steering committee members to two three-year terms, to keep volunteers from burning out. Funding is another constant hurdle.

"We need more financial resources to maintain our structure and sometimes hire part-time help for media or legal issues," she said. "But we do our best to make it work."

Still, their work hasn't gone unnoticed. In 2023, KEC received an Earth Day Award from the Kitsap County Board of Commissioners for its contributions to local environmental advocacy.

## A PHILOSOPHY OF CONNECTION

At the core of KEC's work is a belief that



**KEC members Carol Price (left) and Margaret Tufft measure a tree in Eglogon Forest to estimate its age as part of ongoing conservation work.**

environmental protection is not just about stopping harm – it's about imagining and creating a better future.

"We want to bring a broad understanding of the environment, focusing at multiple levels – from planting trees to influencing policy," she said. "We're not just about saying 'no' to things. We want to create the future we do want."

That philosophy rests on three guiding principles: honest and respectful relationships, scientific and fact-based inquiry, and deep public engagement.

"We want debate and discussion. We want to hear different voices and talk through issues," she said. "It's about building a culture of awareness and action."

## FROM "NO NET LOSS" TO "NET ECOLOGICAL GAIN"

KEC's vision for the future is rooted in a shift in environmental policy goals.

"We're moving from the idea of 'no net loss' to 'net ecological gain,'" she said. "History shows that 'no net loss' often means slow net loss. We want to actually improve the environment, not just slow its degradation."

The coalition's five-year plan outlines four focus areas: education, policy advocacy, communications, and partnerships. They aim

*KEC's Environmental Forum brings together local environmental groups, county leaders, tribal representatives, and scientists to share knowledge and coordinate efforts to protect unprotected natural areas.*







*KEC members and Kitsap County commissioners join advocates in Olympia to urge legislators to support the Trust Land Transfer program, the same program that secured Eglon Forest for permanent environmental protection.*

to expand their work beyond North Kitsap, connecting with communities across the county.

Partnerships remain central.

"We've brought together groups concerned about overdevelopment in places like Royal Valley, Indianola, and Arborwood,"

she said. "Just having people talk and share experiences is powerful. We're not doing everything ourselves – we're convening, connecting, and amplifying voices."

## THE PERSONAL STAKES

For Parsons, the work is deeply personal.

"I grew up in a rural area and saw how important the land is," she said. "Kitsap is beautiful, but it's on the brink of being destroyed by overdevelopment. If we don't protect it, we lose something essential – not just for ourselves, but for future generations."

She recalls a rally in Olympia where a Native elder reframed the concept of stewardship.

"He said, 'The trees are stewards of us.' That really stuck with me," she said. "If we don't take care of them, we lose the very things that take care of us."

## A CALL TO ACTION

Parsons's message to the community is straightforward:

"Join KEC, come to our forums, pay attention to what's happening in the

environment," she said. "Notice the birds singing – or not singing. Engage with nature every day."

KEC's open membership policy requires only that people agree with its guiding principles and pay a modest annual fee. There's no requirement to join a committee or attend meetings, though there's always an open invitation to do more.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

As Kitsap County faces the twin pressures of rapid growth and environmental vulnerability, KEC stands as watchdog, convener, and motivator.

"We can't solve all the problems in the world," she said. "But we can build honest relationships, use science, and work together for our county."

Perhaps KEC's most enduring achievement is its ability to give voice to the community – to connect neighbors, foster debate, and turn concern into action.

"It's about creating the future we want, and making sure that future is green," she said. ■



*KEC members rally outside the Department of Natural Resources during a Board of Natural Resources meeting, calling for the protection of Legacy Forests and the expansion of the Trust Land Transfer program.*

*Participants explore North Kitsap Heritage Park, studying stream life and identifying native species.*



*April Ryan (left) and Beverly Parsons (right) at KEC's Discover Kingston display, highlighting recent events and calls to action for protecting Kitsap's natural environment.*







# Message from the Board

We bid a heartfelt farewell to two valued members of our team. After serving as Executive Director since 2020, **Kaili Roest** departs with an incredible wealth of knowledge, leadership, and dedication that has left a lasting mark on our Chamber and community.

We also extend our deepest

appreciation to **Jannese Hunt**, our talented Office Administrator, whose steady support and commitment have been instrumental in our success.

Both are moving on to exciting new adventures, and we wish them every success in the next chapter of their journeys.

As we look ahead, the Chamber is

preparing for an important season of growth. We are currently seeking passionate leaders to join our **Board of Directors for 2026**, as well as a new **Executive Director** to guide us forward.

Those interested in learning more are encouraged to reach out at [director@kingstonchamber.com](mailto:director@kingstonchamber.com). ■

## Member Spotlight: Jasper Row Boutique

Born and raised in Kingston, **Brittney Jasper** has always had a passion for fashion. From following runway shows as a child to curating timeless style today, she brings that love to her downtown boutique, **Jasper Row**.

With the motto *"Be Your Own Muse"*, Brittney focuses on "elevated basics" — versatile pieces like the perfect tee, chic pants, or a classic dress that can transition seamlessly from day to night.

Jasper Row isn't just about shopping; it's about creating experiences. The boutique recently introduced **permanent jewelry**, sterling silver, and 14K gold-filled bracelets, anklets, and necklaces welded for a lasting, personalized touch. Perfect for moms and daughters, bridal parties, or best friends, this offering adds something unique to the Kingston shopping scene.

Customers can browse in-store, join social media story sales, or shop online at [jasperrow.com](http://jasperrow.com) with free in-store pickup for locals. Brittney also offers personal styling services, helping customers create looks that feel effortless yet polished. In addition to carefully sourced collections, she creates one-of-a-kind quilt jackets

and tops from vintage textiles, bringing sustainability and originality to her shop.

As a Chamber member, Brittney says the support has been invaluable: "They've been awesome about helping me market, resharing posts, and supporting events I do. I really appreciate it!"

"I'm so happy to bring something fresh to Kingston," Brittney says. "Fashion should be fun, effortless, and accessible for everyone."

Follow Jasper Row on Instagram and Facebook: [@shopjasperrow](https://www.instagram.com/shopjasperrow). ■



## Welcome New Member

Johnson Drywall

Yodi Dogs

Pickleball Kingdom



*Photos courtesy of Brittany Kelley*

*Members work in the open-concept main workspace at Vibe Coworks, where collaboration and focus go hand in hand.*

## Where Work, Community, and Opportunity Collide: Inside Vibe Coworks

**By Quinn Propst** | Ward Media Staff Reporter

**I**n the heart of Kitsap, Vibe Coworks is more than just a place to get work done. It's a thriving community, a hub for innovation, and a testament to the power of connection in the modern working world.

As remote and hybrid work reshape the landscape of business, Vibe Coworks stands out as a beacon for professionals seeking not only a desk, but a sense of belonging, growth, and inspiration.

### A NEW KIND OF WORKSPACE

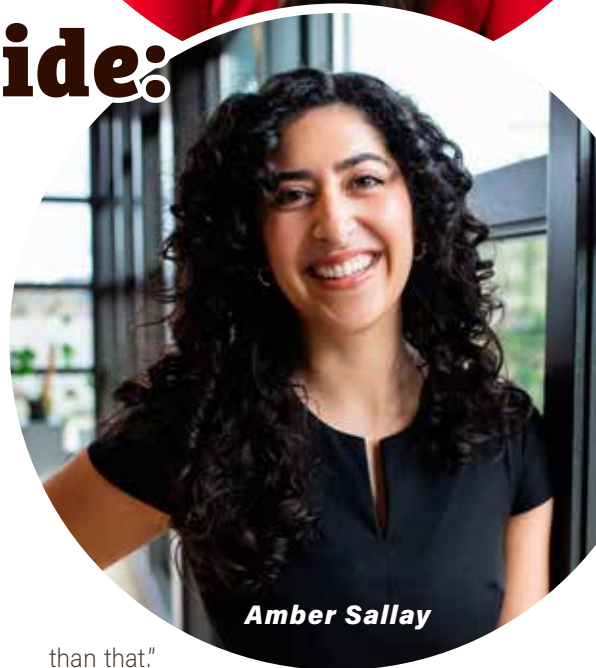
Walk into Vibe Coworks on any given day, and you'll find more than the hum of

laptops and the aroma of fresh coffee. You'll find conversations sparking at the kitchen counter, members collaborating on new ventures, and a palpable sense of energy that's hard to find in a home office or a traditional corporate setting.

"Vibe is a shared coworking space with a coworking community, and we try and differentiate that for folks," Vibe Director of Operations Amber Sallay said. "Sometimes people view coworking spaces as a place to just come get work done, have meeting rooms, have a private office, but a coworking space can be so much more



**Alanna Imbach**



**Amber Sallay**

than that."

At Vibe, the focus is on building relationships as much as businesses. Members don't just share space— they share ideas, opportunities, and support. The result is a dynamic environment where friendships form,



partnerships blossom, and new ventures are born.

## MEMBER BENEFITS: BEYOND THE BASICS

Vibe Coworks offers a flexible array of options for its members: private offices, hot desks, dedicated desks, and access to meeting rooms and event spaces. But the perks go far beyond the physical amenities.

Members enjoy discounted rates for amenities, unlimited coffee, and 24/7 access – a crucial benefit for those working with teams across time zones.

"A huge benefit for folks, too, is 24/7 access, because so many people, our members here, have companies that they're working with in India, the UK, and so their hours are so different," Sallay said. "We try and support that community by giving them 24/7 access. They show digital keys on their phone that they can just tap in, it shows us that they've come in, and it keeps our doors locked so that other people aren't accessing the space when we're not here."

Vibe also serves as a professional anchor for businesses, offering virtual mailboxes and mail handling services. Members can use Vibe as their business address, receive notifications for incoming mail, and even have their mail scanned or shredded as needed. This service has proven invaluable for members with international ties or those needing a U.S. business address.

## COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

What truly sets Vibe apart is its commitment to fostering genuine connections. The space is intentionally designed to encourage



*Photo courtesy of Camlyn Anderson*

*Attendees listen in during Creative Mornings, one of Vibe's many community-focused events.*

interaction, with the kitchen placed front and center to spark conversations and collaborations.

"We have a lot of really cool, key, natural work partnerships that people get out of here," Sallay said. "One business started out of here is GovGig, and they actually have office space now in Poulsbo. They started here at the corner table, talking to our member Brett Eddy about an idea they had about creating an online platform for government workers. Now they're a fully functioning business."

Vibe's impact is reflected in its member surveys:

- 57% use Vibe as an occasional alternative to their home or company office
- 69% feel happier since joining
- 70% report increased productivity
- 82% say membership has expanded their professional networks
- 19% of employers cover some or all of

the cost of membership, a number expected to rise.

## EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING

Vibe's calendar is packed with events designed to bring members together and foster growth. Monthly staples include Waffle Wednesday, birthday celebrations, and Free First Friday – opportunities for members to connect, share a meal, and step away from their desks.

Before the launch of Matchstick Lab, Vibe hosted Lunch and Learns on topics ranging from marketing to mental health. Now, Matchstick Lab, an independent entity, creates curriculum and programming for members and the broader community, including a micro business accelerator.

Once a year, Vibe hosts the White Tie Picnic to celebrate International Coworking Day, opening its doors to the wider community and showcasing the power of shared workspaces.

## HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND INCLUSIVITY

Vibe's commitment to its members extends to their health and well-being. The space features a wellness lounge – first and foremost a mother's room, but also equipped with stretching mats, yoga mats, and rollers. A massage therapist visits twice a month, and members are encouraged to take walks in the nearby park.

The team recently completed Mental Health First Aid training, recognizing their role as the first point of contact for members facing challenges. "We wanted to make sure



*Photo courtesy of Debbie Gilman*

*Vibe Coworks founder Alanna Imbach speaks at a Matchstick Lab event, inspiring local entrepreneurs.*



*Photo courtesy of Brittany Kelley*

**Members enjoy conversation and connection at Vibe's First Friday Happy Hour at Crabtree Kitchen + Bar.**

that our team was trained on how to handle it, and it kind of goes into that community aspect, like, what are things that you can do to change someone's day?" Sallay said.

Inclusivity and accessibility are woven into the fabric of Vibe. The space is ADA accessible, with thoughtful design choices like individual, lockable bathroom stalls and open washing stations.

"We always wanted to make sure that it felt welcoming to everyone," Sallay said.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL IMPACT**

Vibe's roots in the Kitsap community run deep. Partnerships with organizations like Kitsap Bank, the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance, the Greater Kitsap Chamber, and the Small Business Development Center from Western Washington University provide members with resources and opportunities beyond the workspace.

The space also hosts groups like the Kitsap Dental Association and Creative Mornings, further cementing its role as a community hub.

## **CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE**

Like many coworking spaces, Vibe has navigated the shifting tides of remote work, economic changes, and the aftermath of COVID-19. While some members have returned to corporate offices, Vibe remains a steady presence for freelancers, entrepreneurs, and remote workers.

"We have an insanely great generator," Sallay said. "Since I've worked here, I don't think we've ever really lost power. And if we did, it was probably for less than an hour. We have gig fiber WiFi. In the three years that I've worked here, I think that was only one day that it was off for two hours. Being

able to be the steady person here for people that are like, I lost my WiFi, I could come into Vibe – I think that works again and again."

## **THE VIBE ORIGIN STORY**

Vibe Coworks was founded by Alanna Imbach and her husband, Marcel, out of a personal need that quickly proved to be a community-wide opportunity.

Imbach's first experience with coworking came in New York, when her employer temporarily moved the team into a shared space after outgrowing their office.

"I thought that it was going to break up our team dynamics," Imbach said. "I didn't like the idea of losing my stationary desk, with all of my desk decor and paperwork comfort."

What happened instead was a revelation.

"What I never anticipated is, as soon as we got into that coworking space, having a change of environment, having less of our stuff and being surrounded by people from so many different industries and areas of expertise and stages of career massively transformed our creativity, the work we were doing together as a team, and just the network that we had, it was like instant, organic networking," she said.

From that point, she vowed never to return to a traditional office.

When the couple later moved to Kitsap, both were working remotely from home.

"We were going to kill each other if we were both working from home," she joked.

The solution they envisioned was a flexible, professional workspace – first for themselves, and then for others who wanted the benefits of working locally without sacrificing productivity or connection.

They opened a temporary "Vibe Lab" in September 2017 before moving into their

permanent location a year later. From the beginning, Vibe addressed critical needs: reducing the hours lost to commuting, combating isolation, and helping small businesses avoid paying for unused space.

"Our mission has always been helping people work happier, healthier and more connected," Imbach said. "If I'm not stuck in a car or on a ferry, I have time to go outside, see my family, and do the things I love. That's what Vibe is here to make possible."

"When they initially opened, they weren't looking to be running it themselves, because they had their own businesses," Sallay said. "But Alanna ended up loving the work and the community she was building and the people that were coming in. So she did end up leaving her job and working at Vibe full time."

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

Vibe's mission remains steadfast: to be the place where work, community, and opportunity collide. With the addition of Matchstick Lab as an accelerator for local entrepreneurs, Vibe continues to evolve, supporting innovation and growth in Kitsap and beyond.

The team is excited for upcoming events and member milestones, such as book launches and business expansions.

"We want members to be able to use the space as their business launches, as they have huge career milestones," Sallay said.

## **MORE THAN A WORKSPACE**

At its core, Vibe Coworks is about people. It's about creating a space where members feel safe, supported, and inspired to do their best work. It's about fostering connections that lead to new opportunities, friendships, and a sense of belonging.

"Truly, our community is what we're always most proud of," Sallay said. "Not just the community that we have found, but the people that our members hang out with and have found, or the job partnerships that they've found. Creating the community that we have, in a way that we have been told again and again, 'I feel safe here. I get my best work done here. I've met so many connections here, and I just love being in this environment.' That has always been what we've been proudest of."

In a world where work is increasingly remote and isolated, Vibe Coworks offers a powerful reminder: the best work happens not just at a desk, but in a community. ■



# Cost of insurance going up? Benchmark your benefits with BHT

Kitsap employers can expect more from insurance with Business Health Trust



BHT helps small to mid-sized employers in Kitsap County get more from their insurance:



**MORE CHOICE:** Choose from 80+ medical plans from Premiera, Kaiser Permanente and more.



**MORE SAVINGS:** Enjoy discounts on transit, IT and HR tools, dining, shopping, travel and more.



**MORE VALUE:** Mental health support and virtual care are included in every plan.



**MORE SUPPORT:** We're your partner, advocate and resource all year long.

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GREATER KITSAP  
CHAMBER



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# Overcoming Obstacles

Tips and tricks on combating objections to long term care

By Jessica Hull | Community Relations Director, Bay Pointe by Cogir

### **"PROMISE ME, YOU WON'T PUT ME IN A HOME."**

This one is difficult to hear. The jam-packed with guilt and the weight of it is so heavy because as you notice your loved one struggling with every day tasks, you are right there with them.

To unpack this statement, start with not promising anything. Be reassuring that you will always care for and about them; that their comfort is your high priority. Next, focus on curtailing that stigma of "a home."

This commonly used phrase is often an incorrect label of senior living options such as retirement communities, assisted livings, and memory cares. Keep an open mind when touring communities and share those thoughts and feelings with your loved ones. It is beneficial for them to be a part of those decisions when they can be.

### **"I'M NOT LIKE THEM, I CAN STILL DO THINGS FOR MYSELF."**

It's hard to see and feel your independence

seep from you. It's hard to think that there's such a place that would prevent that from happening.



Many retirement communities have the goal of maintaining your independence and quality of life while being there for you when you aren't able to take care of yourself.

Dignity is a big piece of moving into a long term care setting. Your loved one might see themselves as more capable than they actually are and it can be easier said than done to show them that even though other residents may use walkers and wheelchairs, it doesn't necessarily prove they are any less capable than their neighbor.

### **"I'M NOT READY."**

Even though it's most commonly mentioned, it doesn't make it any less an important feeling.

My tip for this one is if it's possible, keep them involved with the decision as much as possible. Once you've narrowed down your search of potential long term care settings, have them tour and find a

positive thing to say about each.

Ask the communities if there are long term commitments or if it's month-to-month. At times, it's easier to digest when you know there is a potential "out" of a contract.

A good question to ask them is "what does ready look like to you?" and "what does your reality look like if you were to continue on the way that you are right now?"

The answers to these questions could be very telling on how to navigate the next step.

### **"THIS HAS BEEN MY HOME FOR YEARS."**

It's difficult to leave a place that you've always known. Change is hard but that's because it's new and unknown.

Taking this entire process step-by-step is beneficial in combatting overwhelmingness and objections. If financially feasible, sharing with them that their home will be there if they need to see it again.

Again, ask communities if there are long term commitments or if contracts are month-to-month.

A good option is trying a respite stay. It's like a short term stay that is a try before you buy. A great option to get a feel of how life could be. ■



# GKC Around the Community



On July 25<sup>th</sup>, City of Bremerton Parks and Recreation celebrated the grand opening of Lulu D. Haddon Park with remarks from Tim Barker (Bremerton Parks & Rec) and Mayor Greg Wheeler. After the ceremony, games and activities were provided by the "Fun at the Playgrounds" staff.

The Greater Kitsap Chamber hosted its summer concert series: Silverdale at Sunset throughout the months of July and August. Pictured below are images from the concert featuring Ranger & the Re-Arrangers on July 30<sup>th</sup>.



**CHECK OUT  
OUR NEW  
MEMBERSHIP  
OPPORTUNITY!**

**BUSINESS  
INFORMATION  
CORNER DISPLAY  
TABLE**

**AT OUR MONTHLY  
CHAMBER LUNCHEONS**

**\*LIMITED SPOTS AVAILABLE\*  
CONTACT US FOR MORE  
INFO TODAY!**



County Commissioner Katie Walters introduced the band Ranger & the Re-Arrangers at the July 30<sup>th</sup> concert, which was sponsored by the Central Kitsap Community Council.



# July Luncheon and Foundation Fundraiser

At the Greater Kitsap Chamber's July Luncheon, held to support the Greater Kitsap Foundation, members purchased raffle tickets for a chance to pie Vice President David Emmons in the face. The Foundation raised nearly \$2,000 at the event.



# NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN!

GREATER KITSAP CHAMBER PRESENTS

FRIDAY 12  
DECEMBER

# season to Sparkle

THIS YEAR'S EVENT  
BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

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# July Member of the Month:

## KITSAP REGIONAL Library

For 80 years, Kitsap Regional Library has been a cornerstone of learning, connection, and community across Kitsap County.

Founded in 1945, this beloved institution has grown alongside the community it serves, evolving far beyond books to become a vital hub for information, inspiration, and engagement for residents of all ages.

A proud member of the Chamber since 2001, Kitsap Regional Library's commitment to Kitsap County is unwavering.

From its humble beginnings, the Library has expanded to nine locations and a robust digital presence, ensuring that no matter where you are – from Bainbridge Island to Bremerton – you have free access to knowledge and community resources that enrich everyday life.

At the heart of the Library's mission is a simple yet powerful belief: everyone deserves access to the tools they need to dream, learn, and grow.

Whether it's a child discovering the joy of reading, a job seeker learning new skills, or a lifelong learner exploring new ideas, Kitsap Regional Library provides programs, spaces, and resources that make it possible.

### A VITAL COMMUNITY PARTNER

Kitsap Regional Library doesn't just serve the community – it's a vital part of it.

By partnering with



local schools, community organizations, and businesses, the Library supports literacy, lifelong learning, and local economic vitality.

The Library's free programs and welcoming spaces create a place where people connect, share ideas, and build a stronger, more resilient Kitsap County.

As the Library celebrates 80 years of service, its impact is visible in every branch and every person who walks through its doors or logs in online.

From book clubs that spark new friendships to workshops that help people learn new skills, the Library's influence ripples through generations.

Kitsap Regional Library's story is one of connection, progress, and unwavering dedication to Kitsap County.

As they celebrate 80 years of service, they invite the community to look forward together – continuing a legacy of learning, belonging, and discovery for generations to come. ■

## GKC Hires New Administrative Coordinator

The Greater Kitsap Chamber is excited to welcome our new Administrative Coordinator: Kara Shepard. With a background in organizational support and a passion for community building, she brings a wealth of energy and dedication to her role.

Her day-to-day work includes managing office operations, supporting events, and ensuring smooth communication with our members. She also plays a key role in tourism and

community initiatives, helping to highlight all the things that make Kitsap such a special place to live, work, and visit.

Beyond her administrative expertise, she is deeply committed to strengthening the local economy and fostering a thriving community. She's especially passionate about supporting nonprofits and small businesses and is eager to connect them with the tools and resources they need to succeed. ■



Kara Shepard



# New and Renewal Members for July

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

## Community Connector

Clark Construction (2023)



First Fed (2013)



Kitsap Mall (1983)



## Growth

Bremerton School District (1983)

Pin Seeker Indoor Golf (2024)

## Main Street

Astound Business Solutions (2027)

Bremerton Masonic Temple (2015)

Maynard's Restaurant (2019)

Parametrix (2002)

Paratransit Services (1983)

Port of Bremerton (1979)

Sound West Group (2013)

Spaeth Transfer (1965)

**Tridentis (2025)**

West Sound Workforce (1999)

YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap Counties (2010)

## Business

A Better Crawl (2010)

Bagwell Law (2022)

BNI Pacific Northwest (2013)  
Bremerton Backpack Brigade (2019)

Bremerton City Nursery (1995)  
Chamber Think Strategies (2022)

**Coach Paul J (2025)**

Craft Hair Studio (2023)

**CRUZ Bookkeeping (2025)**

Fairway Independent Mortgage Corporation (2015)

Fusion Creative Works (2010)

**Good Juju (2025)**

Great Peninsula Conservancy (2019)

Grocery Outlet - Bargain Market (2016)

Kitsap County Sheriff's Office (1999)

Kitsap Humane Society (1989)

Kitsap Tennis & Athletic Center (2016)

Mise en Place Design (2024)

MOXIE Entrepreneurial Support Services (2023)

NAACP Bremerton Unit 1134 (2019)

Oyster Bay Inn (2012)

**The Donica Practice (2025)**

The Kitsap Connection (2023)

Tiffany Diamond Photography (2021)

Viking Education Academy (2018)

Vincennes University (2013)

Washington State Department of Commerce (2022)

**Thank you for your continued support of the Greater Kitsap Chamber through your membership. Your commitment to the Chamber plays a vital role in strengthening our business community and fostering growth, connection, and advocacy across the region.**

**Updated Location!**

JOIN US FOR OUR MONTHLY EVENT:  
**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2025 @ 5:05 PM**  
LOCATION: KITSAP CREDIT UNION, DOWNTOWN BREMEROTN

**CHAMBER OFF the Clock**

**KITSAP CREDIT UNION**

**GREATER KITSAP CHAMBER**

**CHECK OUT OUR NEW MEMBERSHIP OPPORTUNITY!**

**BUSINESS INFORMATION CORNER DISPLAY TABLE** (FOUR PER CHAMBER LUNCHEON)

Are you seeking an opportunity to showcase your business to local professionals and community leaders? The Greater Kitsap Chamber is excited to offer a new way for members to gain additional visibility at our **monthly luncheons** through the **Business Information Corner!**

**AS PART OF YOUR PURCHASE, YOU WILL RECEIVE:**

- ▶ A 6 ft display table to showcase your business to attendees.
- ▶ The opportunity to share marketing materials, brochures, and giveaways
- ▶ Direct engagement with attendees before and after the luncheon
- ▶ Complimentary registration for two to the luncheon
- ▶ Logo Recognition and appreciation in the luncheon slide show

This is an excellent opportunity to increase brand awareness and connect with potential clients and partners.

A BIC Display Table costs only \$250 and helps enhance GKC's membership luncheons while providing a great opportunity to showcase your business or organization.

**Limited Spots Available!**  
Only four businesses/organizations can participate each month

Each business/organization may participate up to **three times per calendar year**

This is **NOT** a luncheon sponsorship, but rather a new opportunity to showcase your business!

FOR MORE DETAILS AND AVAILABILITY  
CONTACT DAVID EMMONS,  
VICE PRESIDENT AT  
DAVID@GREATERKITSAPCHAMBER.COM  
OR (360) 479-3579

**GREATERKITSAPCHAMBER.COM**



# Finance

## The September Effect: Volatility, Opportunity, and Staying the Course

By **Kevin Campbell** | Wealth Advisor & Founder of Peaks Financial, Host of Kitsap Matters Podcast, Author of *Fearless: Charting Your Course to Financial Independence*

If the stock market had a favorite horror movie, I'm convinced it would be *The September Effect*. Year after year, this month has a habit of showing up with more mood swings than a teenager who just lost Wi-Fi. Historically, it's been one of the rockier months for investors.

Now, before you start stuffing your retirement account under the mattress, let's take a breath. Volatility doesn't have to be the villain. In fact, with the right approach, it can be one of the better supporting characters in your financial story.

### WHY SEPTEMBER CAN BE BUMPY

Nobody has a perfect explanation, but there are a few theories that pop up every time this topic comes around:

- **Seasonal behavior.** After summer vacations, investors get back to their desks and start cleaning house in their portfolios.
- **Economic cycles.** A lot of companies wrap up fiscal years in September, which can trigger rebalancing and profit-taking.
- **Psychology.** Once enough people believe September will be rough, they tend to act like it will be – sometimes making it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Of course, not every September is bad. Some years, the markets go up and nobody mentions this "effect" at all. Still, knowing the history can help you be ready for whatever shows up.

### USING THE SAIL FORMULA TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE CHOP

At Peaks Financial, I like to keep the process simple and consistent. That's where the SAIL FORMula comes in:

- **S: Strategy** – Does your investment, tax, and financial plan still line up with where

you're headed? A little turbulence is no reason to toss the whole thing overboard, but it's a good time to make sure the map is still accurate.

- **A: Asset Allocation** – How much of your portfolio is in stocks, bonds, and cash? Market swings can knock that balance off. A quick rebalance might help – sometimes letting you buy at a discount.

- **I: Income** – If you need your investments to provide income, make sure you've got a cushion so you're not forced to sell when prices are down. Think of it like having enough pantry staples to ride out a storm.

- **L: Legacy** – This isn't tied to the market directly, but it's tied to your future. Review your beneficiaries, trusts, and estate plans. It's one of those tasks that's easy to put off until "later," which often means "never."

### WHEN VOLATILITY BECOMES AN OPPORTUNITY

Market swings are uncomfortable, but they can also open doors:

- **Rebalancing.** It's not glamorous, but it may help.
- **Tax-loss harvesting.** In taxable accounts, selling certain positions at a loss can offset gains elsewhere.
- **Dollar-cost averaging.** Keep investing on a set schedule. When prices dip, you get more shares for the same money.

The mistake to avoid? Selling in a panic. That's how short-term jitters turn into long-term regret.

### THE LOCAL VIEW: KITSAP'S REALITY

For folks here in Kitsap, September's market bumps often collide with other financial pressures – business owners gearing up for Q4, households juggling back-to-school costs, and everyone eyeing the holiday season ahead. Add in the fact that interest rates are still higher than we've been used to, and it's easy to feel uneasy.

But just like we plan for ferry delays, we can plan for market delays. You don't cancel the trip – you just leave a little earlier and bring a good book.

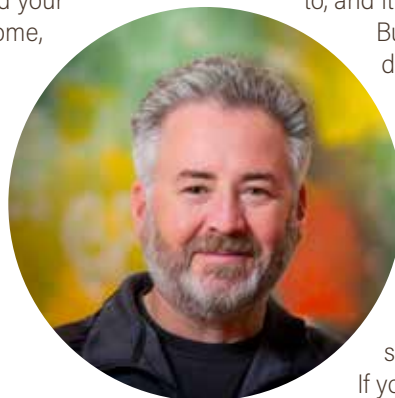
### THE BOTTOM LINE

The September Effect isn't something to fear. It's something to understand.

If you've got a clear strategy, balanced allocation, and enough patience to sit through a little market drama, you're already ahead of most investors.

So this month, instead of watching the market like a thriller movie, think of it as a good mystery – you may not know the ending, but you've read enough chapters to know the hero makes it through. ■

*Kevin Campbell is an Investment Advisor Representative of, and advisory services are offered through USA Financial Securities, A Registered Investment Advisor located at 6020 E. Fulton St., Ada, MI 49301. Peaks Financial is not affiliated with USA Financial Securities. Investing carries an inherent element of risk and it is possible to lose money. Past performance does not guarantee future results.*



# Changing Faces

## Changing Places

The following announcements highlight staff changes, changes of ownership or location, honors, awards, new board member listings, promotions, donations, and certifications. To submit information, email [news@kitsapbusiness.com](mailto:news@kitsapbusiness.com).

### Board Appointments

#### Charles Robertson Named President of Olympic College Foundation Board

**Charles Robertson**, executive vice president and chief retail officer at Kitsap Bank, has been appointed president of the Olympic College Foundation Board of Directors. Robertson brings more than two decades of banking experience and a long record of community service to the position. At Kitsap Bank, he oversees retail operations, consumer lending, and Learning & Development initiatives. A Kitsap County resident, Robertson has supported numerous nonprofits and leads the bank's annual Shred to Fed campaign, which raises funds and awareness for local food banks.

"I deeply believe in the mission of Olympic College and the Foundation's commitment to breaking down barriers to education," Robertson said. "As someone who has walked that path, I understand firsthand the impact community colleges can have in changing lives. I'm honored to serve as Board President and to continue championing the power of education to transform lives and open doors to opportunity."

Robertson, a graduate of the Pacific Coast Banking School at the University of Washington and Saint Joseph's College of Maine, previously attended community college. His personal experience, he said, drives his passion for ensuring students have access to affordable, high-quality education.

The Olympic College Foundation works to support students, strengthen educational programs, and invest in the Kitsap Peninsula's future.



Charles Robertson

Kitsap Bank, founded in 1908 and headquartered in Port Orchard, operates 18 locations in Western Washington and manages \$1.6 billion in assets.

### Leadership Appointments

#### Reliable Storage Names New District Manager

Reliable Storage has appointed **Kathleen Frazer** as its new District Manager, the company announced this week.



Kathleen Frazer

Frazer will oversee operations at all seven Reliable Storage facilities in Kitsap County, including Port Orchard, Bremerton, Silverdale,

Kingston, Poulsbo and Bainbridge Island. She will lead a staff of 12 employees in continuing the company's mission to provide stress-free storage solutions for residents.

"Unlike traditional self-storage companies, Reliable has proudly remained locally owned and operated for over 40 years," said Andrew Sherrard, managing partner. "We give back to our community and have supported thousands of customers through life's transitions. Kathleen's leadership aligns perfectly with these values."

Frazer brings experience in leadership, marketing and customer service, along with a track record of community involvement. She currently serves on the board of the Kitsap Builders Association, graduated from Leadership Kitsap in 2022, and was recognized in 2023 as a 20 Under 40 Leadership Kitsap award recipient.

"We are thrilled to welcome Kathleen to the Reliable Storage team," said Sherrard. "Her experience, leadership, and deep ties to Kitsap County make her an excellent

addition to our organization and the communities we serve."

### Honors & Awards

#### Kitsap Bank names Employee of the Quarter

Kitsap Bank has recognized IT Security Analyst I **Alexander Kobelka**



Alexander Kobelka

as its Employee of the Second Quarter of 2025. Kobelka, who joined the bank in April 2023, was selected for the honor by his peers for what the bank described as his strong work ethic, professionalism and focus on customer service. "Alex is a dedicated and hardworking member of the IT Security team," said Jackie

McVay, senior vice president and chief information officer. "His commitment to learning, his responsiveness, and his positive attitude make him an asset to the department and to Kitsap Bank as a whole. We're proud to recognize him with this well-deserved honor."

The Employee of the Quarter award recognizes Kitsap Bank staff members for contributions to the bank's operational excellence.

### Business Briefs

#### Kitsap Bank launches first CauseGood Day of Service

Kitsap Bank closed its doors early on Aug. 6 to launch its first "CauseGood Day of Service," a new annual tradition aimed at encouraging employees to volunteer in their communities.



Photo courtesy of Kitsap Bank

Kitsap Bank employees volunteer at Bremerton Foodline during the bank's inaugural CauseGood Day of Service on Aug. 6. More than 225 employees participated in projects across six counties, supporting 25 nonprofit organizations.



# Changing Faces Changing Places



*Photo courtesy of Kitsap Bank*

*A group of Kitsap Bank employees joins Great Peninsula Conservancy for an outdoor cleanup effort as part of the bank's first CauseGood Day of Service on Aug. 6. The annual initiative allows employees to volunteer in their communities during the bank's anniversary week.*

More than 225 employees took part in the inaugural event, held during the bank's anniversary week, volunteering at 25 nonprofit organizations across Kitsap, Pierce, Clallam, Jefferson, Mason and King counties. Activities included environmental cleanups, food bank support and financial literacy lessons for children.

"This day is about more than giving back – it was about showing up, together, in every corner of our footprint to live out our values," said Steve Politakis, chief executive officer. "CauseGood Day reflects who we are as a company. We are deeply proud of our employees' dedication and enthusiasm, and we look forward to making this a tradition for years to come."

Organizations supported included Habitat for Humanity of Kitsap, Great Peninsula Conservancy, Meals on Wheels Kitsap, Bremerton Foodline, Jefferson Land Trust and several others.

## **Leadership Kitsap Relocates to New Silverdale Office, Plans October Ribbon Cutting**

Leadership Kitsap has moved its offices to a new location at 3378 NW Lowell Street in Silverdale.

Executive Director Carli M. Meurs said the nonprofit will host a ribbon-cutting ceremony

at its new site on Oct. 7 at 4 p.m. "Everyone is invited!" Meurs said in the announcement.

Leadership Kitsap, a community leadership development program, encourages supporters, alumni, and community members to mark their calendars for the event.

## **Patriot Roofing Sponsors Free Halloween Celebration for Families in Silverdale**

Patriot Roofing is sponsoring the Kitsap Halloween Bash on Oct. 25, a free, all-ages community celebration in Silverdale featuring Trunk or Treat, live music and an indoor DJ dance party. The event runs from 1 to 5 p.m.

The afternoon will open with decorated vehicles and live entertainment outdoors before moving indoors for a DJ-led dance party.

"Bring the whole family to our FREE, all-ages Halloween event! Enjoy Trunk or Treat and live music outside, then head indoors for a DJ and dance party you won't want to miss."

The celebration is intended to provide a safe and festive space for families while also supporting a local cause. Proceeds will benefit the Submarine Veteran's – Bremerton Base and Charitable Foundation, which works to honor

submarine service and assist veterans and their families.

The Kitsap Halloween Bash is open to the public at no cost, and organizers emphasized it is designed to welcome families of all ages while strengthening community ties through seasonal traditions.

## **Artvana Expands Classes With Kids and Family Paint Night in Bremerton**

Artvana has added a new Kids and Family Paint Night to its lineup of classes at Cranes Castle Brewing in Bremerton, beginning Sept. 24.

The new offering joins the two monthly adult paint classes already held at the location. The family-oriented sessions are designed for ages 5 and older and provide an opportunity for parents and children to create art together while connecting with other families in the community.

These classes are great for families looking for something to do together or who want to meet other kids and families in the area.

Each month features a new theme, with the first session focused on painting a Forest Fox. The class begins at 6 p.m. Sept. 24. ■

# The Ecosystem Edge:

Insights for Builders, Backers, and Believers

*Insights and ideas from across Kitsap's entrepreneurial ecosystem – by, for, and about the people building what's next.*

## The Next Chapter is Ours to Build

By Alanna Imbach | Executive Director, Matchstick Lab | Founder, Vibe Coworks

Everywhere I look in Kitsap right now, I see sparks.

I see them in the eyes of a first-time founder refining her wireframes late into the night, and in conversations between seasoned business owners sharing insights over coffee. I see them on white board walls at Vibe Coworks, in underwater test environments with Navy Lab Keyport, on our farms, and on neighborhood blocks being transformed by bold ideas.

Friends. Neighbors. Strangers. All imagining, building, and daring to try something new.

Those sparks are bright. And they matter.

You see, sparks don't stay sparks when the right conditions exist. Given the right fuel – belief, connection, resources – sparks become fires that light the way forward.

Kitsap is at a turning point. While the outside world may know us for our beauty, our Navy presence, and our small-town charm, a more complex story is emerging. One that says:

- Innovation doesn't have to come from a major metro.
- World-class products and companies can be (and are!) born, rooted, and grown here.
- We can grow in ways that add value to the world without losing the character, local knowledge, and sense of place that make this region extraordinary.

Here, and all across the nation today, entrepreneurs are facing headwinds: shrinking access to capital, the rapid pace of AI adoption, and growth pressures that can hollow out communities.

Too many of our innovators are still building in isolation – not because they want to, but because the right pathways haven't always been visible or accessible. Changing that is part of the work ahead.

The potential for a deeply connected entrepreneurial community is here. It's up to all of us to make it real.

Matchstick Lab was created to spark Kitsap's collective imagination, one entrepreneur at a time. Thanks to the infrastructure provided by Vibe Coworks, and a powerful network of partners and funders, we've:

- Helped 48 founders sharpen their business models and connect with capital through the Micro Business Accelerator
- Convened Kitsap's largest founder-led gathering, the Firebrand Unconference, giving voice to real challenges and opportunities
- Launched Entrepreneurs Anonymous, peer mentorship circles where business owners solve real problems together
- Partnered with the NavalX NW Tech Bridge to connect local innovators to

national defense opportunities

- Built a network of 150+ entrepreneurs and partners who know where to turn for ideas, allies, and action.

In the last six months alone, we've seen our region rank 4th in the state for the number of life sciences companies based here. We've seen five Kitsap-connected companies compete – and win – at major regional competitions from Wenatchee to Seattle, Bellevue to Spokane.

These are not isolated wins. They are proof that **when a community**

**believes in its entrepreneurs, it changes what's possible.**

This column, *The Ecosystem Edge*, will build on that proof. Each month, you'll hear from founders, funders, builders, and Matchstick Lab board members and partners, sharing insights, stories, and strategies to shape Kitsap's future. This isn't about one person, or one organization. It's about all of us. If we want Kitsap to become a magnet for entrepreneurial talent and ingenuity, it will take collaboration, deep listening, laser focus on real needs, long-term commitment, and an unwavering abundance mindset.

Kitsap's next chapter is ours to build. Light a fire with us. ■





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# Marketing Metrics That Matter: Moving Beyond Vanity Numbers

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

When it comes to marketing, numbers can be deceiving. A post with hundreds of likes or a spike in new followers might feel like success, but surface-level statistics don't always reflect real growth. Too often, small and medium businesses chase these vanity metrics and walk away thinking their marketing is working when in reality it may not be moving the needle on sales.

If you want to know whether your marketing dollars are truly making an impact, you have to measure what matters most – the results that connect directly to your business goals.

## THE VANITY METRICS TRAP

Vanity metrics are the easy ones: likes, shares, impressions, and follower counts.

They're simple to track and they look good in a report. But they rarely provide a clear picture of business outcomes.

For example, a social post might get 200 likes but lead to zero phone calls, foot traffic, or purchases. In that case, the engagement didn't translate into real results. Vanity metrics can create a false sense of success, causing businesses to keep investing in tactics that don't generate revenue.

One client of mine put it best during a conversation about ad placement. After weighing options, she paused and said, "We just have to keep showing up in front of their eyeballs." She understood that the goal wasn't just to chase clicks or one-time

responses – it was to build familiarity and trust over time.

The takeaway: numbers aren't valuable unless they point to actual customer action.

## METRICS THAT MATTER

The most effective businesses shift their focus from surface statistics to performance indicators tied to outcomes. These include:

- **Leads Generated:** Calls, inquiries, or form fills that put someone into your sales funnel.
  - **Conversions and Sales:** Purchases, closed deals, or appointments booked.
  - **Customer Actions:** Foot traffic, downloads, sign-ups, or repeat visits.
  - **Retention and Referrals:** Existing customers coming back – and sending others your way.
- When you focus on these kinds of metrics, you get a clearer view of how your marketing actually supports growth.

## THE ATTRIBUTION CHALLENGE

Of course, tracking isn't always straightforward. Customers don't usually see a single ad and make a purchase on the spot. They might notice a print ad, look up your website later, and finally click a digital retargeting ad before buying.

This makes attribution – figuring out which channel gets the credit – a challenge. Instead of expecting one tactic to prove all the ROI, look at how channels work together.

I worked with a client recently who was running a digital awareness campaign. The reports showed strong foot traffic from people who had seen the ads – a clear sign

the campaign was driving visits. But because no one redeemed the coupon featured in the ad, he felt he couldn't measure ROI. The reality was that the campaign was working; he was just looking at the wrong yardstick.

The best measurement strategies combine short-term results with long-term indicators of brand health.

## HOW SMALL BUSINESSES CAN MEASURE SMARTER

The good news is, you don't need enterprise-level tools to measure what matters. Start with a few practical steps:

- **Set clear goals before campaigns launch.** Decide whether you want more calls, visits, or sales – then track against that.
- **Pick one or two primary outcomes.** Too many KPIs create noise. Focus on the metrics that tie directly to revenue.
- **Use the tools you already have.** Google Analytics, customer surveys, CRM notes, and even simple foot traffic reports can provide valuable insights.
- **Look at trends, not just spikes.** A single good week doesn't prove success – consistency over time does.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Marketing is full of numbers, but not all of them count. Vanity metrics may look impressive, but they don't pay the bills. Real success comes from measuring whether your efforts drive awareness, trust, and measurable customer action.

The next time you review your marketing reports, ask yourself: are you tracking what really matters? Marketing success isn't about looking good online – it's about building growth you can see in your bottom line. ■

*Amy Yaley is the COO of Ward Media and the co-owner of Northwest Swag Works. She can be reached at amy@ward.media.*







# Chamber Membership Connects People and Builds Trust

In a world where business moves fast, relationships are what truly last.

When you join the Chamber, you're stepping into a network of people who believe in showing up for each other: neighbors, customers, and fellow business owners who want to connect, collaborate, and grow together.

It's more than networking. It's about building genuine relationships that strengthen both your business and our community.

The trust that comes from being part of something bigger than yourself is powerful, the kind of trust that opens doors, sparks ideas, and turns introductions into lasting partnerships.

People naturally trust businesses that are engaged in their community, and that trust becomes the foundation for loyal customers, collaborative opportunities, and

shared success.

And don't just take our word for it – here's why some of our members choose to be part of the Chamber:

- "I just joined the chamber, but I absolutely love seeing our community of small businesses come together to support each other & our community" – **Bianca Nephew**. Owner, *The Gingerbread House Drive Thru*.

- "The chamber is the place where we get insight into all the cool stuff happening around town. The connections I've made through the chamber help me see opportunities in advance so I have time to prepare and make the most of them." – **Mark Winter**. CEO, *Winsource Group*.

**For more information about the South Kitsap Chamber of Commerce please visit [skchamber.org](http://skchamber.org) or call 360-876-3505. ■**



## Young Professionals October

**October 14<sup>th</sup>  
5:30-6:30**

Description: Conflict is a normal and necessary part of doing business (or life, for that matter).

Understanding our approach to conflict helps us become more adept at navigating it. In this interactive workshop, we'll explore the different ways we respond to conflict and discover insights into our own style and tendencies in challenging situations.

Participants will walk away with greater insight into themselves and others, along with actionable steps they can take to grow at a personal and professional level.



## South Kitsap Business Kickstart

**Presented by the South Kitsap Chamber & WinSource Group Consulting**

**R**eady to grow your business in 2026? Join this 4-part workshop series designed specifically for business owners, leaders, and managers who want to increase focus, gain clarity, and take action.

Whether you're launching a new venture or ready to scale, this series will give you the tools to succeed.

### WHAT YOU'LL GAIN:

- A clear business model

- A sharper focus on your ideal customer
- Stronger messaging that connects
- Actionable goals and a jump-started sales engine

### Who Should Attend:

- Entrepreneurs and solopreneurs
- Business owners ready for growth
- Leaders navigating change
- Anyone responsible for customer acquisition or sales. ■

## Welcome New Members

South Kitsap Notary

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# Driving Connection



Photos courtesy of Leah Thompson  
/Scandia Studio

*Richard Asche inside one of the Airporter buses, nearly 47 years after he launched the company with his late wife, Helen.*

## Airporter Carries Kitsap Travelers for Nearly Half a Century

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For nearly half a century, the Bremerton-Kitsap Airporter has been more than just a shuttle service. For residents of the Kitsap Peninsula, it has been a lifeline – a reliable link to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and, by extension, the wider world. But beyond the miles traveled and passengers carried, the company has built a legacy rooted in family, service, and community.

At the center of that story is founder and owner Richard Asche, now 88, and his longtime general manager Lauri Smith. Together, they represent the past, present, and future of a business that has carried more than 4.7 million passengers since its first run in 1979.

### FROM NAVY RETIREMENT TO NEW BEGINNINGS

When Asche retired from the Navy in 1979, he wasn't sure what came next.

"I retired from the Navy in 1979 and was jobless," he recalled. "And I got to recalling how when we lived in Ogden, Utah...when I needed to go to the airport, I called key limousine service, and they picked me up at my doorstep and took me to the airport for \$10."

That memory sparked an idea. With encouragement from his wife Helen, Asche decided to launch a similar service in Kitsap.

"I discussed that with my wife, and we most hardly agreed that was a way to do it," he said.

At the time, Asche's shipmates at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard were skeptical.

"All my shipmates thought I was crazy as hell, except for one guy, the commanding officer, Charlie Cole," Asche said. "He said, 'someday... I hope to one day come back to Port Orchard and Bremerton and see your vans and buses all over the place.' Well, he was right."

Thus the Bremerton-Kitsap Airporter was born. The family ran the business out of their home, with all hands pitching in. Richard drove, Helen managed phones, and their five children answered calls, cleaned vehicles and did what was necessary.

"The first year of operation we carried 935 people for the year," Asche said.

By comparison, in 2024 the company carried 130,362 passengers – a testament to both growth and longevity. In just the first half of 2025, they've already transported 73,370 people.

### BUILDING A BUSINESS ON FAMILY

The Airporter's early years were fueled by grit and family teamwork. Asche washed and repaired vehicles himself, Helen juggled

phones and books, and the children pitched in wherever needed.

"When they initially started the company, back when I was in high school, it was operating out of the house," remembered daughter Lynne Koll, who will eventually take over the company. "I'd listened to them talk... about the vision for the company and how they were going to start up the business and grow the business. And I was even cleaning the vehicles at the time. Everybody, all hands on deck, as my dad would say."

That commitment never left. Even as the company grew – today employing 54 people and operating hourly shuttles from 4 a.m. to midnight – the Airporter has remained a family business at heart.

"My little sister Mary... currently works in the office on weekends, supporting the operation," Koll said. "Another sister (Lisa) supports the business by her knowledge and marketing. So it's really going to stay a family business. It's always been a family business. I see it as a real legacy for the family to keep it going."

### RELIABILITY ON THE ROAD

From its start, the Airporter has been defined by dependability. Its buses leave the airport 21 times a day, every hour, from early morning to midnight.

"From the airport, we don't take reservations at all. It's first come, first serve," Smith said. "People come down there, they buy their ticket on a kiosk or from the driver, and they're good to go."



Behind that smooth operation is careful attention to safety and equipment.

"The biggest thing is our mechanics are very diligent about keeping these buses safe on the road within the Department of Transportation requirements," Smith said. "And then the dedication of the drivers...I have some drivers that I would never doubt that they would show up for a run, snow, rain, hail, anything."

Smith knows the operation well – she's been with the company for 12 years, starting as a driver and working her way up to general manager. Today, she keeps the wheels turning day in and day out.

"The biggest thing is, the customer initiates the reason for us being on the road," she said. "If we didn't have reliable vehicles or reliable employees, we would not have customers trusting us with their safety and everything to get to and from the airport."

## PEOPLE WHO MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

What makes the Airporter more than just a bus ride are the stories of its people – both employees and customers.

"One lady... has ridden with us for 25 years," Smith said. "She always asks for a specific driver. She will not ride with us if he's not working – that's Dana. He tells the worst jokes in the world, but he's probably the sweetest man in the world. He will give the shirt off his back for you, and he goes that extra mile for the passengers. If I had 20 Danas – even as irritating as his hummingbird behavior is – I'd take them."

Asche recalled another example of compassion on the road. A woman injured her leg at the airport and was in great pain on the ride home. "Our driver stopped at the gas station...they prepared an ice pack for her to put on her ankle," he said. "She was very grateful. Turned out that she didn't have a sprained ankle – she had a broken leg."

The driver made sure she had a ride and was settled before leaving. It's moments like these that reveal why the company has earned such loyalty.

"Our average age is 74," Asche said of his drivers. "Most of them are retired or just want something to do for a couple days a week."

That maturity translates into patience, dedication, and often, humor.

## SERVING MORE THAN TRAVELERS

While the airport shuttle remains its core, the Airporter also provides private charters for weddings, events, and group trips. The service has broader community benefits too.

"We take off probably 300–400 cars a day off the road," Asche said.

That reduces traffic, supports tourism, and makes air travel accessible for thousands who would otherwise have to navigate Seattle's roads and parking.

"It provides a very needed, low-cost means of transportation to the airport," Koll said. "One of the key things is, it's probably one of the lowest fares around per mile, and there's a high frequency of service. It runs pretty much 24/7, 364 days a year."

## WEATHERING CHALLENGES

Like all transportation businesses, the Airporter has faced its share of challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic was particularly tough.

"Covid really kind of kicked us in the pants," Smith admitted. "We had to let all of our employees go... then to get my employees back and to restart, you know, so we kind of had to do baby steps."

But resilience, teamwork, and community loyalty carried them through.

## LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY

Though Asche is still active, sharp and has a great sense of humor, he has begun planning for the company's future. His daughter Lynne will eventually step in as owner, joined by her husband David, who is nearing retirement.

"She's a bright girl, she'll do a fine job here," Asche said. "She works well with people, and she's customer oriented."

For Koll, stepping into leadership is both a responsibility and an honor.

"I've always had an interest in it, and I see it as a really beneficial business for the community," she said. "It's really going to stay a family business. We want to keep my dad's legacy going."

That legacy is about more than buses. It's about a way of doing business – listening to employees, valuing customers, and keeping service affordable.

"Dick allowed his company to grow,

and he allowed his employees to grow," Smith said. "If an employee has a good suggestion...he will take that into consideration and say, you know, let's try it. If it works cool, we'll keep it. If it doesn't, we won't have to try that ever again."

"Lauri has been a real, huge asset to our company too," Koll said. "She's just been very loyal and very hardworking. We really appreciate her. She's a real dream to have."

## THE REWARD OF SERVICE

For Asche, the satisfaction of hearing from grateful customers never gets old.

"I think probably the general feeling of satisfaction to our customers, and I feel is the most rewarding part for me when I sit out there with those dispatchers, I overhear their telephone conversations and the favorable treatment that dispatchers get about our service and about them," he said. "Personally, that's rewarding for me."

Smith echoes the sentiment. "We just like that when we get really good compliments... 'you saved our marriage because I wasn't taking Fred to the airport.' For me, to watch my employees develop and become open toward the passengers... I think that's the most rewarding part."

## LOOKING DOWN THE ROAD

Today, nearly five decades after a Navy veteran with a big idea took a chance on a shoestring venture, the Bremerton-Kitsap Airporter is stronger than ever.

"There's a lot to be proud of with this company," Asche said.

"And he is, and I am too," Smith added. "I see what he built – his ideas, his creativity, even his family, his wife, his sons and his daughters are behind him still to this day."

The Airporter's story is one of perseverance, family, and connection. It's also a story of community – neighbors carrying neighbors safely down the road, one trip at a time. ■

*Today's Airporter fleet, parked in the company's garage, ready to transport thousands of Kitsap passengers each month.*





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# Real Estate

## Guiding Clients Through Life's Biggest Transitions: The Human Side of Real Estate

By Tara Scouten | John L. Scott Real Estate Agent

**R**eal estate is more than a financial transaction – it's a turning point. Whether downsizing, navigating a divorce, assisting aging parents, or preparing to sell a long-held family home, these moments often carry emotional weight as well as financial significance.

In the right hands, they can also become empowering opportunities to move forward with clarity and confidence.

Today's market adds new layers to the decision-making process. Interest rates remain high, inflation impacts affordability, and global economic conditions influence everything from construction costs to the pace of sales.

Navigating these complexities requires more than a basic understanding of real estate – it demands a steady, experienced hand and a deep knowledge of the local market.

One critical factor that's often overlooked in high-stress situations is confidentiality. When a home sale is tied to a life event – such as a divorce or estate settlement – discretion is essential. Mishandled

information or public speculation can complicate an already difficult situation.

A seasoned real estate professional understands how to maintain privacy while still positioning the property for a successful sale.

Protecting a client's dignity and peace of mind is just as important as achieving the right price.

In emotionally charged circumstances, trust becomes the foundation for progress.

Clients facing major life transitions don't just need someone to handle logistics – they need a calm, competent advisor who understands both the human and market sides of the process.

The most effective agents are those who listen well, communicate clearly, and help keep priorities in focus when emotions begin to cloud judgment. Local expertise is another key differentiator.

While national headlines and online platforms can paint broad strokes about the housing market, real momentum is shaped at the neighborhood level.

Each community in Kitsap County has its

own rhythm and buyer priorities.

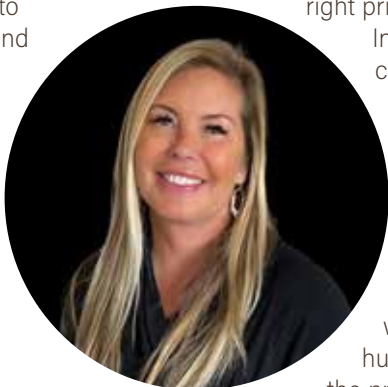
A locally grounded agent understands what's selling, what buyers are seeking, and how to align a property's presentation with real-time market demand.

Factors like timing, pricing strategy, and staging become especially critical in a market with fluctuating rates and variable renovation costs. When done well, real estate is not just about selling property – it's about guiding people through pivotal life changes with professionalism, compassion, and skill.

For anyone preparing to take that next step – whether by choice or by circumstance – working with a trusted advisor can make all the difference. It's not simply about putting a sign in the yard. It's about ensuring that the process protects your interests, respects your situation, and moves you forward with confidence.

In transitional times, the right agent isn't just a resource. They are a steady guide, helping clients navigate complexity and emerge ready for what comes next. ■

*With compassion, discretion, and deep local expertise, Tara Scouten brings a human-centered approach to real estate – helping clients navigate life's most complex moments with confidence.*



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Executive

# Q & A

*Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio*

## Meet Jason Driver, Executive Director of Kitsap Regional Library

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

As Executive Director of Kitsap Regional Library, Jason Driver is helping to shape the future of one of the county's most vital community institutions. With nearly three decades of experience in public libraries and youth advocacy, Driver brings both a passion for equity and a belief in the power of libraries as hubs for connection, learning, and innovation.

Since taking the helm in 2022, he has focused on strengthening the Library's culture, deepening collaboration across the community, and guiding the organization toward long-term sustainability. Under

his leadership, Kitsap Regional Library is reimagining what a modern library can be – expanding beyond books to serve as a catalyst for ideas, creativity, and opportunity.

In this Q&A, Driver shares his personal journey, his vision for the Library's evolving role, and why he sees libraries as essential to a thriving community.

### **Can you briefly introduce yourself and share a bit about your background?**

I've spent my career in public service, working to ensure that libraries remain vital centers for learning, connection, and

opportunity. Before coming to Kitsap, I served in leadership roles at the Chicago Public Library, leading systemwide initiatives in early learning, branch operations, and community engagement.

I began my career in libraries in 1993, working with adults, and I eventually transitioned to working with youth and families. Along the way, I've worked in social services advocating for youth and young adults in many capacities, including mentoring, child welfare, early intervention, and workforce development. My library journey has always been rooted in the belief that libraries catalyze personal and community transformation.

### **What brought you to the world of libraries, and what continues to inspire your work today?**

Libraries have always been more than buildings filled with books for me – they're places where people can expand their worlds, regardless of their circumstances. Initially, the draw for me was that I took a library job right out of college because I wanted to earn a second income to help support my family.

What kept me in libraries was that, by working in public libraries, I began to understand why public libraries are essential pillars of healthy communities. They sit at the intersection of education, culture, and community. What inspires me today is watching that impact in real time – seeing a teen discover a passion for coding, a job seeker land a new opportunity, or a family find a welcoming space to learn together.

### **When did you become Executive Director, and what were your key priorities coming into the role?**

I became Executive Director in February 2022 after a national search for a replacement for the longtime but retiring former Library Director, Jill Jean, landed in my inbox. I'm grateful to have been chosen to succeed Jill and lead this fantastic library system in the beautiful Pacific Northwest.

My priorities were clear from the start: to strengthen our organizational culture, expand our community partnerships, and position the library to thrive in this county long term. That meant focusing on sustainability, staff development, and ensuring our services reflected the diverse needs of the people we serve.

### **How would you describe your**



## **leadership style, and how does it shape the culture at Kitsap Regional Library?**

My leadership style is collaborative, transparent, and mission-focused. I believe in setting a bold vision but empowering teams to find the best ways to get there.

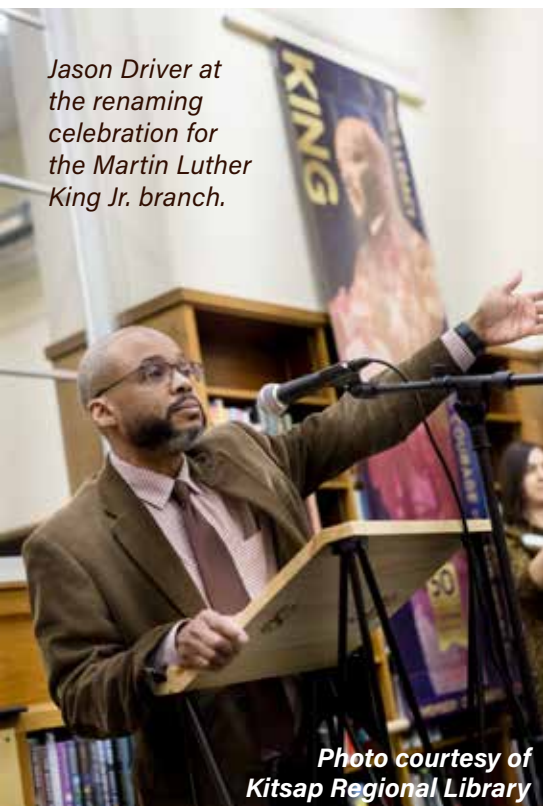
At Kitsap Regional Library, that means fostering a culture where innovation is encouraged, communication is open, and every staff member understands how their work contributes to our larger purpose. Culture is the bedrock of any good organization, and I adhere to the notion that culture eats strategy for breakfast.

## **For readers who may not be familiar, can you give us an overview of Kitsap Regional Library and the communities you serve?**

Kitsap Regional Library serves all of Kitsap County through nine locations, a bookmobile, and a robust online presence. We reach urban centers, rural communities, and everything in between, providing free access to books, technology, learning experiences, and spaces for connection.

Our service area is diverse, spanning Navy towns, creative hubs, and growing neighborhoods – each with its character and needs.

*Jason Driver at the renaming celebration for the Martin Luther King Jr. branch.*



*Photo courtesy of Kitsap Regional Library*



*Photo courtesy of Kitsap Regional Library*

*Jason Driver leads the annual Halloween storytime at the Sylvan Way branch.*

## **How has the library evolved under your leadership – and what changes are you most proud of?**

In just a short time, we've deepened our focus on improving internal culture, deepening community partnerships, expanding digital resources, and we've started laying the groundwork for future capital projects, including exploring how to construct a new central library and connected community campus offering safe spaces and wellness for youth and families.

I'm most proud of how our team has embraced change – stepping into new technology, piloting innovative programs, and finding creative ways to reach more people.

## **How is Kitsap Regional Library adapting to meet the changing needs of today's library users?**

We've embraced a hybrid service model – offering more digital tools, online learning platforms, library services' on-the-go' such as book lockers and expanded access to our Poulsbo meeting space outside traditional library hours.

Of course, it still provides vibrant in-person spaces. We are also focused on being a community connector – linking people to books and skills training, job resources, community services, and ideas!

## **What initiatives or programs stand out to you as especially impactful in recent years?**

Our workforce development partnerships, like resume workshops and digital literacy training, have made a real difference for job seekers.

Our 3rd graders go to the library, which provides every third grader with a library card and a solid foundation for reading and

learning.

Speaking of learning, Summer Learning continues to be our signature program, inspiring thousands of kids to stay engaged during the break. And our Making & Interest-Based Learning programs empower people of all ages to explore new skills, from 3D printing.

## **In what ways does KRL contribute to workforce development, education, or entrepreneurship in Kitsap County?**

We provide free access to technology, training, and meeting spaces for entrepreneurs, along with tools like LinkedIn Learning and databases for research. We offer job seekers free computers, printers, and scanners for resume and digital skill building.

For students, we provide resources for homework help and spaces for tutoring and collaboration. The library is often the first stop for people looking to upskill or launch a new idea.

## **What are some of the ways KRL is working to be more inclusive and community-centered?**

We've prioritized community listening – designing programs and services directly responding to our communities' needs.

We've expanded bilingual programming, built partnerships with local organizations serving underrepresented groups, and focused on making our spaces welcoming for everyone, from the design of our facilities to the way we greet each person who walks through our doors, the library not only aims to meet people where they are, but we also aim to serve everyone, regardless of their social status, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, political

# Executive Q & A

affiliation. Libraries are for everyone – please come visit us!

## **Public libraries are evolving rapidly. What do you see as the biggest opportunities or challenges over the next 5–10 years?**

One of our most significant opportunities is to expand our role as a hub for lifelong learning and civic engagement. We can be where people explore new technologies, connect with local resources, and collaborate on community solutions.

The challenge will be balancing that growing role with sustainable funding, ensuring libraries remain free and accessible while adapting to new demands. Ultimately, our funding structure is tied to the property



*Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio*

tax levy, which does not allow revenue growth to keep up with inflation and other escalating costs, such as salaries and benefits.

The library prides itself in being a responsible steward of the taxpayers' resources, aiming to provide a wide range of services and materials to reflect the residents who live, work, and play in Kitsap. We are the hub for information, connection, and learning in Kitsap County, and have been for the past 80 years.

Ultimately all libraries are at risk of faltering if the communities that they serve do not understand its history and relevance



*Patrons take part in Summer Learning programs at the Sylvan Way branch. Photo courtesy of Kitsap Regional Library.*

in modern times.

Kitsap Regional Library has been celebrating our 80th year as a unified library system, this year, although many locations have been around much longer than 1945. We invite you to grab a passport, visit all nine locations and explore all that we have to offer.

## **How is KRL planning for that future – in terms of technology, partnerships, or funding strategy?**

We're investing in technology that enhances access, from improved digital platforms to tools supporting expanded library access.

We're strengthening partnerships with our schools, nonprofits, and local businesses to amplify our impact. And we're pursuing sustainable funding strategies, including our recent levy lid lift effort, to ensure we can meet community needs for decades.

Libraries aren't just buildings with books; the 21st-century library is a multifaceted organism, where you can borrow a telescope, print from your smartphone, learn to play a ukulele, and use the meeting room to host a board meeting, small reunion, or even learn to sew or garden. We're doing it all today in libraries. One of the signs of a thriving community is a robust library system serving it.

## **What's something about your role that would surprise most people – or that people often misunderstand about library leadership?**

People often think library leadership is all about the books and managing the budget – but it's really about the people and the relationships. Nothing works if you don't manage the relational aspects of this role because it's an interconnected web of systems and people that make our library

system work.

Don't get me wrong, managing the budget is a massive part of my role, as well as policy review, negotiations, strategic planning, facilities development, community relations, fundraising, and managing a talented and multifaceted leadership team that helps bring our mission to life. It's as much about civic leadership as it is about library service. It can be challenging to navigate all the nuanced complexities of what I do, but I utterly love my job and can't imagine doing anything else.

## **How do you measure success at KRL – and what metrics matter most to you and your team?**

We measure success by the stories told. We are impactful in many ways to individuals, families, and organizations with which we maintain partnerships.

The anecdotes we receive speak to the impact of what we do, and it is gratifying to hear about how our talented staff impacts every citizen.

The stories are heartwarming and ultimately validate why we're all public servants. We also track library visits, program attendance, and digital resource use – but we also pay close attention to impact: the student who becomes a more confident reader, the small business that launches after using our resources, the isolated senior who finds connection at a library event. Success is when the library makes a measurable and meaningful difference in someone's life.

Sometimes, that is difficult to capture for various reasons. Still, twenty-five years into this game of libraries, I am confident that libraries will be counted on increasingly to be at the crossroads of learning, curiosity, and connections for Kitsap County and beyond. ■

*Jason Driver assists at the Manchester Friends of the Library annual Father's Day Salmon Bake, a 50-year tradition.*



*Photo courtesy of Kitsap Regional Library*





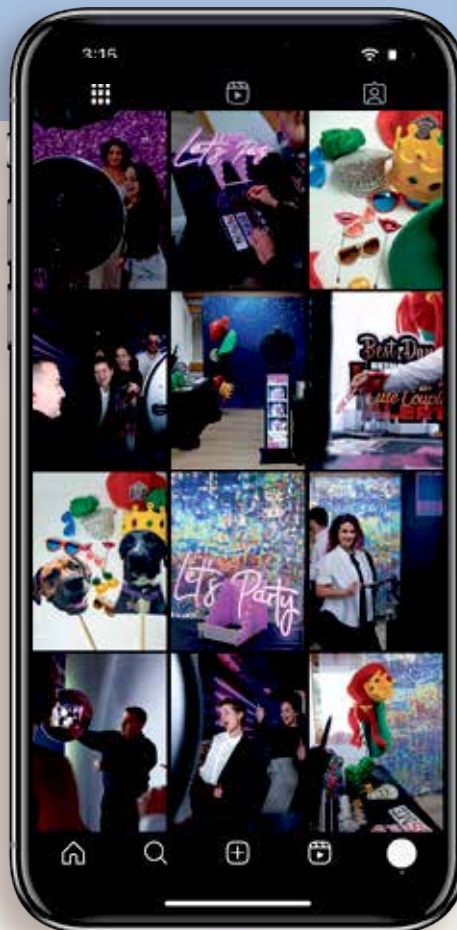
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