

KITSAP

December 2025

BUSINESS

News | Features | Nonprofits | People

Rooted in Community

How Brothers Greenhouses Became Port Orchard's Homegrown Haven

A Legacy Reborn

Minder Meats, a USDA-Approved Meat Processing Facility, Enters A New Era

F.R.O.G. Soap

Reimagines Sustainability and Small-Business Creativity in Bremerton

Q & A
with
Eric Mahler

CEO of Caffè Cucina and Caffè Cucina Coffee Roasting Co.

 GREATER
KITSAP
CHAMBER

Newsletter Inside



Eleven Winery staff raise a toast together in celebration of their team and shared successes. Photo Courtesy of Eleven Winery

CONTENTS

December 2025

Cover photography: Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Vol. 1 / No. 10

Fueling Futures

How the Olympic College Foundation Turns Community Generosity Into Life-Changing Opportunity

For 30 years, the Olympic College Foundation has stood as a guiding force, bridging donors' support with the aspirations and necessities of students, faculty, and the broader Kitsap County community. The foundation, an institutionally related philanthropic partner of Olympic College, "supports several pillars of success at OC," said Kimberly Cizek Allen, the foundation's executive director.

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How Brothers Greenhouses Became Port Orchard's Homegrown Haven for Gardeners and Wanderers Alike

The Brothers Greenhouses has been part of the Port Orchard landscape for more than 55 years—long enough to watch saplings become towering shade trees, and customers become second- and third-generation gardeners. What began as a small wholesale operation has steadily evolved into a year-round garden center known for its deep horticultural knowledge, unusually low staff turnover, and a loyal customer base.

Eleven Winery

A New Generation Takes the Lead While Staying True to Its Roots

On Bainbridge Island, where small business and community often intersect, Eleven Winery has quietly become one of the most vibrant hubs of connection, creativity, and craft winemaking in Kitsap County. Since its founding in 2003, the winery has steadily grown from a one-man operation into a thriving business with two tasting spaces—one at the Day Road winery and another in downtown Winslow.

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Innovation, Renewal, and the Power of Local Leadership

Forward^{THINKING}

Welcome to the December edition of *Kitsap Business*. This month, we close out the year with a set of stories that highlight something essential about our region: the future of Kitsap's economy is being built—not by abstract forces or distant markets—but by the people who choose to invest their time, talent, and conviction right here at home.

Across the county, you'll find businesses that are entering new eras, embracing change, and shaping what it means to grow with purpose. Some are revitalizing long-established institutions. Others are stepping into ownership for the first time. Still others are proving that creativity and community values can propel even the smallest enterprise into something deeply impactful. In Poulsbo, Caffe Cucina CEO Eric Mahler shares the often-unseen realities of entrepreneurship, describing a journey that began with a family dream and unfolded into a multi-location brand built on education, connection, and a fierce commitment to craft. His story offers a reminder that businesses don't evolve by accident—they evolve through leadership willing to adapt, learn, and stay grounded in community.

On Bainbridge Island, Eleven Winery begins a new chapter under three longtime employees who now co-own the business. Their transition represents more than a change in leadership; it underscores how culture, collaboration, and shared purpose can shape a company's identity as much as the product itself. As they prepare to expand into Bremerton, they're proving that approachability and joy can be strategic advantages in a competitive market. In Bremerton, F.R.O.G. Soap is redefining what sustainability can look like at a neighborhood level. Owners Andi Buescher and Greg Stanek are carrying forward a beloved brand while sharpening its



environmental mission and strengthening its ties to local producers and makers. Their story is a case study in how small businesses—especially those rooted in craft—can help shape the values of a downtown corridor.

A few miles away, Minder Meats begins a bold new phase under the ownership of Noo-Kayet Investments, the enterprise arm of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe. What began decades ago as a family operation is now positioned to become a regional anchor for meat and seafood processing, providing new opportunities for fishermen, farmers, and longtime employees alike. It's a rare

example of a legacy business transitioning in a way that honors its past while expanding its capacity to serve the community.

In Port Orchard, Brothers Greenhouses continues to thrive as both a garden center and a place of discovery. Under the stewardship of Marilyn Davis and Sam Maupin, the nursery blends horticultural expertise with whimsical experiences—from Hobbit houses to nature trails—that pull people into a deeper relationship with the natural world. As interest in sustainable gardening grows, so does the nursery's influence as a community educator.

And at Olympic College, the OC Foundation demonstrates how philanthropy, when rooted in local understanding, can transform lives at scale. With rising student need across the county, the Foundation is expanding scholarships, food and housing assistance, and support for emerging healthcare and athletic programs. Their work underscores an often-overlooked truth: a thriving regional economy depends on accessible education and the pathways it creates.

Taken together, these stories reflect a powerful throughline: Kitsap's future is being built through leadership that is hands-on, community-centered, and deeply invested in place. Growth here doesn't come from chasing trends—it comes from tending to roots, honoring local history, and trusting that thoughtful, intentional work can move an entire region forward.

As always, it's our privilege to share these stories with you. They remind us that progress doesn't always arrive with fanfare. Sometimes it looks like a new roastery coming to life, a trio of leaders raising a glass in a tasting room, a handmade bar of soap curing on a shelf, or a nursery worker tending to seedlings in winter light. These are the choices that shape the Kitsap economy—steady, local, and built to last. ■

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OC Foundation staff members gather for a team photo. At the center is Executive Director Kimberly Cizek Allen, joined by Foundation Coordinator Saren Anderson, Program Impact Manager Samantha Fairweather, and Director of Donor Experience Leanne DeSilva. **Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio**

Fueling Futures

How the Olympic College Foundation Turns Community Generosity Into Life-Changing Opportunity

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For 30 years, the Olympic College Foundation has stood as a guiding force, bridging donors' support with the aspirations and necessities of students, faculty, and the broader Kitsap County community.

The foundation, an institutionally related philanthropic partner of Olympic College, "supports several pillars of success at OC," said Kimberly Cizek Allen, the foundation's executive director.

"One of those is through direct student aid, through scholarships and grants," Allen said. "And then part of that is through programmatic and campus support, and also supporting campaigns for projects,

buildings, or other initiatives."

But the Foundation is more than a financial resource. It is a driver of transformation—connecting donors to students, responding to urgent needs, and fortifying the college and the region. It is a story of impact, leadership rooted in empathy, and an unwavering commitment to student success.

UNDERSTANDING AND MEETING LOCAL NEED

"All community college foundations are unique in that they work to support what's important to their college," Allen said.

"Every community college is a little different in its priorities, based on who they're serving and what they're seeing in the community," she said.

For Olympic College, which serves a diverse and sometimes underserved population across Kitsap County, that means being attuned and responsive.

"Part of what we strive for is being nimble and responsive to the needs that we see with our college partners," she said.

One stark example is student hunger.

"Nearly 40% of OC students suffer from food insecurity. If they can't eat, they can't learn, they can't stay in school, they can't succeed, and that's really what we're here to help with," she said.

When Resource Center partners reported, "the food pantry shelves are bare, we don't have any Grab and Go packs... can you help?" the Foundation pivoted quickly to address the immediate need.

But the Foundation's work extends beyond emergency interventions.

"We serve as the way that people who care about Olympic College... can support financially what's happening here and the students who are transforming their lives," she said.

The Foundation acts as a bridge—translating donor intent into tangible student and campus benefits while maintaining a deep understanding of the local context.

MISSION IN MOTION

The Foundation operates around three pillars: student access, achievement, and success.

"Access is through direct student support," Allen said. "Achievement is helping students with persistence, often through emergency funds or grants. Success is that sense of belonging that helps students find their place here, which we foster through many campus endeavors."

The Foundation's influence spans academic programs, athletics, and community initiatives.

"We offer several hundred scholarships to students, all different kinds," she said. Donors may create scholarships for future engineers, nurses, journalists, or for students facing food insecurity or homelessness.



*Olympic College Foundation staff a booth during a local golf tournament.
Photo Courtesy of Olympic College Foundation*

"We have scholarships for prospective journalists, engineers, people who like math, and many healthcare scholarships," she said. "On top of that, we have several funds set up to support students with all sorts of emergency needs: housing, transportation, child care, food assistance, and most of that is managed in partnership with the Resource Center or food pantry."

ADAPTING IN A CHANGING WORLD

Kitsap County is geographically large and diverse, and understanding its unique challenges is essential.

"Understanding what Kitsap is and how to support students is something we've had to do," Allen said.

The Foundation's responsiveness has been tested during leadership transitions.

"After two years as a student athlete playing for the Olympic College Golf Team, my athletics scholarship ran out just before my final quarter at OC. I heard about the Finish Line Scholarship through Olympic College Foundation and reached out to ask for help funding my tuition and fees. The OC Foundation truly made it possible for me to finish my associate degree in business, and I'm forever grateful!" – Elizabeth Mellum

Allen's own journey illustrates this resilience.

"I started as director of fund development, and then stepped into the Interim Executive Director role," she said.

At that time, "there was actually only one other person working in the foundation then that person left. So it was just me for about a

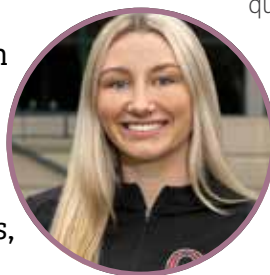
week, and then I hired someone. A lot of the functions of the executive director started coming my way."

The experience galvanized her vision.

"One of our primary priorities is shoring up the foundation," she said. "We want it to be strong and stable for decades to come. It's rebuilding relationships with donors, letting people know, 'We're here. We're back. We want to connect you with what excites you about supporting OC and the students we serve.'"

SUPPORTING OPPORTUNITY AND GROWTH

The Foundation aligns its work with the college's present and future strategic ambitions, currently that is particularly healthcare and athletics.



"As the college executes its strategic plan we want to come alongside and support with funding. We're prioritizing the healthcare expansion, particularly the EMT and paramedic, dental hygiene, dental assisting, respiratory therapy programs. We want to run a campaign alongside the

OC Foundation by the Numbers:

2025–2026 Planned Support

Total Program & Campus Support: \$650K+

- \$230K – Departments & Programs
- \$188K – Athletics & Student Life
- \$147K – Library & Learning Resources
- \$91K – Faculty, Staff & Administrative Support

Direct Student Aid: \$600K+

- Scholarships, Grants & Emergency Funds

Barriers to Student Success

- 40% of students face housing insecurity or need help meeting basic needs
- 87% require financial aid, scholarships, or grants
- 1 in 9 experience food insecurity

college to fund the launch of these programs and potentially a building to house them," Allen said.

Athletics is also expanding.

"Athletics here at OC has a new director, and he's focused on building a robust athletics program," she said. "We have many exceptional student athletes, so ensuring facilities and programs meet their potential is critical."

MEASURING IMPACT AND STORIES OF SUCCESS

The Foundation's success is measured not only in dollars but in lives transformed. "We have very direct qualitative impact, usually expressed through letters from scholarship recipients that we pass along to donors," Allen said.

There is also a growing focus on quantifiable data. "We're starting to track if students are completing their education," she said.

The OC Promise Program is a signature initiative.

"We fully support the OC Promise Program, which helps high school students who might not consider higher education," she said. "We take about 30 students from each of those two (Bremerton) high schools, and they're part of a program where they get their tuition covered, it's a last dollar scholarship. So most of these students do qualify for federal aid or other types of aid, but any remaining tuition and fees the foundation covers."



The Olympic College Foundation team collaborates during a strategy meeting, planning scholarships, grants, and campus initiatives to support student success and strengthen community impact across Kitsap County. Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

"We also offer a more holistic support program for that first year, so there's coaching, mentorship, check ins, etc.," she said.

THE POWER OF DONORS AND COMMUNITY

The Foundation is built on generosity.

"The Foundation takes donor support and converts it into a student's ability to transform their life and our broader community," she said. "We serve over 200 students a year with scholarships, many of whom would not otherwise obtain higher education.

Receiving a scholarship from Olympic College



Foundation is life changing."

Partnerships amplify the Foundation's impact.

"Our primary partner is Olympic College – college leadership, the Board of Trustees, the Resource Center, the food pantry, athletics, and faculty," she said. "Externally, Kitsap Bank sponsors The Community Lunch annually and provides a scholarship we distribute each year."

A LEADER GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY

Allen's path to leadership mirrors the Foundation's mission of supporting nontraditional journeys. A former registered nurse who faced burnout, she found purpose in nonprofit work with animal welfare organizations, eventually advancing into leadership.

Her approach to leadership emphasizes trust and empowerment.

"I'm deeply interested in how we relate to one another and to the environment. I like to lead people-first, allowing them to use their skills to the fullest. It's empowering," Allen said.

She champions diverse leadership styles, noting, "If we want things to change, we have to accept, even champion, other styles and types of leadership."

CHALLENGES AND LOOKING FORWARD

The Foundation faces the same uncertainties as other nonprofits and higher education institutions.

"There's a lot of economic

uncertainty, which makes it challenging to know when the best time is to invest," Allen said. "Tax law changes, political shifts, and whether higher education is prioritized all affect philanthropy."

Balancing immediate needs with long-term goals is a constant challenge.

"It's about building a long-term plan while being nimble—focusing on what's happening now, supporting that, then returning to the bigger path," she said.

Still, optimism is strong.

"We're fully staffed for the first time in over three years," Allen said. "Over the next two to three years, we'll see a lot of improvement in building this as an effective philanthropic office. We'll also advance a campaign around the healthcare expansion."

Making a Difference, One Student at a Time

Allen emphasizes the proximity of impact.

"OC students are our neighbors and friends, family members, co-workers, now and in the future. They're the leaders of our community. When you donate to a student at Olympic College, you're directly impacting, very likely, someone you know, or someone just a couple degrees removed," she said.

For Allen, the work is deeply rewarding.

"What I find rewarding about working at the Foundation is that you provide service. It's knowing the work I do each day contributes to a student's success and to a more vibrant, healthy community that benefits all of us."

As the Foundation looks to the future, expanding support, building new campaigns, and deepening community ties, Allen envisions a more equitable and thriving society. "If we want businesses, systems, and society to function differently, we have to recognize different types of leaders... which will help us all thrive."

With Allen at the helm, the Olympic College Foundation continues to transform lives, build community, and power opportunity across Kitsap County. ■

Kimberly Cizek Allen, executive director of the Olympic College Foundation. Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Personal Development

Turning Great Ideas into Real Results

By Dan Weedin | Consultant, Coach, and Head Dog Walker

Last month, I attended the Firebrand UNconference hosted by Matchstick Labs at Vibe Coworks. Nearly 80 entrepreneurs from all kinds of industries showed up for the second annual event.

An “unconference” flips the normal model on its head. Instead of a predetermined schedule, attendees answer a few questions from the organizers. Those sticky-note responses shape the four breakout sessions, and off we go. You choose what you want, follow your curiosity, meet new people, and pick up ideas to fuel the year ahead. I left with plenty of notes and plenty of people to follow up with.

But like New Year’s resolutions, those ideas will die a slow, silent death unless we hold ourselves accountable... or worse, let apathy creep in.

It’s easy to get fired up in a room full of motivated people. The energy is real. The spark is real. And then we all go home to our already full lives and immediately start paddling just to stay above water.

If you’re like me, you’ve got closets filled with half-filled notebooks from conferences over the years. Great ideas but barely touched.

What happened?

The same thing that happens to most resolutions. No matter how well-intended the goal - exercise more, eat better, declutter the house (my sworn enemy) - nothing sticks without two things: a compelling emotional “why” and a system of accountability.

So, let’s fix that with a simple three-part plan of attack.

Part 1: Identify Your “Why”

I go to conferences for two reasons: to meet people and to learn new things.

The chance to reconnect with friends and clients in an energized space is fun and productive. Meeting new people is how business gets built. And I expect to leave each event with at least three good ideas. Fewer than that means the investment wasn’t worth it; more than that becomes overwhelming.

Right after the event, remind yourself why you went. Doing this immediately keeps you aligned as you take the next step.

Part 2: Take Action

This is where most great ideas go to die.

Implementation is where the rubber meets the road, and most of us never get the car out of the driveway.

If you met people you want to see again, schedule the next call or meeting within a week. Better yet,

schedule it on the spot with your phone out. Business cards don’t drive action anymore; attention spans are too short and distractions too plentiful.

And this goes well beyond conferences. Anytime you meet someone you want to follow up with, schedule the next touchpoint in that moment. If you don’t, odds are you never will.

The same principle applies to new ideas for your business. If you wait more than a few days, your chances of implementing them drop fast. Not because you don’t like the idea, but because perfection sneaks in. We want more time. Better timing. The right moment.

When you’re 80% ready, go. The



remaining 20% is dysfunctional. Success, not perfection, is the target. Even if the idea fails, you’ve gained insight. But you can’t succeed or learn if you don’t move.

Part 3: Build Accountability

This is the hardest part.

We’re terrible at holding ourselves accountable, and the people closest to us rarely do much better. Spouses, family, co-workers, and friends may start strong, but eventually they get tired of reminding us... or tired of hearing us talk about what we’re “going to do.”

Real accountability requires vulnerability. It’s uncomfortable, and that’s why it works.

I’ve always needed coaches in business because I know myself. When you pay someone to hold you accountable, fatigue is never an excuse on their end.

Nobody becomes brilliant alone. Even the most driven and capable leaders need someone who will help them stay on track, push through discomfort, and finish what they start. The most successful people aren’t the ones who know everything, they’re the ones willing to ask for help.

Looking Ahead

As you plan for the new year, look back at the biggest areas of growth and opportunity you had over the past twelve months. What ideas did you abandon too early? Who did you mean to follow up with but didn’t?

Now’s the time to act.

Invest a little time today to knock out the first step. Then use this simple three-part system—identify why, act, and get accountability to make sure you’re getting value from the events, people, and ideas you engage with in the coming year.

The ideas are there. The opportunities are there. The people are there. The spark is there.

All you need now is the follow-through. ■



Feature

Rooted in Community

How Brothers Greenhouses Became Port Orchard's Homegrown Haven for Gardeners and Wanderers Alike

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

The Brothers Greenhouses has been part of the Port Orchard landscape for more than 55 years—long enough to watch saplings become towering shade trees, and customers become second- and third-generation gardeners. What began as a small wholesale operation has steadily evolved into a year-round garden center known for its deep horticultural knowledge, unusually low staff turnover, and a loyal customer base that views the nursery as much as a community hub as a place to buy plants.

Today, under longtime owner Marilyn Davis and manager Sam Maupin, Brothers Greenhouses continues to grow—literally and figuratively—while staying rooted in its original mission: offering high-quality plants and genuine, informed service to local gardeners.

"It's a nice place to be," Maupin said. "And we try to keep it a nice place to be."

FROM WHOLESALE ROOTS TO A COMMUNITY GARDEN CENTER

The story of Brothers Greenhouses began in 1969, when founders Lou and Sam Darmiento built the original greenhouse structures—still in use today—on what was then a quiet stretch outside Port Orchard. The name "Brothers" came from two places: the striking double peaks of The Brothers in the Olympic Mountains, and Lou's three sons.

In those early years, the business was almost entirely wholesale. Poinsettias, Easter lilies, and seasonal bedding plants were shipped to hardware stores and grocery chains throughout the Peninsula. Public shopping was limited to a few weeks each year.

"At that time, it was a very different business model," Maupin said. "They were selling things wholesale, and they had limited availability to the public. Basically



Mother and son, Marilyn Davis and manager Sam Maupin, continue the longstanding family connection at Brothers Greenhouses.

Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

seasonal—when they were open to the public for a few weeks, that was it."

Two employees, Marilyn Davis and Cheryl Pelkey, worked closely with Darmiento. After he passed away, Sam Darmiento managed the business for a time before selling it to Davis and Pelkey in 1996. A gradual shift followed.

"They started changing to a garden center," Maupin said. "It was a gradual shift away from a production greenhouse. We became open to the public every day. We kept some wholesale accounts, but as our community grew around us, we needed wholesale less."

Eventually, Davis purchased Pelkey's share and became the sole proprietor. Under her leadership, Brothers Greenhouses fully embraced its role as a retail garden center—still growing its own stock, but with an expanded selection designed around the interests of local gardeners.

A WORKPLACE BUILT ON CARE

One of the most distinctive features of Brothers Greenhouses isn't visible from the road: it's workplace culture.

"We are unique in that the owner makes breakfast and lunch for the staff every day," Maupin said.



Spring blooms fill the foreground outside the Brothers Greenhouses' historic structures. Photo Courtesy of Brothers Greenhouses



It's not a gimmick. It's a tradition that sets the tone for the entire operation, one built on care, respect, and shared purpose.

"Even though it's not necessarily a bunch of our extended family working here, it's pretty tight in the way we treat each other," he said.

That supportive environment leads to remarkably low turnover, especially in an industry known for seasonal staffing challenges. Many employees have been with the business for decades, building expertise across propagation, irrigation, retail service, and year-round maintenance.



Maupin, who is Davis's son, has spent much of his life connected to the greenhouse, giving him both a personal and professional understanding of the business's evolution.

"There's a lot going on on any given day," Maupin said. "We do a lot of stuff ourselves, so all the work that gets done is as quirky as we are."

A DESTINATION FOR WONDER, NOT JUST PLANTS

While the nursery's horticultural expertise keeps gardeners returning year after year, its playful, immersive outdoor spaces draw a much wider audience. Winding paths lead visitors through displays that feel equal parts nursery, nature walk, and enchanted garden.

The most beloved attraction is the Hobbit house—a whimsical, plant-topped structure that has become a Kitsap-area photo icon.

"It gets a lot of attention, especially from people looking to take a photograph," Maupin said. "You can go inside, have a seat, and enjoy some solitude."

Owner Marilyn Davis tends to flowers inside one of the production greenhouses. Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Sometimes it gets busy on the weekends, but it's been a great attraction for us."

What surprises Maupin most is who it draws.

"It brings people to the garden center who would never go to a garden center," he said. "Most people never go to one—that's true. Sometimes it takes something you're interested in, even tangentially, to capture your attention. And we believe there's a plant for everybody."

The Hobbit house isn't the only fantasy-inspired feature. Pelkey first sparked the creation of a themed gift shop that has grown into a series of small galleries with supplies for building fairy gardens, miniature landscapes, and whimsical terrariums.

These are more than retail displays, they're playful gateways that help guests find joy and imagination in gardening.

NATURE TRAILS, COMMUNITY EVENTS, AND HANDS-ON LEARNING

Extending beyond the nursery beds, Brothers Greenhouses has developed a small nature trail that loops through the property and gives visitors a chance to explore a bit of the local ecosystem.

"We're starting to kind of incorporate some of our production into this space," Maupin said. "You can see we've installed water collection. We're collecting runoff from our roof and recycling water with flood benches using a collection system."

The outdoor spaces also host community events—including one of the nursery's most popular traditions: the annual tomato trial.

"We grow about 40 different types of tomatoes and make observations on their productivity," Maupin said. "At the end of the season, we invite the public to come taste them and tell us what they think. It's been pretty fun, and it helps our literacy in directing customers to the best varieties in the springtime."

These hands-on community experiences, part tasting event, part garden school, deepen customer relationships while reinforcing the nursery's role as an educational resource.

ADAPTING TO THE SEASONS

Horticulture is inseparable from seasonality, and Brothers Greenhouses embraces the constant shifts.

"The weather is everything," Maupin said. "If the weather's nice, people want to garden. If it's raining, they usually don't."



Feature

A detailed fairy house display showcases the miniature-garden magic found throughout the shop. Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio



Davis and Maupin care for plants together in the greenhouse, where much of the nursery's growing takes place. Photo Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio



The nursery's popular Hobbit House has become a whimsical landmark and favorite photo spot. Photo Courtesy of Brothers Greenhouses

Even in winter, the operation remains busy. The propagation houses—open to the public—showcase seedlings and cuttings long before they're ready for sale, giving visitors a behind-the-scenes look at the growing process.

Bare-root trees arrive in winter and are potted onsite for spring and fall planting seasons, helping smooth out the business's cash flow.

"You can sell trees and shrubs all year long," Maupin said. "Spring is busiest, but fall is a great time to plant them."

The nursery also maintains a robust selection of native plants—an increasingly in-demand category as local regulations and homeowner priorities shift toward ecological landscaping.

EXPERTS WHO KNOW LOCAL GARDENS INSIDE AND OUT

One of the reasons Brothers Greenhouses is so trusted in the community is the depth of expertise on staff. Because many employees have stayed for years, and because the nursery grows so much of its own stock, knowledge is both wide and hyperlocal.

"We know what works for people in the community," Maupin said. "We feel very competent as horticulturalists, and our staff has a low turnover rate, so we have a lot of staff we can trust to work with the community."

Employees specialize in everything from fruit trees to natives to rare ornamentals. With niche plants, like quince or carnivorous species, staff can guide customers through selection, planting, and long-term care.

"So as far as a specialty, we try to have something for everyone," Maupin said. "We love to garden. And we want to keep it interesting for all the people who love it too."

SUSTAINABILITY IN PRACTICE

Sustainability isn't a marketing slogan at Brothers Greenhouses, it's woven into daily operations.

One of the biggest efforts is the use of biochar, a stable form of carbon produced by heating organic material in low-oxygen conditions.

"We've been purchasing biochar, and that goes into our soil mix," Maupin said. "Biochar and peat and vermiculite—we mix our own soil. It helps lock carbon in the soil long-term, improves water retention and fertility. It's an easy step for growers like us to make a real difference."

The nursery also composts all of its plant waste.

"All of our annuals and compostable stuff gets composted, and we reuse it," he said. "All our trees and shrubs get planted into compost that was once our annuals and vegetables."

Water conservation is another priority, reflected in the extensive water-collection and recycling systems now integrated throughout the property.

"As our nursery grows, it becomes more challenging to keep everything watered," Maupin said. "Having the ability to store water in tanks gives us a little insurance."

A REPUTATION BUILT ON TRUST

After more than five decades, Brothers Greenhouses isn't just a plant nursery, it's



Rows of vibrant petunia baskets await spring gardeners. Photo Courtesy of Brothers Greenhouses

part of the fabric of Port Orchard.

"We have a long reputation in this community," Maupin said. "We know a lot of the community, and we know what works here. What makes us unique is the level of trust we've built. That's our goal, to keep that."

Longtime customers know they can rely on honest guidance, durable plants, and staff who genuinely enjoy helping people grow things.

LOOKING AHEAD

Future improvements will continue to blend sustainability with visitor experience.

"One of our goals is to build a nicer public restroom," Maupin said. "We get used as a rest stop by a lot of folks coming off Highway 3."

Beyond that, the business will keep doing what it does best, growing plants, cultivating curiosity, and serving its community.

"Definitely a small business," Maupin said. "There's a lot going on on any given day. We have to do a lot of stuff ourselves. But that's part of the fun."

A PLACE THAT CONTINUES TO BLOOM

At Brothers Greenhouses, the story is told not just in words, but in every corner of the property: in the propagation houses humming with new growth, the Hobbit house tucked under greenery, the fairy-themed gift shop, and the nature trail winding through the trees. It's a business that grows alongside its community, quietly, steadily, joyfully.

"We're not trying to grow things for other garden centers," Maupin said. "We grow things for ourselves, to meet the interests of the community."

Brothers Greenhouses is more than a nursery. It's a place where plants thrive, employees stay, customers return, and curiosity blooms year after year. ■



Letter from the President

Hello, Poulsbo friends! I'm Marianna, your 2026–2028 President-Elect of the Poulsbo Chamber of Commerce—though some of you may know me simply as “that lady from Western Red Brewing who’s always talking about new event ideas.” After serving as a board director and vice president, I’m thrilled to step into this next chapter with you.

My mission for the next few years? Mix together the events we already love, add a splash of innovation, and serve up new opportunities that help our business community shine. Think of it as the Chamber’s very own recipe for a bold, fresh, and exciting 2026—crafted collaboratively and brewed with care. ■

Cheers to what’s ahead,
Marianna Smyth – Western Red Brewing, 2026 President-Elect – Poulsbo Chamber of Commerce



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A Legacy Reborn

Minder Meats Enters a New Era

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For more than eight decades, Minder Meats has stood as a cornerstone in Kitsap County. Its story, interwoven with themes of family legacy and resilience, recently entered a bold new chapter—one that now aligns its future with the aspirations of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe (PGST). Through the tribe's enterprise arm, Noo-Kayet Investments (NKI), Minder Meats has transitioned from a strictly family-run operation into a modern, tribally supported company poised to reshape the local food landscape.

Based in Bremerton, Minder Meats is one of only two USDA-approved meat processing facilities in Western Washington, giving it a unique role in the regional food system. With newly renovated facilities and expanded processing capabilities, the company is now able to handle not only meat but tribal-caught seafood, including halibut, salmon, and crab. This expansion provides PGST fishermen with a stable, reliable outlet for their harvests, ensuring fair pricing and consistent demand, while giving local consumers access to some of the freshest regional seafood available—a rare offering in a market often dominated by imported products.

The acquisition by NKI brings more than infrastructure improvements. It provides Minder with the financial and operational resources to grow retail and wholesale operations, modernize equipment, and strengthen employee benefits. For longtime staff, this transition preserves jobs and adds opportunities previously out of reach for a



Photos Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Eric Croft, Kyle Blatchley, Josh Hancock, and Jim Carlson stand beneath the iconic cow head that has hung in Minder Meats since the company's early days.



Director of Culinary Operations Kyle Blatchley talks with a staff member during production at Minder Meats.



Minder Meats offers a selection of premium meat cuts in its retail store.

small family business, all while maintaining the company's decades-long commitment to quality, local sourcing, and community.

A FAMILY LEGACY OF HARD WORK

Minder's story begins in the late 1800s with the Minder family, who migrated west and eventually settled in Bozeman, Montana. After WWII, family members moved to Bremerton to meet the U.S. Navy's need for regional meat suppliers. From those early days, Minder's reputation was built on partnership, practical ingenuity, and an unwavering work ethic. The company grew

steadily, earning contracts with institutions like Safeway and establishing itself as a reliable local distributor.

Jim Minder Carlson, grandson of the original founders, took leadership after working his way through every role in the company. Under his guidance, Minder weathered dramatic shifts in the industry: everything from USDA regulatory changes to the dominance of national supermarket chains. When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down restaurants overnight, Minder pivoted quickly to consumer retail, keeping staff employed and product moving.



But like many multigenerational businesses, Minder faced a crossroads. There was no family successor ready to take the helm.

"My kid was the only heir, and he wasn't interested in this," Carlson said. Selling the business, honorably and in a way that protected employees, became uncertain.

A WELL-TIMED PARTNERSHIP

At the same time, Noo-Kayet Investments was looking for the right opportunities to expand its portfolio and support long-term tribal employment and economic sovereignty. The alignment of goals was immediate and natural. Minder offered a respected regional brand, a critical processing capability, and a chance to strengthen the local food system. NKI offered capital, business infrastructure, and the stability of a tribally owned enterprise.

"The goal of NKI is to diversify the Tribe's economy and to provide employment and growth for tribal members," said NKI Interim CEO Eric Croft. "Minder was an ideal fit."

INVESTMENT WITH IMMEDIATE IMPACT

With NKI's backing, Minder gained something that had been out of reach: the ability to modernize at scale. As a small business, even necessary upgrades, like

new equipment, often had to wait. Under NKI, those investments became possible immediately.

Among the first enhancements:

- New freezer and refrigeration systems
- Upgraded processing equipment
- Investment in marketing and brand development
- Most significantly, renovation to support large-scale seafood processing

"We do have resources through our other businesses and through the Tribe to really come in and modernize," Croft said.

The new seafood capacity will be especially meaningful. It positions Minder to serve not only its long-standing restaurant and retail partners but also PGST fishermen, who will now have a high-quality local processor capable of handling halibut, crab, salmon, and more.

A SMOOTH AND SECURE EMPLOYEE TRANSITION

The effect on employees has been immediate and positive. Acquisitions often bring restructuring and job loss, but Minder's transition was approached with intention. All employees were retained, and many received expanded benefits that small companies typically struggle to afford, including comprehensive medical, dental, and retirement plans.

"These guys are going to make me look really bad," Carlson joked. "Now you get 401(k)s, you get your teeth fixed, all the things a small company can't afford to do."

For Carlson, knowing that longtime team members, including those who have been with the business for decades, are secure has been among the most meaningful outcomes of the acquisition.

One of those employees, office manager Teena Page, joined Minder at 18. Today, she remains a central part of the operation, energized by the company's new direction and future potential.

STRENGTHENING LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

With expanded capacity, Minder is becoming an increasingly important connector in the regional food supply. For tribal fishermen in particular, the new processing facility offers something the market has long lacked: a stable, predictable outlet with fair pricing. For years, many sold directly off the docks, where prices fluctuated and options were

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limited. Now, fishermen can bring product to Minder, where it enters established markets with transparent, reliable pricing.

That benefit extends beyond PGST fishermen. With local sourcing, strong regional customers, and an independent distribution network, Minder keeps more food dollars circulating in Kitsap County rather than leaving the region.

EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS AND VISIBILITY

Under NKI, Minder is doubling down on local sourcing, maintaining its longstanding partnerships in Washington and Oregon while seeking new relationships with small farms and ranches across the Kitsap Peninsula. The company also plans to support young agricultural talent through programs like 4H and FFA, nurturing the next generation of producers.

These local supply lines serve more than 80 restaurants and commercial kitchens in the region. With expanded capacity, Minder is able to meet rising consumer demand for transparency, traceability, and product origin.

Kyle Blatchley, the Director of Culinary Operations at NKI also oversees operations for Minder Meats and the Point Casino Hotel Food and Beverage Operation.

"The mission is to maintain the legacy of providing a high-quality, fresh product as local as possible," Blatchley said. "If we have to go as far as Oregon, we go as far as Oregon, but we're trying to avoid what general America is doing by importing from overseas and keep it homegrown."

"What matters to consumers is where did it come from, how was it raised, is it fresh?" he said.

Minder's visibility and direct sourcing give chefs and diners the information they increasingly expect.

LOOKING AHEAD

With the resources of a tribally owned enterprise behind it, Minder Meats is poised for growth on multiple fronts. Over the coming years, the company expects to:

- Increase seafood processing volume
- Grow retail and wholesale channels

- Expand into institutional and government markets
- Develop new products and prepared items for restaurants and consumers
- Continue upgrading facilities to match industry demands

Even as it evolves, Minder retains the qualities that made it a respected name: a commitment to local sourcing, quality product, and the people who make the business run.

For Carlson, the transition marks a fitting continuation of his family's history. For NKI and the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, the purchase represents not just smart business, but an investment in regional resilience, sovereignty, and community well-being.

As Minder Meats moves forward, it stands as a strong example of how partnership, thoughtful transition, and investment can preserve heritage while opening the door to a stronger, more sustainable future for businesses and communities across Kitsap County. ■



From left, Jim Minder, former owner and grandson of Minder Meats' founder; Josh Hancock, operations manager; Kyle Blatchley, director of culinary operations for NKI; and Eric Croft, interim CEO of NKI, in Minder Meats' retail space in Bremerton.



Minder Meats traces its beef and other products directly to their source, ensuring freshness and transparency for consumers.



Eric Croft and Jim Carlson hold a photo of Minder Meats' founder, George Minder, honoring the company's long family legacy.

A worker prepares fresh ground beef at Minder Meats' Bremerton facility.

Health & Wellness

The Impact of Winter on Dementia Care

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

The change of the season into winter can be a challenging time for those with dementia as well as for the caregivers caring for individuals with dementia. The cold weather and reduced daylight can disrupt daily routines and exacerbate symptoms. The holiday season is a time that highlights memories and family gatherings. Having dementia does not change that but brings a different perspective into play. Being prepared for the challenges that come with wintertime will help ensure holiday cheer for all.

NOTABLE CHALLENGES

- **Disruption In Routine:**

Big celebrations during the holiday season in addition to the cold weather disrupt the structure and predictability that people with dementia often rely on. This disruption may and can seem small such as adding an activity or including a bigger meal or starting the meals early, but any alterations in the daily schedule can cause disorientation. A disruption in routine can be changes in the environment, social interactions, and activities. The impact

- **Social Isolation:** Depending on where the individual lives, it can make it difficult for family and friends to visit which can lead to social isolation and feelings of loneliness. This feeling can exacerbate the symptoms of dementia such as depression and anxiety. Social isolation can contribute to decreased cognitive function which can include declines in memory, language, and problem-solving



skills. Both social isolation and feelings of loneliness can lead to an increase in behavioral symptoms such as agitation, aggression, and wandering. In addition, the winter weather can make it difficult for those with dementia to leave their homes to participate in festivities and gatherings. The flipside, families and friends that travel during the holidays that leave individuals with dementia alone or with reduced support can exacerbate social isolation as well.

- **Increased Risk of Illness:** Older adults with dementia are more susceptible to illnesses like pneumonia and influenza, which can be more prevalent during the holidays. This is also due to their weakened immune system and dementia can further compromise the immune system. Chronic health conditions play a part as well.

STRATEGIES TO COMBAT THE CHALLENGES

- **Maintain Consistency:** Providing a sense of structure and familiarity is key. Sticking as close as possible to a regular routine that includes meal times, activities, and sleep schedules will help. Consider scaling back on holiday celebrations to reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed and stressed with the change in routine. This helps create a calmer environment by minimizing noise and chaos.
- **Encourage Social Interaction:** Weather permitting, arrange for regular visits from friends and family. Consider adult day programs from senior centers and assisted living and memory care communities in your local area. Adapt



Stock photo

winter activities and have your loved one engage in winter-themed activities to encourage social interaction.

- **Hygiene Practices:** There are several strategies that help reduce the risk of illness. Ensuring that your loved one receives any recommended vaccinations, if desired. Encourage good hand hygiene to prevent any spread of illness. Providing your loved one with a balanced diet and adequate hydration to promote immune system function. Schedule and stick to regular health check-ups to monitor their health and detect potential issues early. Making sure their environment is modified, if needed, such as improving ventilation and reducing clutter.

As always, ensuring any caregivers or family members giving care are provided with necessary support and resources to manage stress and prioritize their own health so that they can provide the ultimate best care possible for your loved one.

By understanding these challenges and implementing the strategies to combat them, family, friends, and caregivers can help support loved ones and individuals with dementia during the cold, wintery months by promoting a sense of comfort, security, and well-being. ■



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Feature

Owners Andi Buescher and Greg Stanek lead F.R.O.G. Soap with a focus on sustainability, craftsmanship, and community.



Photos Courtesy of Leah Thompson/Scandia Studio

Reimagines Sustainability and Small-Business Creativity in Bremerton

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

On a quiet stretch of Fifth Street in downtown Bremerton, a small soap shop is proving how much impact a single business can make when sustainability, creativity, and community come first. F.R.O.G. Soap, an acronym for “From Reclaimed Oil and Glycerin,” has become a beloved local brand under owners Andi Buescher and Greg Stanek, who took over after the retirement of founder Laura Kneib in 2023.

FROM FRYER OIL TO FARMER’S MARKETS

F.R.O.G. Soap began with a moment of curiosity.

“It was founded by Laura Kneib,” Buescher said. “The story she always told me was she was out to eat, I believe, at Hound and Bottle in Manette, and she saw someone walk past with a vat of fryer oil. Like, to dump or something. And she wondered, ‘Oh, I wonder if I could make soap with that.’”

What followed was more than a year of experimentation as Kneib developed a stable recipe using reclaimed fryer oil. At first, she made soap out of her home and sold

it at farmers markets. Demand grew, and eventually she moved into a storefront in Bremerton.

By 2023, Kneib was ready to retire and relocate to Maine. After reviewing several prospective buyers, she chose Buescher, her longtime employee, and Stanek to take the reins. The transition happened almost overnight.

“We closed on the business deal, I think we made an offer, and a week later we closed, and the next day she left. It was really, really fast,” Buescher said.

STEWARDSHIP OVER A BRAND

Picking up where Kneib left off was equal parts honor and challenge. F.R.O.G. Soap wasn’t just a retail shop, it was a community fixture. For Buescher and Stanek, taking ownership meant preserving that spirit.

“I don’t know that it would still be here if we hadn’t taken over because

[Laura] had a few other offers, but she was really picky about who would take it over,” Buescher said. “I think because she wanted to maintain the integrity of the brand. And she trusted me to do that.”

Stanek, who came from a more structured work environment, found small business ownership both exciting and overwhelming.

“I had autonomy [before], but this just feels so open-ended, so that can sometimes be a struggle when

Limited-edition Krampus soaps, created specially for Bremerton’s annual Krampusnacht celebration.



Feature



Stanek removes soap from the mold, part of the meticulous handcrafted process behind every bar.

you're like, there are 100 things we want to do," he said. "Which one should we really work on?"

And the transition wasn't without hiccups.

Buescher explained that while Kneib had built an amazing product and a strong foundation for the business, she had focused primarily on the craft itself rather than the business side. As a result, Buescher and Stanek spent the first couple of years gathering records and data to better understand sales trends and operations.

A LOW-WASTE MISSION

Sustainability has always been part of F.R.O.G. Soap's DNA, but under new ownership, that messaging has become even clearer.

"We've really tried to make (sustainability) more a part of our messaging," Stanek said. "That's a huge part of the brand."

The shop encourages customers to refill their own containers, a win for both the environment and their budgets.

"That saves us money. So we save money, we can save you money," Buescher explained.

She also makes it clear that customers don't need to be perfect to make an impact.

"You can't be completely zero waste, so just focus on reducing your waste a little bit."

POLISHING THE BRAND

Buescher and Stanek also gave the shop a visual refresh, standardizing its look while keeping its quirky, grassroots charm.

"The biggest two that jump to mind is, we

changed the logo and came up with some branding; we have official colors and fonts," he said. "And then because of that, all of the labels changed and are more uniform and consistent."

Products that no longer sold well have been phased out, unless customers want to special-order a full batch. Meanwhile, the core lineup has expanded into body bars, shampoo bars, dish soap blocks named "the brick", lotions, shower steamers, calendula cream, hydrosols, and more.

LOCAL PRODUCTS, LOCAL PEOPLE

At F.R.O.G. Soap, customers aren't just shoppers, they're collaborators.

"You know, we're not a large corporation," Stanek said. "If I call—who makes soap anymore?—Dove, right? And I'm like, 'I want you to make it this way,' they don't have the bandwidth to care about you, right? But we do, and so we can respond to the community."

One request led Stanek to build a custom soap mold out of cardstock.

"A lady came in, I think she was with a real estate company, and she wanted a soap with a thunderbolt in it, and Greg built a mold out of card stock," Buescher said. "We were able to do that for her."

For others, F.R.O.G. Soap has become more than a brand, it's a solution.

"I've got a guy that came in, he's in his 70s, he's like, 'This is the only soap I've ever used in my life that hasn't made my skin break out,'" Buescher said. "And then he sent some to his sister in Michigan, and now she orders it online all the time."

Even physicians have taken note.

"I've had people come in say, 'My doctor told me to come here and get your calendula cream,'" Stanek said.

THE REALITIES OF SMALL BUSINESS

Like many small shops, F.R.O.G. Soap is not immune to economic slowdowns or uncertainty.

"There were a lot of records we didn't have," Buescher said, reflecting on the early months. "So we had to collect data for the first couple years and figure out what actually does sell."

"One of the biggest things I had to overcome was being used to operating in a box, knowing what I could and couldn't do," Stanek said. There are 100 things we want to do. Which one should we really work on? That's definitely been a stress."

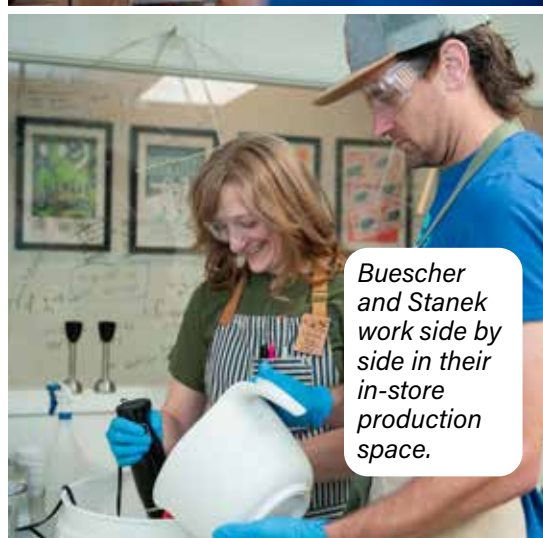


Freshly cured bars are stocked on the shelves, ready for customers.



Each October, the shop invites the community to take part in a popular soap-carving competition.





Buescher and Stanek work side by side in their in-store production space.



Stanek prepares to make a new batch of handmade soap, continuing the brand's tradition of small-batch production.

But the community is their favorite part of running the store. It keeps them grounded and moving forward.

"Connecting with all the customers that come in our regulars, our community," she said. "And then our neighbors like Bob the hat shop on the corner, and Ruben the barber. Getting to know like your neighbors, that's really rewarding."

A SHOP WITH A CIVIC HEART

F.R.O.G. Soap is deeply embedded in Bremerton's community fabric. The owners regularly donate baskets for fundraisers, display neighborhood posters, and participate in local events.

"We put together baskets for a lot of organizations, like for their auctions, to raise money," Stanek said.

The shop takes part in Bremerton traditions like First Friday, Krampusnacht, and its popular September–October soap carving contest.

"This year we're going to have a booth at Krampusnacht and we've been making specialty Krampus soaps," Stanek said.

Buescher, who is completing studies at the University of Washington, is eager to expand involvement even further once her schedule allows.

"When that's done, I'm really looking forward to being more involved in my community."

POWERED BY PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration isn't just a community value, it's baked into the products themselves.

"We did like a beer soap series when we first took over, getting beer from local breweries," Stanek said. "And we have a carrot soap and a cucumber soap, made with carrots and cucumbers from Roots Farm in Poulsbo."

And when customers ask for something special, the answer is often yes.

"If someone wants something, we can respond to their needs," Buescher said. "Not all the time, but if someone wants a special batch, we can do that."

GROWING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Stanek and Buescher hope to expand thoughtfully, especially into wholesale, while staying true to their sustainable foundation.

"We want to grow it," she said. "So we're looking at wholesale as our next big hurdle."

Their long-term vision includes supporting workers as the business grows.

"We have one employee now, we pay her more than minimum wage, hoping to, continue that and be able to provide a living wage to people," Stanek said. "Maybe it's part-time work, but if we can grow it enough to hire people and pay them right, that's definitely on our radar."

New products are always in development.

"I have a bunch of supplies to try and make an all-purpose cleaner, like a spray cleaner," said Buescher. "I want it done by January."

A SUSTAINABLE MAIN STREET MODEL

While Kneib created the foundation, Buescher and Stanek are building a business designed to endure.

"We want it to function as a business that can support somebody with a living wage, and then it can stay around forever if somebody can just maintain that," he said.

Most of all, they want customers to leave with a sense of belonging.

"We want people to feel welcome here, like this is a place where you're welcome," she said.

On Fifth Street, F.R.O.G. Soap is proof that small businesses can shape the character of downtown Bremerton in the most unexpected ways—one reclaimed, hand-poured bar at a time. ■

The Ecosystem Edge

INSIGHTS FOR BUILDERS, BACKERS, AND BELIEVERS

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

Why I'm Building A Global AI Startup from Kitsap

The best place to build a tech company isn't where you think

By Katie Hoffman | Co-founder, President & COO Phaidra, Advisor At Large, Matchstick Lab

When my co-founders and I started Phaidra at the end of 2019, we looked at a map and, like typical engineers, built a matrix to determine where to live. Our criteria included tax rates, talent availability, proximity to customers and venture capital, the strength of the startup ecosystem, and affordability.

We quickly narrowed our choices to the Bay Area, New York City, and Seattle. The Pacific Northwest, with its history of heavy industrial manufacturing and companies like Microsoft and Amazon, was the clear answer for a startup at the intersection of AI and industry.

DISCOVERING KITSAP

After incorporating Phaidra and securing our pre-seed funding in Seattle, the onset of COVID shifted us to a remote-first organization. This dramatically altered our company operations and rendered many of our initial location criteria irrelevant. We realized we could hire globally and no longer needed to be based downtown.

While we loved Seattle, the high cost of living limited our quality of life. This led us to explore the west side of Puget Sound and specifically Kitsap, which offered a significant improvement in affordability while still providing access to venture capital and the startup ecosystem. We put down roots and quietly built our global company and life, right here.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF STARTUP ADVANTAGE

Five years later, Phaidra is a venture-backed company that builds AI agents for AI factories—optimizing the infrastructure that underpins AI workloads and reducing the energy utilization of every token. Kitsap remains integral to our success.

Living here has fundamentally improved our quality of life, enabling us to purchase a home, grow our family, and afford childcare—all impossible in Seattle on startup salaries. We can pop out between meetings to walk in the forest or view



the Olympic Mountains. It's profoundly grounding to be in nature in between high-stakes discussions with our teams and customers.

Frankly, I feel like we found a cheat code for entrepreneurs by living here.

There are tradeoffs to be sure. Seattle offers an incredible founder community, not to mention the infrastructure to support diverse interests and needs. But it's also prohibitively expensive. When you are growing a young company, every dollar counts.

THE NEXT FRONTIER

I believe the next frontier for Seattle startup growth should be in Kitsap. It's a short ferry ride away and offers the breathing room for founders to do their best work while staying tapped into Seattle. It's far more affordable and has a massive amount of untapped space for companies to grow. The fact that Kitsap has its own burgeoning startup ecosystem—through Vibe Coworks and Matchstick Lab—makes it even more compelling.

This future requires investment: critical infrastructure development, startup-friendly policies, more restaurants, childcare options, and other quality-of-life amenities to attract and retain talent. It requires Seattle-based venture capitalists to encourage their early stage portfolio companies to build on this side of the Puget Sound. We must also grow our own Kitsap-based venture capital ecosystem.

Most importantly, we need to keep building a community that supports and retains talent. I'm grateful to be here building Phaidra, and am excited for the bright future so many are working to achieve here in Kitsap. ■



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Ready Kitsap:

2026 Business & Tourism Summit Set for January 15; Registration Opens December 1

As Kitsap County prepares for the global attention and economic surge tied to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the Greater Kitsap Chamber is convening regional leaders and local business and nonprofits for Ready Kitsap: 2026 Business & Tourism Summit on January 15th at the Kitsap Conference Center.

Designed as the county's premier readiness event for 2026, the summit will equip businesses, nonprofits, tourism partners, and community organizations with the insights and tools needed to navigate increased visitor demand and capitalize on new opportunities.

The inaugural agenda spans a wide range of high-impact topics, including regional economic forecasts, statewide business resources, community branding, financial preparedness, marketing and promotion, workforce scaling and training, and critical public-safety considerations such as the impact of human trafficking on businesses.

Ready Kitsap will also feature countywide resource partners available to speak with businesses throughout the event.

Select featured speakers

include Washington State Department of Commerce Director Joe Nguyen, presenting a look at FIFA's projected economic impact on



Washington; West Sound Workforce's Monica Blackwood, offering staffing and training direction for businesses; and Visit Seattle's World Cup Activation Lead Jorge Gotuzzo, who

will share the new statewide brand developed to create a more seamless, unified experience for visitors as they travel throughout the region.

Additional sessions and

panels will showcase Kitsap-focused activations, case studies, and best practices to strengthen local business operations ahead of the global event.

"Ready Kitsap allows us to bring the business community together to prepare for this once-in-a-generation moment," says Irene Moyer, President & CEO of the Greater Kitsap Chamber. "It's about readiness, collaboration, and ensuring Kitsap is positioned to shine."

Registration opens December 1 at GreaterKitsapChamber.com, with strong interest expected from businesses, nonprofits, and tourism partners across the region. ■



JOIN US FOR OUR MONTHLY EVENT:
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2025 @ 5:05 PM
LOCATION: PIN SEEKER INDOOR GOLF - BREMERTON

OCTOBER MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Olympic College

The Greater Kitsap Chamber is proud to recognize Olympic College as our October Member of the Month! As a pillar of education and economic development in Kitsap County, Olympic College continues to make a lasting impact on our community.

Where Education Meets Opportunity

Olympic College has long been a driving force in Kitsap County's growth and success. As one of the region's largest employers, OC provides affordable, high-quality education and workforce training that directly supports local business development. Their graduates enter critical industries like healthcare, maritime, technology, manufacturing, and public service - helping to power the local economy from the ground up.

But Olympic College is more than just an educational institution - it's a community partner. Their programs are designed to meet the real-world needs of Kitsap's workforce, and their commitment to student success is evident in every classroom, lab, and training center.

Local Partnerships, Regional Progress

Olympic College works hand-in-hand with the Greater Kitsap Chamber, local school districts, and industry leaders to ensure their programs align with current workforce demands. From hosting Chamber events to supporting youth mentorship



and business development initiatives, OC's faculty and staff are deeply engaged in building a stronger, more connected Kitsap.

Their customized corporate training programs and apprenticeship opportunities allow local employers to upskill their teams without sending talent out of the region — a win-win for businesses and the community alike.

A Legacy of Impact and Innovation

This year, Olympic College received a transformational \$1 million gift from the Tim Ryan family, expanding access to scholarships and educational initiatives for local learners. The college

also launched new career pathways and advocated for modernization projects like West Sound Tech, reinforcing its commitment to innovation and regional development.

Olympic College truly embodies the Chamber's mission of building a stronger Kitsap through education, collaboration, and economic opportunity. We are honored to spotlight their achievements and continued impact on Kitsap County. ■



NOVEMBER MEMBER OF THE MONTH

Business Health Trust

The Greater Kitsap Chamber is also excited to announce our November Member of the Month: Business Health Trust! As Washington's source for affordable, high-quality employee benefits, Business Health Trust (BHT) empowers small and mid-sized businesses to compete and thrive.

Where Benefits Meet Business Growth

Founded to level the playing field for small businesses, BHT offers large-company benefits at small-company prices. Through its Association Health Plan model, BHT helps employers attract and retain top talent with access to more than 80 medical plan designs, dental and vision coverage, mental health resources, and wellness programs. These benefits don't just keep employees healthy; they strengthen the backbone of our local economy by helping businesses remain competitive and sustainable.

More Than Insurance - A Community Resource

Business Health Trust is more than a benefits provider; it's an advocate for Washington's business community. By partnering with Chambers and associations statewide, BHT ensures that even the smallest companies can



Insurance Done Differently

access comprehensive health coverage and HR tools. Their commitment to innovation is evident in partnerships like the recent collaboration with Nice Healthcare, bringing affordable virtual and in-home primary care to employers across the state that remove barriers to care and improve employee well-being.

Driving Economic Impact

With over 1,000 employers and 25,000 employees covered statewide, BHT plays a critical role in workforce stability and economic development. Their programs reduce costs for businesses, improve productivity, and foster healthier communities. By offering consolidated billing, compliance support, and cost-saving resources, BHT allows business owners to focus on growth while ensuring their teams are supported.

Business Health Trust exemplifies the Chamber's mission to build a stronger Kitsap through collaboration, advocacy, and resources that matter. We are honored to spotlight their impact and continued dedication to Washington's business community. ■



Hyas-Tyee Award

The Greater Kitsap Chamber Board of Directors is honored to announce Captain Alan R. Beam, USN (Ret.) as the recipient of this year's Hyas Tyee Award, one of the Chamber's highest distinctions. Captain Beam is a retired submarine officer whose distinguished Navy career included serving as Commanding Officer of the fast-attack submarine USS Bremerton, followed by longtime service throughout Kitsap as a leader and supporter of the Bremerton-Olympic Peninsula Council of the Navy League.

The Chamber's Hyas Tyee Award seeks to recognize individuals for significant leadership positions,



Captain Alan R. Beam, USN (Ret.)

contributions to the community and for serving as an exemplary role model for others. Captain Beam will be honored at the 4th Annual Business Awards Gala on December 12th at the Kitsap Conference Center in Downtown Bremerton. ■

Kitsap Habitat for Humanity Store Grand Re-Opening & Ribbon Cutting



On Halloween, the Chamber was thrilled to celebrate the grand re-opening of the Kitsap Habitat for Humanity Store! More than just a place to shop, the store is a cornerstone for sustainability and community impact. Every purchase helps fund affordable housing projects right here in Kitsap County, while donated items are given new life instead of ending up in landfills. With incredible deals on furniture, appliances, and building materials, the store makes home improvement accessible for everyone.



GKC: November Luncheon – Nonprofit Showcase

The GKC welcomed Tina O'Brien (Kitsap Community Foundation), Cori Kauk (Bremerton Foodline), and Charlie Thompson (North Kitsap Fishline) to speak at our November

Nonprofit Showcase where they shared insights on the challenges facing local food banks and highlighted the importance of collaboration between nonprofits and businesses. ■



GKC Around the Community

Hosted at the Kitsap Humane Society, the Greater Kitsap Chamber's October Chamber: Off the Clock featured delicious snacks by Honeybee Horticulture and a unique opportunity to connect in a setting dedicated to animal care - with a special visit from

one very charming canine ambassador. ■



Eggs & Issues



26th Legislative District Senate with Michelle Caldier and Deb Krishnadasan



Alysa Grimes and Paige Jarquin were the moderators for the Chamber's Eggs & Issues candidate forums



Bremerton Mayoral Race with Greg Wheeler and Jeff Coughlin



Poulsbo Mayoral Race with Ed Stern and Dan Weedon



New and Renewal Memberships for October

We appreciate your support of the Chamber's Mission!

Main Street

Lockheed Martin Space Systems (1987)

Studio 360m (2025)

Timberland Bank (2000)

Business

Affordable RV Repair Center Inc. (2024)

Bricks 4 Kidz Puget Sound (2025)

Business Health Trust (2023)

Cascade Natural Gas (1963)

Cedar Glen Mobile Home Park LLC. (2025)

Cowan Media Creations (2025)

Evoluent.AI (2025)

Gennaro Contracting LLC (2024)

Girl Scouts of Western Washington (2025)

Greg Wheeler (2018)

Holly Ridge Center (1995)

Irene Miller (2023)

JJM Consulting Services, LLC (2022)

Keller Williams Greater 360 (2022)

Marina Square Suites (2022)

NW Hopeful Horizons (2023)

Poulsbo Film Festival LLC (2023)

ShowCase Media: New

Neighbors Guide Kitsap (2023)

SS Landscaping Services, Inc. (2025)

Staples - Port Orchard (2025)

The Bridgeford Insurance Team (2019)

The Center for TMJ & Sleep Solutions NW (2025)

Vintage at Bremerton (2005)

West Sound Plumbing Service (2024)

West Sound Youth for Christ (2017)

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. ■

Strawberry Creek Grand Opening & Ribbon Cutting

The rain cleared just in time for the official unveiling and ribbon cutting of the new Strawberry Creek Community Mosaic on November 2nd. The Chamber was proud to join the celebration and help spotlight this often-overlooked fish ladder. Featured above are Lisa Stirrett (left) and Gaylene McCray (right), who spearheaded this exciting project.



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Finance

Tax Efficiency

Keeping More of What You Earn

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



Ah, tax season. That special time of year when you either feel like a financial genius or a government donor. Most people see April 15th as a deadline, but the real winners think ahead. Paying taxes is inevitable, but overpaying? That's optional.

SHORT-TERM VS. LONG-TERM TAX PLANNING

Many investors focus on the now, forgetting that small tax decisions today add up over time. Take capital gains, for example. Sell an investment too soon (less than a year), and you could be taxed at rates as high as 37%. Hold it longer (over a year), and you might cut that rate nearly in half.

But this isn't just about capital gains. Retirement brings its own tax curveballs. Many assume their tax rate will drop once they stop working, but Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) can push retirees into higher tax brackets. The government lets you defer taxes in a traditional IRA or 401(k), but eventually, Uncle Sam wants his cut. The key? Plan ahead.

ROTH CONVERSIONS: A LONG-TERM TAX PLAY

This is where Roth IRAs step in. Pay taxes now, and in exchange, future withdrawals are tax-free.

But how do you decide between traditional and Roth? It's about your future tax rate. If you believe taxes will be lower in retirement, a traditional IRA or 401(k) may make sense. If you expect a higher future tax rate—due to rising income or changes in tax laws—Roth contributions or conversions may be worth considering.

Not everyone is eligible to contribute directly to a Roth IRA. Contributions are subject to income limits, meaning some high

earners may not qualify. Additionally, Roth IRA earnings can only be withdrawn tax-free if the account has been open for at least five years and the account holder is over age 59½. These rules make it essential to evaluate whether a Roth strategy fits within your financial plan.

Tax rates have fluctuated significantly. In the 1970s, the top federal tax rate was 70%. While no one can predict future tax policy, understanding historical trends can help. Since tax implications vary, consulting a tax professional is recommended.

TAX-LOSS HARVESTING: TURNING MARKET LEMONS INTO LEMONADE

Market downturns can create tax-saving opportunities. Selling investments at a loss allows you to offset taxable gains elsewhere. Investors may also deduct up to \$3,000 per year against ordinary income.

But beware of the wash-sale rule. Buying back the same investment too soon disallows the tax benefit if the same (or substantially identical) security is repurchased within 30 days. Tax-loss harvesting should be evaluated as part of a broader financial plan.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT INVESTMENT ACCOUNTS

Not all accounts are created equal. Where you hold investments can be just as important as what you invest in.

- Traditional IRAs and 401(k)s: Tax break now, taxes later.
- Roth IRAs: No tax break now, but tax-free withdrawals later.

- Taxable accounts: No upfront tax benefits, but careful tax management can keep Uncle Sam's cut to a minimum.

A smart approach? Hold growth-oriented investments in a Roth IRA, keep tax-inefficient assets (like bonds) in tax-deferred accounts, and use taxable accounts for assets benefiting from lower capital gains rates. The goal isn't just to invest well—it's to invest well and keep more of your profits.

THINKING BEYOND APRIL 15

Most people focus on taxes once a year. The financially savvy think about them year-round. In the long run, proactive planning—whether through Roth conversions, tax-efficient investing, or strategic withdrawals—can mean the difference between a comfortable retirement and an unexpected tax bill.

If all of this feels overwhelming, don't stress. Tax planning isn't about making perfect decisions—it's about making better ones. A little foresight today can mean thousands saved down the road. Consulting a financial or tax professional can help ensure your plan aligns with your goals. ■



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Real Estate

10 Essential Winterizing Steps

for Sellers and Buyers in Kitsap County — With a Focus on the Right Service Providers

By Tom Earnest | Real Estate Broker
/ Realtor John L. Scott Real Estate

As winter approaches in the Kitsap County area, both sellers looking to maintain or enhance their home's market appeal and buyers preparing for ownership must gear up for the season ahead. The region's cold, wet weather and occasional freeze make it critical to winterize properties—whether single-family, multi-family, or manufactured homes. Below are ten actionable tactics, with emphasis on choosing the right service provider for each property type.

1. Clean gutters, inspect roof & trim trees:

Clogged gutters or failing roof flashing allow moisture intrusion; overhanging branches increase storm-damage risk.

Right provider tip: Hire a licensed roofing & gutter contractor with insurance. For older manufactured homes, they find providers familiar with lighter roofs and non-traditional framing. For multi-family properties, ensure the vendor is equipped for larger roofs, multiple units, and has experience with associations or landlords.

2. Seal doors, windows, and small openings:

Wind-driven cold and moisture seep through gaps in doors, windows, crawlspaces and lowers heating efficiency.

Right provider tip: Use a local weather-sealing specialist or insulation contractor. For single-family homes standard, for multi-family units, choose one with experience managing common spaces and multiple facades; for manufactured homes, verify service on factory-built siding and seals.

3. Insulate pipes & protect exterior faucets:

Freezing pipes can lead to major damage in Kitsap's colder snaps—especially in unheated crawlspaces or garages.

Right provider tip: Contract a plumber or HVAC specialist who offers freeze-protection services. For manufactured homes, ensure the vendor has experience with skirting and mobile-home specific plumbing layouts.

4. Service heating system and test detectors:

Your furnace, heat pump or other HVAC system should be professionally inspected, filter changed, and carbon monoxide/smoke detectors evaluated.

Right provider tip: Use a certified HVAC service for all home types. For multi-family, engage someone comfortable working in tenanted buildings. For manufactured homes, confirm compatibility of system with home's foundation and energy profile.

5. Check attic insulation and crawlspaces:

Heat rises and tends to escape through attics and under-floors. Proper insulation can reduce bills and help maintain comfort.

Right provider tip: Hire an insulation contractor. For multi-family buildings expect larger scope; for manufactured homes check specifications — some older models may need retrofit kits.

6. Disconnect hoses, cover outdoor faucets, secure outdoor items:

Ice, wind and rain can damage exterior systems and furniture; simple steps like draining hoses matter a lot.

Right provider tip: A general handyperson or exterior-maintenance company is sufficient. For manufactured home parks, choose a vendor familiar with park utilities and shared services.

7. Prepare driveway, walkways & emergency supplies:

Slips, falls and power outages happen. Clearing walkways, prepping ice-melt and getting an emergency kit matters for both buyers and sellers.

Right provider tip: Landscape or exterior maintenance firms can oversee walkways and clearing debris. For multi-family complexes, ensure the provider is insured for common-area maintenance.

8. Landscape and trim trees to prevent storm damage:

Weak branches, untrimmed trees and poor drainage can lead to storm-related losses.

Right provider tip: Use an arborist or tree-service company certified in storm-damage prevention. For multi-family and manufactured parks, verify coordination with management.

9. Budget for seasonal maintenance & highlight winter readiness in listings:

For sellers, ready homes create stronger buyer perception. For buyers, checking maintenance records matters.

Right provider tip: A property-management consultant or real-estate staging advisor can help sellers present winter-ready homes; buyers should review vendor invoices, service records and ask about winterization work when selecting homes.

10. Choose service providers with local experience and appropriate specialization:

Winterizing in Kitsap means familiarity with local climate, codes, and common home types (single-family, multi-unit, manufactured).

Right provider tip: Ask for references in Kitsap for the exact property type (multi-unit vs. manufactured vs. single-family).

Verify licensing, insurance, and scope of work. For multi-family buildings, ensure the provider is comfortable coordinating with tenants & property management. For manufactured homes, confirm that the vendor is experienced with factory-built structure, HUD standards, and unique utility/pier foundation issues. For

sellers prepping for market: keep all invoices and maintenance records to show prospective buyers your winterization investment.

Bottom line: Whether you are selling to maximize value or buying to ensure long-term comfort and performance in Kitsap County's climate, effective winterization is non-negotiable. By following these ten steps and carefully selecting the right service providers tailored to your home type—single-family, multi-family, or manufactured—you'll protect your investment, reduce risk, and position your property for success whether on the market or under your own roof this winter. ■



Feature



Photos Courtesy of Eleven Winery



Cyclists enjoy a gathering at Eleven Winery's Day Road location, highlighting the brand's roots in cycling culture.



Eleven Winery

A New Generation Takes the Lead While Staying True to Its Roots

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

On Bainbridge Island, where small business and community often intersect, Eleven Winery has quietly become one of the most vibrant hubs of connection, creativity, and craft winemaking in Kitsap County.

Since its founding in 2003, the winery has steadily grown from a one-man operation into a thriving business with two tasting spaces, one at the Day Road winery and another in downtown Winslow, and a third on the horizon in Bremerton. But perhaps the most defining change came in April 2024, when three long-time employees stepped into ownership: General Manager Alana Mignano, Winemaker Armathia Bolles,

and Tasting Room & Events Manager Ashley Dunlap.

The transition marks not only a passing of the torch from founder Matt Albee, but also the beginning of a new chapter guided by women who came up through the business while working side-by-side behind the bar, on the production floor, and in the back office. Still, even with new leadership, the essence of Eleven remains intact.

"We try to make wine approachable for everyone," Bolles said. "Yeah, and make it fun, obviously."

Fun is a word that comes up again and again when talking to the new ownership team. They use it to describe the personality

of the winery, the experience they want to deliver, and even their approach to winemaking. And if there is one thing they are determined to preserve under their leadership, it is that sense of joyful approachability.

FROM GARAGE STARTUP TO LOCAL FIXTURE

When Albee founded Eleven Winery more than 20 years ago, the operation looked very different. A former semi-professional cyclist, he learned winemaking in California at Page Mill Winery before moving to Washington with his wife Sarah. Inspired after the birth of his first child, he launched Eleven in his garage on Bainbridge Island.

"He always jokes that the winery was like his middle child," Mignano said.

The name itself is a nod to cycling: the smallest gear on a road racing bike has 11 teeth, often referred to simply as "the 11," and is used in the final moments of a race, when you're pushing all-out. That spirit resonated

deeply enough to become the foundation of the business.

"It translates over into what we do here with the wine and the winery," Mignano said. "We're always giving it our all."

Eleven moved into its current production facility and tasting room on Day Road in 2011, followed by the Winslow tasting room in 2012. The founders and early employees shepherded the winery through steady expansion, turning a garage startup into a much-loved community hub producing more than 30 wines annually.

THE ROAD TO CO-OWNERSHIP

The three new owners did not set out with individual ambitions of taking over the business. Each began working in various capacities, often behind the tasting bar, and bonded over time with each other, the wines, and the people they served.

Things shifted when Albee announced that he was beginning to explore what the next chapter of ownership might look like.

"It started just from that sort of declaring that he wanted to be able to take a step back," Mignano said. "He didn't really know what exactly it looked like. He certainly did not want someone to just walk in and buy the business outright who had no experience with it. It was important to him to keep Eleven what it is and keep the mission and vision alive."

Each of the three women approached Albee individually, expressing interest in being part of whatever came next. What began as informal conversations gradually evolved into a shared ownership structure and operational leadership role.

"We all got really close too," Bolles said. "It was really fun to, start as co-workers, become good friends, and then, to be partners is really, really cool, really fun."

COMPLEMENTARY STRENGTHS

Collectively, the team runs everything: production, financial management, hiring, events, and more. While their responsibilities overlap, each brings distinct strengths.

Mignano has worked the longest



Guests celebrate a birthday with wine and camaraderie at Eleven Winery.

at Eleven, holding positions across the business.

"My strengths really lie in organization and planning," she said. "I am a by-the-book, numbers, Excel spreadsheets kind of person."

Bolles is the scientist and technician, overseeing the alchemy of winemaking.

"She just knows front and back every which way the chemistry, and what needs to happen," Mignano said. "She's two or three steps ahead of everybody else in her winemaking."

Dunlap is the hospitality heart of the business.

"She is such a light," Mignano said. "Every person that comes in, she's treating them like they are her family."

Together, they make decisions collaboratively, with transparency and long history as coworkers informing how they communicate.

"We talk a lot about stuff," Mignano said. "And Matt is still involved but he'll always be like, what's your decision? And he really means that."

"I think a lot of times we make most decisions thinking about the staff first, and customers too," Dunlap said.

Letting the Grapes Speak

Eleven does not own vineyards.

Instead, the team sources grapes from Eastern Washington, often from the same vines year after year.

"It's cool to know that year over

year, we're getting grapes from the same vines," Mignano said. "How those can change and present themselves every year is really exciting."

Bolles' winemaking approach is rooted in restraint and respect for the fruit.

"I keep it simple," she said. "Some people call it low intervention, but we just like to let the grapes showcase themselves."

While production has expanded from four wines to 32, the philosophy remains the same: let the grapes speak, listen, and refine.

Bolles is deeply connected to certain wines, particularly those carrying personal weight. One is the Malbec "Outlaw," named for her father who passed away in 2021.

That same year when Albee and Bolles were diversifying their sources they went to look at the vines and Bolles felt a connection.

"Matt and I went out to look at those vines and I fell in love with the vines," she said. "They're a little old and kind of in a weird area, but I just loved it. It was my happy place."

When extra Malbec became available during bottling in 2022, she asked to make a small batch of her own.

"Matt said there was some extra Malbec and I told him, 'Well, I want four barrels to make my own wine.' He let me do it and said I had to name it," she said. "My dad's name was Jesse James, so the Outlaw is an ode to my dad."

Another wine that is special to Bolles is La Prossima 2023, a whole-cluster Syrah

Eleven Winery produces select annual blends that support nonprofit organizations; \$1 from each bottle sold benefits World Bicycle Relief and Seattle-based Bike Works.





A variety of Eleven wines line the shelves at the Winslow tasting room.

representing the next generation of winery leadership.

"It is like the next generation," she said. "It's representing us taking over ownership."

A PLACE WHERE COMMUNITY GROWS

Eleven's tasting rooms operate on a simple shared mission: "Make great wine, make it fun, and make the world a better place." For Mignano, that's not a slogan, it's the measure of success.

"We want it to be an enjoyable experience for anyone who comes to the door," she said. "Whether they are a seasoned wine drinker or if it is their first wine tasting ever."

One of the most cherished parts of their work is seeing the connections that form over a glass.

"We've got something posted up on our fridge of this couple that came in randomly on a date one day," Mignano said. "They barely knew each other. Then they were getting married a couple of years later and they sent us this letter and a picture of them in here at the winery on their first date and they were ordering wine for their wedding."

Dunlap sees it daily.

"I love the connections that are made in the tasting room, and here at the winery," she said. "I want people to leave better than when they came in."

BUILDING A BETTER WINE BUSINESS

A key value inherited from the founder is giving back—financially, socially, and environmentally. Eleven hosts regular "Sunday Fundays," donating 100% of tasting and glass pour sales and 10% of bottle sales to a local nonprofit partner. Past beneficiaries include Kitsap Humane Society, Kitsap Pride, and others.

The winery also produces a couple of annual blends that support community nonprofit organizations: \$1 from each bottle goes to World Bicycle Relief and Seattle-based Bike Works.

"It's really important to us that we're making that impact locally," Mignano said.

Eleven also supports the organizations that support others. Nonprofits can host events at the winery at no charge, and wine is discounted 50% for those events. Teachers also receive free use of space for gatherings or retirement parties.

A GROWING PRESENCE

Like many businesses, Eleven had to pivot dramatically during the pandemic. The shutdowns pushed the team to reimagine service models, and they came out stronger.

Now, a new milestone approaches: Eleven is opening a new wine bar in Bremerton's Manette neighborhood in the space formerly occupied by La Fermata.

"We are really excited to open a new spot down in Bremerton," Mignano said. "We still want to bring the Eleven vibe that same fun, enjoyable place for anyone to feel comfortable."

Unlike the existing tasting rooms, the new location will serve food, lighter offerings, charcuterie, and small plates—to complement wine flights and pours.

There is no firm opening date yet, but the goal is early 2026.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

For a business built on relationships, success isn't measured in awards or case counts.

"I would say, if a customer comes in and leaves having a better day than they came in with, that's success," Bolles said.

Another key metric: the workplace they offer their employees. Benefits include

health and dental insurance, retirement contributions, paid vacation, and professional development opportunities, rare in small wine and hospitality businesses.

"It's really important to us to be a good place to work," Mignano said.

WHAT THEY WANT THEIR GUESTS TO REMEMBER

If guests carry only one thing with them when they leave, the team hopes it's the experience, wine, warmth, and a sense of belonging.

"I hope they walk in the door with who knows what kind of day or attitude or what's going on," Mignano said, "and they leave remembering us and thinking about the awesome time they had here."

At Eleven Winery, the smallest gear isn't just a name, it's a mission: full effort, full heart, full connection. And as a new generation steps into leadership, the winery continues to pedal smoothly forward, still giving its all. ■



Friends and staff gather to enjoy a tasting at Eleven Winery's Winslow location.



Dunlap and Mignano share a celebratory toast in the Winslow tasting room.

Wrapping Up the Year

Effective December Marketing That Drives Sales and Loyalty

By Amy Yaley | COO of Ward Media

December is the final push of the year and a critical time for businesses to maximize sales, strengthen customer relationships, and set the stage for the new year. With shoppers in a holiday mindset and deadlines for gift-giving looming, marketers must combine urgency, personalization, and multi-channel strategies to stand out in a crowded marketplace.

UNDERSTANDING DECEMBER CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

We all know holiday shopping peaks in December, with many customers making last-minute purchases both online and in-store. Research shows us that buyers are more decisive in December but also more selective, seeking convenience, speed, and reliable service. Mobile devices dominate this period as consumers compare prices, read reviews, and complete purchases on the go. Understanding these behaviors allows businesses to design campaigns that are timely, easy to navigate, and aligned with the way people shop during the busiest season of the year.

COORDINATING MULTI-CHANNEL CAMPAIGNS

A single marketing channel is rarely enough in December. High-performing businesses synchronize email, social media, digital display, and in-store messaging to create a seamless experience. Consistency across channels builds brand recognition and trust, while reinforcing promotions ensures your offers stay top-of-mind. For example, a limited-time holiday bundle promoted on email should also be visible on your website, social media platforms, and any local advertising, creating multiple touchpoints that drive action.



TIMING AND STRATEGIC MESSAGING

Timing is especially critical in December. Early-month campaigns target proactive shoppers, while the final two weeks focus on urgency and convenience for last-minute buyers. Clear messaging around shipping deadlines, gift wrapping, and in-store pickup ensures customers know their options and encourages them to act quickly. By planning campaign sequences thoughtfully, businesses can reach the right audience at the right moment without overwhelming them with too much content.

PERSONALIZATION AND FESTIVE OFFERS

December shoppers respond strongly to personalized offers and holiday-themed incentives. Tailoring promotions based on purchase history, browsing behavior, or loyalty program participation creates relevance and increases the likelihood of conversion. Incorporating festive elements, such as limited-edition products, holiday bundles, or seasonal discounts, enhances engagement and positions your brand as a thoughtful, customer-focused choice. Pair personalization with urgency, emphasizing limited availability or time-sensitive deals to prompt action.

POST-HOLIDAY PLANNING AND CUSTOMER RETENTION

December marketing doesn't end at year's end. Post-holiday engagement is critical for maintaining relationships with new and returning customers. Thank-you emails, personalized follow-ups, and loyalty incentives turn seasonal buyers into long-



term advocates. Additionally, analyzing the successes and challenges of your holiday campaigns provides valuable insights for planning the next year's marketing strategy.

BUILDING MOMENTUM INTO THE NEW YEAR

A strong December strategy is about more than just short-term sales. It's an opportunity to solidify brand perception, deepen customer relationships, and build momentum for January and beyond. By integrating multi-channel campaigns, personalized messaging, and strategic timing, businesses can finish the year strong while positioning themselves for continued growth in the months ahead.

December is a high-stakes month for any business, but careful planning and execution ensure it is also one of the most rewarding. When marketers focus on multi-channel consistency, personalization, and actionable metrics, they not only drive holiday sales but also create lasting value for their brand and customers. ■

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



Kingston Cares

A huge heart and a vision for all

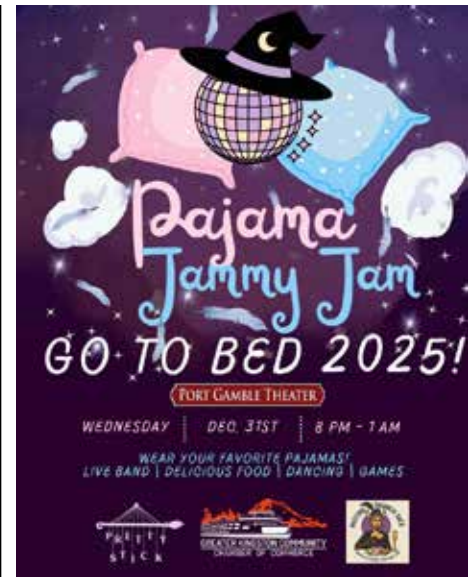
Kingston Cares is our local nonprofit organization with a huge heart and a vision for 'all the people in the greater Kingston area to have opportunities and access to resources they need to thrive and feel valued and connected.'

Back in 2013, one of the founders saw two young people sheltering in a tool shed and the idea for a cold weather shelter was born. Since then, Kingston Cares has tackled other hidden and unmet needs of our community. Food insecurity is addressed through monthly community meals, by providing food for students during school breaks with Food4Kids, and offering readily available food at the Little Food Pantry. Most recently, Kingston Cares is tackling the need for affordable housing.

In order to do all these projects, Kingston Cares partners with local businesses, Rotary, Kiwanis, Sharenet, the North Kitsap School District and the S'Klallam and Suquamish Tribes. AND an army of volunteers step up to do this work! Much more information about Kingston Cares can be found at www.kingstoncares.org,

including how you can volunteer and/or donate to the good works. In addition, the FaceBook page- Kingston Cares-North Kitsap- posts continually on what is happening and how you can help.

We truly believe "We all do better when we do better" (Paul Wellstone). ■



Note from board

We are excited to kick off holiday festivities with the Kingston Cove Christmas on 12/6 and to enjoy the spectacular display of lights at the Kingston Port for all of December! Check out all the holiday happenings in Kingston at kingstonchamber.com/christmas and buy your ticket soon for the NYE party as we expect it to sell out!

Welcome New Member

- Spruce Properties

Human Resources

What Kitsap Businesses and Nonprofits Learned in 2025 and How to Lead with Confidence in 2026

By Julie Piazza | SHRM-SCP, SPHR Anew Insights

As 2025 draws to a close, Kitsap businesses and nonprofits find themselves reflecting on a year marked by resilience, innovation, and transformation. Business excellence—once defined by operational efficiency alone—has evolved into a multidimensional concept encompassing adaptability, employee engagement, and purpose-driven leadership. Let's take a closer look at the key themes that shaped this year and what they mean for the future.

THE RISE OF PEOPLE-CENTRIC STRATEGIES

This year reinforced a truth that many organizations have long suspected: business excellence begins with people. Amid economic uncertainty and shifting workforce expectations, businesses and nonprofits doubled down on employee experience. Flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and inclusive leadership became non-negotiables rather than perks.

Organizations that invested in employee well-being and development saw measurable gains in retention and productivity. For nonprofits, this translated into stronger volunteer engagement and

donor trust. The lesson? Excellence is not just about meeting Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)—it's about creating environments where people thrive.

TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER, NOT A DISRUPTOR

Digital transformation continued to accelerate, but 2025 marked a shift in mindset. Instead of chasing every new tool, businesses focused on strategic adoption—choosing technologies that enhance collaboration, streamline HR processes, and improve decision-making.

AI-powered recruiting platforms, automated payroll systems, and data-driven performance analytics became mainstream for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). Nonprofits leveraged tech to optimize fundraising and donor management. The emphasis was clear: technology should serve people, not overshadow them.

LEADERSHIP REDEFINED

This year challenged traditional leadership models. Command-and-

control approaches gave way to empathetic, transparent leadership. Leaders who communicated openly about challenges and invited input from their teams fostered trust and agility.

For SMBs, this meant empowering managers to lead with authenticity. For nonprofits, it meant aligning leadership decisions with mission-driven values. The takeaway? Excellence in leadership is no longer about authority—it's about influence, adaptability, and emotional intelligence.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) AS A BUSINESS IMPERATIVE

DEI initiatives moved beyond compliance to become a cornerstone of organizational strategy. Businesses recognized that diverse teams drive innovation and resilience. Nonprofits, often at the forefront of social impact, modeled inclusive practices that strengthened community relationships.

Organizations that embedded DEI into hiring, training, and culture reported stronger engagement and brand reputation. In 2025, DEI wasn't a trend—it was a marker of excellence.

PREPARING FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Looking ahead, the pursuit of business excellence will demand continuous learning and adaptability. Economic volatility, technological advancements, and evolving workforce expectations will remain constants. For SMBs and nonprofits,

the challenge is clear: stay agile without losing sight of purpose.

Investing in leadership development, leveraging data for smarter decisions, and prioritizing employee well-being will be critical. Excellence is not a destination—it's a journey of intentional growth.

FINAL THOUGHTS

2025 reminded us that business excellence is holistic. It's about aligning strategy with values, leveraging technology thoughtfully, and putting people at the center of every decision. For small businesses and nonprofits, this year proved that size is not a barrier to impact. With clarity of purpose and commitment to adaptability, these organizations are poised to lead with excellence in the years ahead. ■



Stock photo

Executive Q & A

Fresh coffee beans ready for roasting; Mahler emphasizes sourcing and roasting for peak flavor.

Meet Eric Mahler,

CEO of Caffe Cocina and Caffe Cocina Coffee Roasting Co.

Photos courtesy of Brittany Kelley

By Quinn Propst | Ward Media Staff Reporter

For more than a decade, Caffe Cocina has been a community touchstone in Poulsbo — a place where great coffee, local connection, and entrepreneurial grit intersect. At the center of it all is CEO Eric Mahler, whose unlikely path from banking to specialty coffee has shaped one of Kitsap County's most recognizable hometown brands.

In this month's Executive Q&A, Mahler reflects on the evolution of Caffe Cocina and Caffe Cocina Coffee Roasting Co., the family history intertwined with the business, and the hard-earned lessons that have guided its growth. From roasting their first batch of coffee to expanding wholesale operations to 29 states, Mahler shares the vision, vulnerabilities, and values behind the company's momentum. He also speaks candidly about community leadership, the realities of entrepreneurship, and the importance of passion, both in business and at home.

Meet the leader behind the beans, the brand, and the next chapter of Caffe Cocina.

Please tell our readers a little bit about yourself.

Hi! I'm Eric Mahler, CEO of Caffe Cocina and Caffe Cocina Coffee Roasting Co. I have

a seven-year background in the financial sector, focusing on personal finance and the development of small businesses. Currently, I reside in Kitsap County with my wife Tiffany, our two sons River Pilot and Oliver Skye, and we are eagerly anticipating the arrival of our third child, Juniper Rayne, in March 2026. Alongside our family, we have two golden doodles, Sweetie Pie and Rosie, and a cat named Mr. Pickles. Additionally, we manage four businesses.

Having lived here for 35 years, we are deeply rooted in this community. We cherish our family time and enjoy traveling, cooking, hiking, embarking on adventures, and embracing life's experiences. Our commitment to family is unwavering, and we strive to provide a strong presence in a world that often presents many questions.

Can you share the story behind Caffe Cocina and how it has evolved since its founding?

Our family acquired the business in 2012, and we are now in our 13th year of operation and 6th year of roasting. However, the establishment's history predates our

ownership. Initially known as Finn Hill Java, it changed ownership a few times but retained its original name until purchased by Shelly Love and Holly Smith. In 2005, the business was transferred to Shelly's daughter Breanne and Holly's son Paul, who had married the previous year. This marked the founding of Caffe Cocina and Ciao Bella.

My mother, Sharon, who had a prominent career in finance, became a regular customer. She managed the Washington Mutual Bank and Loan Center in Poulsbo, holding the title of Western Regional Vice President. She developed a strong connection with the local community and business owners. Over time, she befriended Breanne and became one of her regular hair clients, making Caffe Cocina her favorite spot. My mother

CEO Eric Mahler, the visionary behind Caffe Cocina and Caffe Cocina Coffee Roasting Co.



always harbored a dream of running a charming “Cheers”-style coffeehouse, although she kept this aspiration to herself, considering it a post-retirement possibility.

In 2011, following the financial industry collapse and bailout crisis, my mother and Breanne began discussing the potential acquisition of Caffè Cocina. At the time, the concept was somewhat unclear. The business was a drive-thru coffee shop with a hair salon inside, blending elements of a European pub, coffeehouse, kitchen, bakery, sports bar, and hair salon. After extensive family discussions and about six months of deliberation, we decided to proceed with the purchase, despite my initial hesitation. I was then a young 23-year-old, in my 7th year as a financial representative for Washington Mutual, Chase, and later US Bank.

Witnessing the evolving retail banking landscape, I realized that the opportunity ahead of me was shifting. Coming from a family with a 28-year combat veteran father and a senior bank president mother, the expectations were not mild. This acquisition represented a potential turning point for me. On June 1, 2012, we finalized the purchase, inheriting staff, clientele, and a list of repairs and to-dos. Our initial plan was for me to manage the business temporarily until my mother could retire and take over in a year or two. However, things did not go as originally planned. My mother did not retire, and I did not leave. Instead, I uncovered a deep-seated enthusiasm for business management, driving growth through pointed decision-making, branding, strategic menu rollouts, fostering relationships between community and business, cooking, refining operations, and projects, all fueled by a relentless pursuit for exceptional coffee. The initial idea of how the world worked was peeled away and granted me a deeper understanding of business I never thought possible.

In 2014, I rebranded our entire company after enduring a couple of challenging years. I made some mistakes and ruffled feathers, but I had a vision for improving the business. Through our financial expertise, we identified missing pieces in the original financial story, leading to some difficult adjustments. This experience was a reality check, highlighting the differences between banking institutions and small business operations. Butterflies became a familiar



Mahler at work roasting and grinding beans in the company's production facility, ensuring every cup meets his standards.

constant, particularly during payroll periods, quarterly tax filings, and addressing repair invoices.

By 2017, we had achieved significant growth and accomplishments, although we still faced challenges. One night, in a moment of clarity, I realized that we needed to roast our own coffee. Navigating my significant admiration and reliance on Jeff Babcock, the owner of Zoka Coffee Roaster and Tea Co, our current wholesale roaster, was among the most challenging tasks I faced. Jeff had become a crucial source of knowledge on coffee operations and extraction methodologies, and he epitomized the artistry of specialty third wave coffee. He frequently invited us to exclusive events, cupping sessions, roasting sessions, and the occasional sushi and cocktail luncheon. I took advantage of all of them. I had been reminded by several of the key members in his company that invites of this nature didn't happen often and I might want to “dress for it” a few times.

Moreover, as this revelation began to fester in my mind, it became clear that I

needed to match the quality and dedication Jeff had devoted his life to from the very beginning. We couldn't afford to compromise on the craftsmanship and commitment to the art. On April 1, 2019, at precisely 2:28 pm, we roasted our first batch of coffee, marking a pivotal moment for our business.

What inspired you to transition from a background in finance and banking into the specialty coffee industry?

Plain and simple, it was Mom. If it weren't for her somewhat unorthodox idea to pursue this path, I believe my life would have taken a very different course. It's kind of scary to think about. Both my parents had unwavering faith in me and recognized my determination to achieve goals and do big things. Their confidence and acknowledgment of my potential are truly remarkable aspects of my life, for which I am deeply grateful.

What makes Caffè Cocina unique?

While we haven't revolutionized the industry, we have identified a critical moment where the specialty coffee industry faltered in 2010 and are addressing those issues head-on. During that period, the communication



Executive Q & A

The inviting interior of Caffe Cocina, blending community warmth with artisanal coffee culture.

between roasters and their clients diminished significantly. The market saw an overwhelming influx of coffee brokers, and the availability of direct and fair-trade coffee was decreasing despite growing demand. Amidst this, Starbucks experienced rapid growth while Tully's and Seattle's Best began to slow down. New roasters were entering the industry, which was thriving, but there was still a considerable learning curve for everyone involved. At Caffe Cocina, we dedicate significant efforts to educating and supporting our wholesale partners. We are revitalizing specialty coffee education and striving to make it accessible to anyone interested in learning more, especially here on the Olympic Peninsula. While yes, our wholesale and subscription platforms are now in 29 states we pour it on a bit thick here at home.

Why is working with local farmers and using direct and fair-trade coffee important to you?

For me, it serves as the bridge between business and passion. Getting to know the individuals and families who cultivate our coffees, and witnessing the generations of dedication and expertise invested in these coffee farms worldwide is truly inspiring. This is a humbling experience. It is passion at the source. Go find brilliant, delicate, mind-bending delicious coffees on a farm built for mass production owned by equity firms. You cannot. Major corporations often appear to dismiss passion, as it is deemed expensive and arguably insignificant to 90% of their customer base, so they fake it with fun catch phrases invented in marketing departments and approved in board rooms.

You've been recognized as "Young Leader of the Year" and served as President of the Poulsbo Chamber of Commerce. How has community leadership shaped your perspective as a business owner?

What an incredible journey. I was so young, I had the privilege of learning from some truly remarkable professionals. Engaging with a dedicated core group of individuals who were instrumental in driving progress in Poulsbo. A transformative experience that exposed me to a level of personal commitment to the community, igniting a new fire within myself. I had never been involved in something of this magnitude. The insights I gained into the workings of local government proved to be invaluable. I am so grateful for the opportunity and the wealth of knowledge I acquired through that experience.

In terms of shaping my perspective on business ownership, it made me realize my

Mahler creates Harvestmoon latte art, highlighting the skill and artistry behind each beverage.

vulnerabilities. It was during this period that I understood I didn't have all the answers and could not handle everything independently. This realization taught me the importance of delegation and the necessity of relying on others. It was truly a turning point in my professional career.

What does success look like for you — both as a business leader and as a member of the Poulsbo community?

The concept of success is fluid and continually evolving for me. What it meant at our origin is not what it signifies today. In my beginning endeavors they were purely monetary. Everything seemed to revolve around each dollar. Presently, much of my thoughts for success stem from two thoughts, "Do the people who work for me and dedicate their time to this company feel successful?" "Does our community trust us?" If I can continually answer yes to these then we can consider ourselves successful.

On a more personal note, success is reflected in whether my children, when they're grown and making their own way in the world, still desire to come home for the holidays or check in from time to time. The quick "hey Dad" phone calls in the middle of the day. I believe that success in business should not come at the expense of my family; achieving a balance is a vital source of motivation.

What's next for Caffe Cocina? Are there any upcoming projects, collaborations, or expansions you're excited about?

We have been adamant about maintaining a robust pipeline of projects. Some big and some small. Some most won't even recognize or even hear about. Earlier this year, we successfully negotiated an



expansion deal for our roastery, which is located just two doors down from our flagship location on Finn Hill. This new Roasting Headquarters features offices, green coffee storage, training facilities, a cupping room, and a significantly larger roasting room. This expansion will enable us to achieve a 450% growth in our wholesale and e-commerce platforms without sacrificing the quality we are currently producing. We anticipate being fully operational very soon.

Additionally, we are excited to announce the upcoming launch of our third café location in Silverdale, situated just across from the Trails Shopping Center at the base of the new Highlands living complex on Clear Creek Rd. This new café will offer both indoor seating and an expansive drive-thru, which we are particularly enthusiastic about.

Looking ahead to 2026, we have plans to introduce four new blends to our year round offerings and to revive an exciting project involving bourbon barrels, roasted coffee, and canned cold brew. In terms of collaborations, we have several initiatives in the pipeline. Notably, we will be partnering with Scarlet Road, a local non-profit organization dedicated to supporting survivors of sexual exploitation and human trafficking. This collaboration has been a profound eye opener, revealing the stark reality of these issues occurring close to home. Our objective for 2026 is to make Scarlet Road a household name in Kitsap County.

How do you define entrepreneurship, and what mindset do you think is essential for long-term success?

Entrepreneurship has undergone significant evolution over the past decade. The rise of social media and advancements in technology, the introduction of AI to countless interfaces have given birth to a new generation of entrepreneurs. In my view, true entrepreneurship is embodied by individuals who possess a certain "heart fire", a stonewall determination, striving to achieve goals independently, and thoughtfully. Pulling inspiration from everything. It is the spirit of creating something unique and pursuing it with fierce commitment. This drive encompasses hope, vision, and excitement, requiring a mindset that is constantly adapting.

Fundamentally, it all begins with an

unyielding desire to learn, followed by the acceptance of inevitable failure and an uninterrupted fight to push forward, applying the knowledge gained from hard-learned lessons.

What advice would you give to someone thinking about launching a business in Kitsap County today? **DO NOT RUSH TO SIGN THE LEASE!**

I encourage people to do intense research, perhaps even uncomfortable research. It is essential to ask questions, even if doing so may make you seem uneducated. Embrace the discomfort of not knowing everything and remain humble. Delve into leasing contracts, zoning, change of use permits, CALL THE CITY, question everything, triple net agreements, point of sale systems, credit card processing, and search engine optimization (SEO) to understand why your website needs it. Conduct interviews, investigate inventory and supply chains, and familiarize yourself with graphic designers. Understand why some people respond promptly while others do not and learn how to collaborate effectively with everyone.

Develop your business acumen by engaging with your weaknesses, which will enable you to connect with individuals who have achieved success or accomplishments that you admire. Observe those who possess charisma as well as those who have navigated and grown through challenges over the years. Pay close attention to how these individuals handle opposition, accusations, and public feedback.

Furthermore, critically examine the aspects of yourself that make you uncomfortable and commit to addressing them without compromise. Cultivate financial management skills and hold yourself accountable. It is imperative to understand and build your credit, as well as to cultivate your capital and funding needs. Don't make excuses, establish and adhere to effective systems. Focus on your future while also planning for the present, so that you can truly savor and live in the moments when they arise.

What do you enjoy most about leading Caffè Cucina?

It has been an experience to witness the growth of this company and to see such an amazing community come together in support of it. The enthusiasm and appreciation that people express for our

work are truly heartening. Observing our staff evolve from young individuals into accomplished adults, pursuing their aspirations has been incredibly rewarding. Moreover, providing access to coffee education and witnessing our wholesale partners, managers, and staff embrace it with enthusiasm and passion is a real gift. There's never a dull moment.

Who or what inspires you most — in business, coffee, or life?

In the realm of business, travel serves as an obvious source of inspiration for me. It is all too easy to become confined within our comfort zones and grow complacent with the status quo. Content in a self-manufactured echo chamber. I am driven by a desire to continually experience new foods, drinks, flavors, sights, smells, and cultures. This wanderlust rekindles the entrepreneurial spirit's spark and enduring flame within me. It challenges everything, it presents a fun little uncomfortable space where you control nothing that you interact with. Additionally, my family serves as a significant source of inspiration, as I observe them engaging with and navigating through life. Seeing the world through their eyes and exposing them to all this world has to offer. Similarly, I am inspired by my staff, witnessing their trust in the process and their dedication to showing up every day. It's big. It's really big. It's always just coffee, until it's not. ■



The downtown Poulsbo café provides a cozy setting for community connection and specialty coffee enjoyment.

Spotlight on South Kitsap:

Strengthening Local Business Through Community Engagement

South Kitsap is home to a vibrant business community, filled with entrepreneurs and local shops that give our region its unique character. At the South Kitsap Chamber of Commerce, our mission is to help these businesses thrive...not just individually, but together... by connecting them to the community and creating opportunities for lasting growth.

The Chamber Discount Card: Building Loyal Local Shoppers

One of our newest initiatives, the South Kitsap Chamber Discount Card, is designed exclusively for Chamber members. The program encourages

residents to shop locally by offering special discounts and promotions at participating businesses.

The concept is simple: when shoppers frequent these member businesses, they save money while building relationships with local entrepreneurs, discovering new services, and contributing to a stronger local economy. Over time, these connections create loyal, returning customers, helping small businesses grow in a competitive marketplace and fostering community pride.



Local Events: Driving Economic Impact

The Chamber also actively supports community events such as Holiday on the Bay (December 6th), seasonal festivals, and

other gatherings that attract visitors to South Kitsap. These events do more than celebrate our community—they generate real economic benefits. Local restaurants, shops, and service providers gain valuable exposure, while residents and visitors experience the unique offerings that make South Kitsap special.

By participating in and promoting these events, Chamber members expand their reach, strengthen customer loyalty, and contribute to the economic vitality of our region.

Engaging the Next Generation

Our South Kitsap Young Professionals committee connects the next generation of business leaders to the local community. Through mentorship, networking, and volunteer opportunities, young entrepreneurs and emerging professionals gain the resources and relationships they need to succeed. Volunteerism is a key part of this work, fostering a stronger, more connected local business ecosystem.

Looking Ahead

From the Chamber Discount Card to community events and active committees, the South Kitsap Chamber of Commerce is committed to building connections, driving economic growth, and celebrating the businesses that make our region thrive. Together, we can ensure South Kitsap remains a vibrant hub for business, community, and opportunity. ■

Your South Kitsap Chamber Team



Jaclyn Williams

Executive Director

Cassandra Cosmos

Membership & Engagement
Coordinator



SouthKitsapCOC



southkitsapchamber



skchamber.org



Welcome New Members

- Patriot Roofing LLC
- Spruce Properties
- Communities in Schools of Peninsula
- Pro-west Landscape
- Apex Roofing
- Hollyday's Coffee
- Pro Group Networks
- Murray's Collision Group
- Village Greens Golf Course
- South Kitsap Public Education Foundation

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.

New Hires

Bay Pointe by Cogir has welcomed two new team members to its resident life department.



Arleen Ardron

Arleen Ardron

has joined the community as Resident Lifestyle Director, bringing a passion for senior Zumba,

event planning, and arts and crafts. She is known for her energetic, resident-focused approach and offers what the community describes as "a refreshing outlook" to its lifestyle programming.

Joshua Gould

has been hired as Resident Lifestyle Coordinator. With experience in senior services, the arts, and Parks and Recreation, he adds what Bay Pointe calls "a colorful and fruitful engagement" to resident activities and enrichment opportunities.



Joshua Gould

Admire

Medical Aesthetics has added Master Esthetician

Kathleen

Rush to its

practice. Rush brings a passion for skincare and specializes in sugaring hair removal, customized facials, and advanced laser treatments. She emphasizes personalized care for every client and says her goal is to help individuals "unlock their natural glow and confidence."

Outside the treatment room, Rush enjoys pinball, live music, and playing Magic with her son. Admire notes that she welcomes all skin



Kathleen Rush

types, tones, and identities, with a commitment to helping every client feel radiant and confident.

Vibe Coworks has welcomed **Genesis Steele** as its new Community Coordinator. Steele brings a combination of warm energy, strong Bremerton roots, and a passion for helping people succeed. Her background spans customer service, management, patient care, and small business ownership — experience that supports her work assisting members, fostering connections, and strengthening day-to-day operations at the coworking hub.



Genesis Steele

Outside of Vibe, Steele is studying sonography at Olympic College and keeping up with her energetic toddler. The company says her blend of dedication, community spirit, and hometown pride makes her an ideal fit for a role centered on connection and belonging.

Studio360m has added **Lisa Guilian** to its teaching team. Guilian discovered yoga in 2007 while attending college in Northern California and later earned a BA in Psychology from UC Berkeley. She spent more than a decade working in K-12 education as a counselor, and in 2011 became a Transcendental Meditation practitioner through the David Lynch Foundation's Quiet Time program, serving underserved youth in Bay Area schools.

Her yoga journey deepened in Nashville at Shakti Power Yoga, and she completed her 230-hour teacher training at the Asheville Yoga Center in 2016. Guilian later earned her MA in I-O Psychology and has worked alongside an applied kinesiology chiropractic

doctor, offering one-on-one yoga sessions focused on posture and alignment. Her teaching style draws from Baron Baptiste's dynamic Vinyasa flow, emphasizing the mind-body connection, supportive learning environments, and an inclusive approach for students of all backgrounds. She also works with Teach the Future, a global nonprofit advancing futures literacy in education.

Studio360m

has also welcomed **Steffanie Steffanson** as a new instructor. Steffanson is a NASM-certified trainer, a 200-hour certified yoga instructor, and an experienced group fitness professional with more than eight years in the industry. A Navy spouse and mother of two, she brings a strong background in strength training and group fitness, including



Lisa Guilian



Steffanie Steffanson

work as an advanced Les Mills instructor.

At Studio360m, Steffanson leads Pilates, barre, and yoga classes known for their energizing and empowering structure. Her sessions focus on building strength, improving balance, and helping students tone, sculpt, and leave feeling confident and uplifted.

The Admiral Theatre has expanded its management team with several additions. JLouis King and Mykel Chambers have been hired as House Manager, and Kelly Koppa has joined the organization as Bar Manager.

Board Appointments

The Admiral Theatre Foundation has elected three new members to its Board of Directors. **Jeremy Cross**, **Andy Mitchell**, and **Aly Rotter** will each serve as Directors.

Awards

The Admiral Theatre received an Appreciation Award from **NAACP Unit 1134 Bremerton** in recognition of its support for the organization's Annual Freedom Fund Banquet, which was held at the venue. ■

THE LIVE WELL KITSAP THRIVE PODCAST

Lesli Dullum-Taylor
HOST

Brett Clark
CO-HOST

www.livewellkitsap.com www.bcfitsstudio.com

LISTEN IN

Business Briefs

Poulsbo Chamber members to gain new benefits through partnership with Ward Media and Kitsap Business magazine

The Poulsbo Chamber of Commerce and Ward Media, publisher of Kitsap Business magazine (KBM), have entered into a new partnership that expands opportunities for local businesses and delivers direct benefits to Chamber members across North Kitsap.

Under the partnership, Chamber members will receive added benefits, including complimentary subscriptions to Kitsap Business magazine, discounted advertising opportunities, and enhanced visibility across KBM's print and digital platforms.

Each issue of Kitsap Business magazine will now include a dedicated full-page feature for the Poulsbo Chamber of Commerce, showcasing Chamber news, member spotlights, upcoming events, and resources that help businesses connect, grow, and thrive.

"This partnership is about elevating local businesses and amplifying the voices of our Chamber members," said Terry Ward, CEO and Publisher of Ward Media. "By featuring Poulsbo Chamber members in Kitsap Business magazine, we're helping them reach new audiences, strengthen their brands, and become part of a regional conversation about business success in Kitsap County."

Ward Media currently maintains similar partnerships

with the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, South Kitsap Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Kitsap Chamber, reinforcing its commitment to supporting business organizations across the region.

Through these collaborations, Kitsap Business magazine has become a shared platform for Chambers to highlight leadership, advocacy, and the dynamic stories that define Kitsap's economy.

Chamber Executive Director Kathi Foresee said the new agreement brings additional value to membership. "We're excited to partner with Ward Media to shine a brighter light on Poulsbo's business community," she said. "Our members will gain new exposure and connections through this partnership, and that's a win for the entire region." ■

ADMIRAL THEATRE

EST. 1942

515 Pacific Avenue
Bremerton, WA 98337
360.373.6743
admiraltheatre.org

An Appalachian Christmas Featuring Mark & Maggie O'Connor



Thursday, December 18, 2025
Show 7 PM



Wednesday, December 31, 2025
Show 7:30 PM

Suquamish Tribe to Acquire Kitsap OBGYN

The Suquamish Tribe will acquire Kitsap OBGYN in January 2026, a move both organizations say will expand access to women's health services amid a growing regional shortage.

Kitsap OBGYN, which has operated for more than four decades, will join the tribe's network of medical services. Providers say the change will help stabilize and strengthen obstetric and gynecological care for patients across Kitsap County.

"Kitsap County is often referred to as an 'OBGYN desert' with more demand than there are available providers," said Dr. Amity Marriott of Kitsap OBGYN. "I have seen estimates that one in four expectant mothers in Kitsap travel to King or Pierce counties for care. By becoming part of the Suquamish Tribe's medical offerings, we are able to operate more efficiently and effectively, allowing us to focus on our patients."

The transition follows the tribe's expansion into primary care in 2023 with the opening of the Healing House clinic, which serves both tribal and non-tribal members in North Kitsap.

"When the tribe opened our Healing House in 2023, we filled a void for both tribal and non-tribal members seeking primary care in North Kitsap," said Suquamish Tribe Chairman Leonard Forsman. "Expanding

our scope of services to include specialized care for women allows us to make progress toward our goal of improving the health of our tribal community, while also providing resources that will benefit the greater region."

Both organizations are preparing operational details for the transition, including credentialing the tribe with the same insurance providers currently accepted by Kitsap OBGYN. The practice will keep its name, a nod to Chief Kitsap, a prominent 19th-century leader of the Suquamish people.

"We will continue to offer compassionate and personalized medical care for women," Marriott said. "The only difference will be that we will be offering this level of care with the support of the Suquamish Tribe. We are honored that the tribe recognizes the importance of our work and is helping us maintain our high standard of excellence."

According to the release, services will remain open to both tribal and non-tribal patients. Clinics in Poulsbo and Silverdale will continue deliveries and surgeries at St. Michael Medical Center, as well as surgical procedures at Pacific Surgery Center. Kitsap OBGYN's staff will join the more than 450 employees of the Suquamish Tribal Government. ■



Kitsap OBGYN's Poulsbo clinic is pictured in November. The Suquamish Tribe will acquire the long-standing women's health practice in January 2026, a move intended to expand access to obstetric and gynecological care in Kitsap County.
Terry Ward/Ward Media



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Business Briefs

Matchstick Lab Secures \$75,000 SBA Award to Build Kitsap's First Capital Formation Initiative

Matchstick Lab has received a \$75,000 award from the U.S. Small Business Administration's 2025 Growth Accelerator Fund Competition, positioning the organization to launch Kitsap County's first coordinated effort to expand local access to capital.

The award places Matchstick Lab among just 76 recipients selected nationwide from what the SBA described as the largest applicant pool in the program's history. The funding will support development of a countywide Capital Formation Initiative—an effort focused on mapping the investor landscape, assessing funding gaps for startups and small businesses, and convening stakeholders to build a long-term strategy for strengthening Kitsap's capital environment.

"Entrepreneurs across Kitsap have told us again and again that access to capital is one of their greatest challenges," said Matchstick Lab Executive Director Alanna Imbach. "Too many promising businesses stall out because the funding pathways just aren't there, or they have to leave Kitsap to find them. With this award, we finally have the means to build a foundation that keeps

innovation and investment rooted in our community."

BUILDING A NEW INVESTMENT PIPELINE

The Phase One award will fund research, engagement with local investors and entrepreneurs, and development of a capital formation roadmap tailored to Kitsap's distinct business landscape. The findings are expected to support a Phase Two proposal that would formalize investor networks and create more structured pathways for local founders seeking early-stage capital.

The initiative is expected to become the first known capital access strategy designed specifically for the West Sound entrepreneurial community.

Advisory Board Member and former Voyager Capital cofounder Enrique Godreau III said the region is ready for coordinated investment work.

"As someone who has spent a career building and observing innovation networks in many regions, it is clear that Kitsap is poised for this breakout moment," Godreau said. "This Growth Accelerator Fund Competition Award accelerates the ability to build a strong capital environment right here in

the Kitsap—one that can attract investment, unlock founder capacity, and generate long-term prosperity for the community."

STRENGTHENING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

Matchstick Lab has emerged as a central connector in Kitsap's startup scene. Its programs — including the Firebrand Unconference, the Micro Business Accelerator, partnerships with the U.S. Navy's Northwest Tech Bridge, and peer networks such as Entrepreneurs Anonymous — have helped establish a shared infrastructure for founder support.

The new capital initiative is designed to complement these efforts by pairing founder readiness with investor engagement. It also aims to strengthen the relationship between capital and community by activating local investors and linking them with ventures developed within Matchstick Lab's programs and nurtured inside Vibe Coworks, the region's central hub for entrepreneurial activity.

The goal, Matchstick Lab says, is to ensure that businesses with high growth potential can stay rooted in Kitsap while accessing diverse funding sources

comparable to those found in larger metropolitan markets.

"This award shows that what we're building here can be a model for inclusive growth," Imbach said. "We envision a future where entrepreneurs in Kitsap can access diverse funding sources as easily as they would if they were in a major city, supported by a strong network of angel investors, financial institutions, and venture capital."

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Matchstick Lab is now seeking prospective angel investors, venture capital partners, and philanthropic leaders interested in supporting the initiative. Those wishing to participate or learn more can contact Imbach at alanna@matchsticklab.co.

The Growth Accelerator Fund Competition, launched a decade ago, has awarded more than \$33 million to innovation hubs nationwide. This year marked its most competitive cycle to date.

Matchstick Lab's award signals growing recognition of Kitsap County as an emerging innovation corridor—and gives the region its first opportunity to build a sustainable, homegrown investment ecosystem from the ground up. ■



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Parametrix Relocates Kitsap Peninsula Office to Silverdale

Parametrix has relocated its Bremerton office to Silverdale, maintaining its long-standing presence on the Kitsap Peninsula while positioning the firm for continued growth. The move ends nearly a decade at the Bremerton ferry terminal, a space the firm had leased from Kitsap Transit since 2016. Kitsap Transit plans to use the former office to support its expanding workforce, prompting the transition.

"We're proud to have been

a part of this community for nearly 50 years. We look forward to continuing to serve our peninsula clients from this great new location!" said Darby Watson, a senior vice president at Parametrix.

Nearly Five Decades Serving the Peninsula

Parametrix has provided engineering, planning, environmental, and surveying services in the region since 1978. The firm's Peninsula team—now based in Silverdale—includes

about 15 professionals who support public- and private-sector clients across Kitsap and Mason counties and in cities including Bremerton, Poulsbo, Port Townsend, Port Angeles, Gig Harbor, and Bainbridge Island.

The company has contributed to several well-known infrastructure and community projects throughout the peninsula, such as:

- Silverdale Transit Center
- Quincy Square
- Johnson Parkway

- Silverdale Way and Manchester stormwater parks
- Evergreen Rotary Park
- Pacific Avenue improvements
- Day Road Park and Ride

A Broader Mission

Parametrix is a 100-percent employee-owned firm delivering engineering, planning, environmental, and construction management services across the United States.

More information about the company and its work is available at parametrix.com. ■

Local Expertise at the Center of Property Care as Kitsap's Rental Market Grows

As Kitsap County continues to experience rapid growth in apartment construction and multi-unit development, more buildings are being turned over to large property management firms based outside the region. While those companies often bring scale, local owners are finding that distance can come at a cost—particularly when it comes to on-the-ground care, community understanding, and real-time responsiveness.

Puget Sound Property Management, Inc., a family-owned firm based on Bainbridge Island, says its 30 years in Kitsap has proven that local knowledge is not a luxury in property management—it's a necessity.

Deep Roots and Hands-On Management

Managing an apartment community requires more than collecting rent or scheduling repairs. It demands insight into neighborhood-level trends, changing state and local regulations, and the expectations of residents who call a building home.

"With more than 30 years rooted in Kitsap County, we bring unmatched local insight to every property we manage," the company notes in its announcement. That

local foundation extends to long-standing relationships with vendors, contractors, and tradespeople—connections that allow Puget Sound Property Management to secure discounted service rates with no markups, an advantage the firm says comes from decades of partnership.

The company emphasizes that apartment management requires a consistent on-site presence: walking buildings, checking common areas, and responding to issues in real time. "Management of apartment communities, regardless of size, demands a hands-on approach," the firm states.

Built on Relationships, Community, and Local Investment

As a family-operated business, Puget Sound Property Management frames its work around people first—property owners, tenants, and the neighborhoods where they live. The company highlights its commitment to hiring local contractors, supporting community organizations, and maintaining strong neighborhood connections.

"We know the area neighborhoods, we know the local housing market, and

the residents who call these neighborhoods home," the announcement reads.

In recent years, the firm has expanded its portfolio to include single-family rentals, mixed-use commercial buildings, and apartment communities of all sizes. The company says its size is an advantage: small enough for hands-on service, but with decades of expertise behind every decision.

Services For Owners and Investors

- Local market analysis to set accurate rental rates
- Oversight of building operations and legal compliance
- Proactive maintenance using trusted local vendors
- Clear financial reporting, annual budgets, and year-end documentation

Tenant relations and after-hours emergency assistance Waived Onboarding Fees for New Communities

The onboarding package includes:

- Building evaluation
- Rental market analysis
- Owner account setup and portal activation
- Tenant file transition
- Budget implementation

The goal, the firm says, is a smooth and stress-free transition that supports both residents and long-term investment health.

Local Team, Local Response

Puget Sound Property Management has managed properties across the region for more than three decades. Owners interested in learning more can contact 206-842-9557, email Heidi@pspm.us, or visit www.pugetsoundrent.com. ■

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Technology

What Is the Role of a Virtual CIO?

By Jon Hoehne | CMIT Solutions

Larger organizations often have a Chief Information Officer (CIO) sitting at the leadership table. Their job is to:

- Understand where the business is going,
- Decide what technology will be needed to get there, and
- Prioritize investments over time.

For many small and mid-sized businesses, hiring that role full-time isn't realistic. A virtual CIO offers a different model. Instead of a full-time executive, you work with a part-time strategic advisor who brings CIO-level thinking on a recurring, scheduled basis.

The goal isn't to sell you more tools. It's to make sure your technology decisions are intentional and aligned with your plans.

WHAT A VCIO DOES (IN PRACTICAL TERMS)

1. Turn business goals into a technology roadmap

The conversation starts with the business:

- Are you planning to grow headcount, open new locations, or add services?
- Do you expect more remote or hybrid work?
- Are there current bottlenecks that technology might improve?

From there, the vCIO builds a roadmap: a simple, time-phased plan for what to tackle first, what can wait, and what to retire.

Aligning IT strategy with business goals is the core value of vCIO services. It shifts the conversation from "What should we buy?" to "What are we trying to achieve, and what's the best way to support that?"

2. BRING STRUCTURE TO BUDGETING AND REFRESH CYCLES

Technology spending can feel lumpy: a big server replacement here, a surprise licensing bill there, an urgent security project after that. A vCIO's job is to smooth this out as much as possible.

On a practical level, that includes:

- Building a 12–24 month technology budget that accounts for hardware

refreshes, software subscriptions, security needs, and planned projects.

- Identifying overlap and waste, such as multiple tools performing similar functions or licenses that are no longer used.
- Recommending what can reasonably move to predictable monthly services versus what should remain as occasional capital spending.

Owners increasingly see technology planning and budgeting as core to achieving business priorities, not just a back-office concern. A vCIO makes that planning concrete.

3. HELP YOU MAKE SENSE OF SECURITY AND RISK

There's no shortage of cybersecurity headlines, products, or opinions. The vCIO works to understand the key details and risks in your business so that you respond to existing and emerging threats effectively by:

- Reviewing your current posture: sign-in security (like multi-factor authentication), backup practices, device protection, and vendor access.
- Helping you understand what your customers, regulators, or insurers actually expect, in plain language.
- Making sure security projects show up on the roadmap in a realistic order, rather than as last-minute emergencies.

Surveys of small and mid-sized organizations consistently find that cybersecurity and data protection are among their top planned IT investments. The vCIO role turns those investments into a coherent plan instead of a collection of point solutions.

4. PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON NEW OPPORTUNITIES: CLOUD, AI, AND AUTOMATION

ChatGPT and its competitors are generating a lot of headlines and interest. There are success stories and genuine opportunities to pursue, but jumping in without a plan carries risk.

A vCIO's role is to take a measured approach by:

- Identifying a few high-impact opportunities rather than chasing every

new trend.

- Evaluating where cloud services make sense.
 - Highlighting repetitive, manual processes like data entry or report compilation that might be candidates for automation or AI.
- Here again, the vCIO's deep understanding of your specific goals is key to implementing meaningful changes.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM "JUST CALLING YOUR IT PROVIDER"?

If you already work with a managed service provider (MSP), you might wonder whether you're already getting vCIO services informally.

The difference is structure:

- Scheduled strategy conversations, not just reactive tickets.
- A written roadmap or plan that can be reviewed and updated.
- A recurring review of budget, risk, and priorities, ideally with leadership present.

Many MSPs already include some level of vCIO-style guidance in their agreements; others offer it as a defined service. Either way, the value comes from treating technology planning as an ongoing discipline.

WHEN DOES A VCIO MAKE SENSE?

You may benefit from a more formal vCIO role if:

- You have 15–200 employees and technology decisions are starting to feel ad hoc.
- You're planning growth, a move, or a significant systems change.
- You're being asked more questions by customers, partners, or insurers about your security and continuity posture.
- You want your technology budget to be easier to explain and defend.

In those situations, having a consistent, structured conversation about technology led by an expert can remove a lot of guesswork.

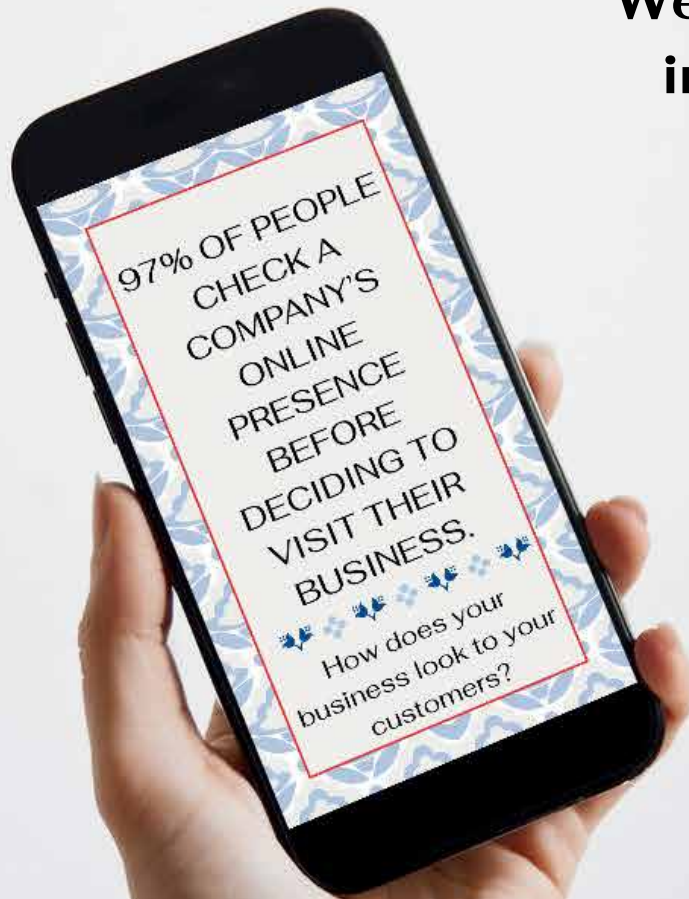
The idea behind a virtual CIO isn't complicated: give smaller organizations access to the same kind of planning and oversight that larger companies expect, but in a format and scale that fits their size.

For many owners and managers, the greatest benefit isn't any single project. It's the feeling that technology has moved from something reactive and scattered to something deliberate and understandable. ■





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